

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

The Unhinged Hinge: Pegged Out, Pinned Down, and Folded Away

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For a hinge-logic, a hinge-style. (Lyotard 1990: 123)

Unhinged from its textual scaffold, the concept of spatial hinge has been hung by James Thurgill and Jane Lovell in five distinct ways: spatial hinge; spatial ‘hinge;’ ‘spatial hinge;’ and occasionally just hinge or ‘hinge’ (Thurgill and Lovell 2019; Thurgill 2021). From the off, then, there are at least five variants of the concept in play, splayed out using a series of pegs, each of which perhaps recalls the metal pin that plugs the hollow knuckles of the two plates that it interleaves, interlocks, and allows to rotate. How many pins will it take to peg down the lean-to concept of *spatial hinge* I wonder? ‘The clothespins of quotation marks around’ the words spatial hinge ‘indicate that the words are put in question, their everyday meanings suspended or ‘under erasure’ (‘sous rature’)’ (Hillis Miller 2011: 42). Across Lovell and Thurgill’s two papers the ratio of pegged to unpegged occurrences of the concept is roughly two to one. More often than not, inverted commas set the concept apart from both itself and its textual scaffolding by pegging the concept out along a set of undecidable hinge-lines with which readers of this journal will be all too familiar, such as those that run between the literal and the metaphorical, use and mention, and the direct and the indirect. This distancing, alienation, and self-effacement of the concept is put in place from the off, when the concept is mentioned in passing during its one and only appearance in the first of the two papers.

[The] engagement with the extra-textual does not reach its terminus after the reading of a text has ended. Rather, we posit a spatial ‘hinge’ operating between the instances of

the reading and the read, whereby the role of the extra-textual outlined by Hones (2008, 2014) becomes inverted, so that actual-world places shift from shaping the reading of the text to being shaped *by* the reading of the text. (Thurgill and Lovell 2019: 18, original italics)

By way of the word *by* the spatial ‘hinge’ operates not only as an inverter, reverser, and extender of what appears to be unidirectional and terminable, but also as a vanishing mediator, since it disappears in the act of causing both the textual and the extra-textual to shapeshift through multidirectional and interminable reciprocity. Placed *mise en abyme*, the spatial ‘hinge’ finds itself not so much suspended between the textual and the extra-textual, as *by*-passed by their reciprocal extension and expansion. Having vanished (perhaps without trace) in the rest of the first paper, the cropped concept resurfaces in the second paper, but this time with a more expansive pegging: ‘The recent introduction of the ‘spatial hinge’ accounts for [the] extension of literary space into extra-literary sites ... as a means to describe the interaction between intra- and extra-textual space during and after the reading process’ (Thurgill 2021: 152). Thereafter, almost every occurrence of the concept is clipped with inverted commas that recite the ambivalence of the original citation. For example: ‘The ‘spatial hinge’ names a process which extends a reading (and with it the text itself) into places previously unassociated with the text, which start to feel as if they belong to the text and, as a result, come to be experienced by readers as fundamental parts of its literary landscape, even where the author has made no connection to such a site in their writing’ (153). Or again: ‘the ‘spatial hinge’ gives a name to the sensory triggers – aural, gustatory, haptic, olfactory, visual – that allow us to find echoes of texts in places unconnected to the world described by the author’ (153). And to cut to the chase: ‘The ‘hinge’ provides a unifying concept ...’ (153). Except for the paper’s title, *Literary Geography and the Spatial Hinge*, however, one will search the paper in vain for a spatial hinge without inverted commas. All sixteen occurrences are suspended from inverted commas. It is not at all clear whether ‘spatial hinge’ can be held together any more successfully than spatial ‘hinge.’ If there is a unity of the concept, then it is always already suspended: ‘? For here as elsewhere, what we find pegged out and suspended agape in thin air – ‘ – is *space*. Space cuts into the textual and the extra-textual, but it ‘does not pass through the same spot for one as it does for the other. There are two cuts, which are so far apart that they leave different off-cuts’ (Lacan 2014: 167). The spatial hinge is suspended from these two off-cuts: ‘(?) (?)’

Cutting back to the pegged out concept of the spatial hinge, I would be tempted to turn to David Wills’ (2005) essay on the articulation of friendship and enmity through the figures of the face-to-face, the back-to-back, and the back-to-front: ‘friendship presumes the figure of an *inter-view*, a reciprocal perception, a face to face symmetry whose inimical converse would be the back to back that initiates a duel; and that within the same figural terms, a repoliticized friendship ... would look like a dissymmetrical something, back to front, dorsal rather than frontal’ (Wills 2005: unpaginated). He illustrates the intimacy of the *face-to-face* by way of two self-enclosed brackets (...), the enmity of the *back-to-back* by way of two inverted brackets)...(), and the torsion of a *back-to-front* friendship by way of two open brackets (...(- ‘the figure

of a double *retrait* in torsion, ((, a coupling, if that is what it is, whose only ending would be another opening, to another' (Wills 2005: unpaginated). I would therefore be tempted to mount the spatial hinge in a similar manner, with clanging brackets: (spatial (hinge(... (– or else with inverted commas: 'spatial 'hinge'...' – or even with chevrons, guillemets, and bellows: <spatial <hinge<<. The spatial hinge twists around, bares its hinge-teeth, and retorts: « ... Accordingly, the unity of the concept spatial hinge – if indeed it is *a* concept – appears to me to be in disarray from the off. It is not so much that this clanging concept is badly hung – spatial 'hinge' or 'spatial hinge' – but rather that it unhinges itself. Thurgill almost says as much towards the end of his paper:

Jacques Derrida refers to a hinge (*brisure*) in his 1967 *Of Grammatology* to describe connections between the inner and outer worlds of thought and language. As Hillis Miller has observed:

'Brisure' means, at one and the same time, two opposed things: a hinge or joint that connects two separate things, and a break that divides two separate things. In both cases, the word 'brisure' names something that comes between, as both separator and connector. (Hillis Miller 2011: 41)

Where the conjoined elements alluded to by Derrida show both connection and separation to exist between thinking and wording, the 'spatial hinge' names the bleeding of texts into and out of actual-world sites, and further extends the role of the 'text-as-spatial-event.' (Thurgill 2021: 154)

The final two paragraphs of Thurgill's paper then take an explicitly metaphorical turn, which perhaps explains why the concept is always suspended from scare quotes:

Of course, metaphors can be themselves problematic ... Yet, the use of the 'hinge' is vindicated precisely because of its paradoxically 'fixed' nature as "something that comes between, as both separator and connector." (Thurgill 2021: 154, quoting Hillis Miller 2011: 41)

[T]he hinge metaphor is, at its core, about [the] affordance of movement; hinges, in whatever guise, are mechanisms that allow for mobility and flow, however limited, of people, objects, and ideas. The 'spatial hinge', meanwhile, allows a different kind of movement; a shift in perception, an affectual encounter with the extra-textual, that sees the transference and rendering of imagined geographies in actual-world spaces. Moreover, and most significant, the movement involved in this shifting of the extra-literary encounter that the 'spatial hinge' permits is no longer restricted to the actual-world sites associated with the text. (Thurgill 2021: 155)

When all is said and done, then, the spatial hinge is not only (or not really) a metaphorical hinge, affording two-way movement by way of a connector that separates, it is a different kind of hinge entirely, one that shifts and moves otherwise: not the kind of hinge ‘that allows a door to swing open and closed with ease, permitting movement into and out of spaces that are otherwise separated,’ but more like ‘the hinged arm of an Anglepoise lamp; a hinge that allows for pivot or movement in an otherwise fixed object’ (Thurgill 2021: 155-56). There is, however, no reason to restrict the metaphorical displacement of the spatial hinge to these two fixed possibilities. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, offers at least five distinct senses of the noun hinge that we could pursue, the first of which pertains to the two possibilities sketched out above. First, a movable joint. The movable joint or mechanism by which a gate or door is hung upon the side-post, so as to be opened or shut by being turned upon it. The similar mechanism to provide for the turning or moving in a quarter or half revolution of a lid, valve, etc., or of two movable parts upon each other. Something resembling a hinge in position or shape. Second, a natural movable joint, such as that of a bivalve mollusc. Third, the axis of the Earth; the two poles about which the Earth revolves, and, by extension, the four cardinal points. Fourth, that on which something is conceived to hang or be supported and to turn; a pivot, a prop. The cardinal point of a discussion or controversy; the central principle of a thesis. A turning point, critical point, crisis. And fifth, senses relating to the heart and other bodily organs: the pluck of a beast. The Dictionary’s entry for the verb hinge is more succinct: to bend (anything) as a hinge; to attach or hang with or as with a hinge; and to hang and turn on, as a door on its post. The Dictionary also lists an array of compounds, such as hinge-question, hinge-line, and hinge-way, and phrases such as ‘off the hinges’ and ‘out of (the) hinges,’ in the sense of out of order, in disorder, and unhinged. One could also follow the slang and idiomatic use of hinge, such as hooking up, matchmaking, dating; swinging, swinger; swinging both ways, bisexual; the pivotal vee of a polyamorous vee relationship; or a seedy, shady, or intoxicated person. While I doubt that clipping the spatial hinge with inverted commas or suchlike will hold this array (or disarray) of sense together, the pegs that pin it to the hinge-line of the text might at least allow the concept to swing, sway, and revolve under the relentless pressure of its dissemination. Indeed, as a fresh concept recently introduced into the lexicon of literary geography, the spatial hinge is not so much newly minted (coined) as freshly laundered (cleansed): washed, tumbled, and mangled, with a few of the creases and wrinkles ironed out, but not those impressed by the force of the clothespins and clothes pegs (Derrida 1984). The text qua textile is a tissue of signs, a sign-sponge, sponge-cloth or sponge-towel, or even a crisp white sheet stained with spilt ink. ‘[T]he ‘spatial hinge’ names the bleeding of texts into and out of actual-world sites’ (Thurgill 2021: 154). Hereinafter, sense and other fluids haemorrhage through the hinge-ways of the text (and extra-text: *hors-texte*). Dissemination is first and foremost dissemination (Derrida 1981, 2020).

Rather than dwell on the polysemy of the concept-cum-metaphor of a spatial hinge I want to swing around and follow the *by*-ways of the hinge-line elsewhere. In a first move I would be inclined to let the inverted commas fall away and allow the concept to become unfastened from its intra-textual, inter-textual, and extra-textual moorings. When all is said and done, the pegs struggle in vain to keep the spatial hinge pinned down. Hereinafter, I

would be inclined to let the spatial hinge float and drift freely – unhinged from the off. In a second move I would allow the spatial hinge to fold in on itself, or else back on itself, since this twofold phrase strikes me as pleonastic. I struggle in vain to conceive of a hinge that would not be spatial, or a space that would not be hinged. Spatial hinge reads like spatial space and hinged hinge to me, a redoubling that has at least one fold too many. Indeed, our discipline was hinged from the off: *geo-graphy* (from the Greek *geō graphia*, *γῆω γραφία*, earth writing). Nowadays, it invariably appears unhinged, thanks to the effacement of the hyphen and the elision of its two terms: geography. Geography *unhinged*, by which I invariably mean to say: geography *deranged*. Deranged in the sense of unbalanced, maddened, and disturbed, but also in the sense of split, disadjusted, and errant. *Space* is an unhinged hinge that opens and closes, folds and unfolds, turns and returns, and joins and disjoins. ‘That returns us to ‘brisure’ as joint that disjoins’ (Hillis Miller 2011: 42); ‘meaning is generated from the joints between words that are also breaks between them, disarticulated articulations’ (43). ‘What is a hinge?’ asks Ian Maclachlan (2011: 75). ‘It is a point of disarticulation that is never located in the textual present.’ I agree entirely, so long as that point does not simply refer us back to the present. For it is precisely this point that is mangled as the hinge pivots, revolves, rotates, and turns in space.

Dissemination endlessly opens up a *snag* in writing that can no longer be mended, a spot where neither meaning, however plural, nor *any form of presence* can pin/pen down {*agrapher*} the trace. Dissemination treats—doctors—that *point* where the movement of signification would regularly come to *tie down* the play of the trace, thus producing (a) history. The security of each point arrested in the name of the law is hence blown up. (Derrida 1981: 26, original italics)

What remains, then, of the spatial hinge once it is blown up and blown apart is the *spacing*, the *articulation*, the differing and deferring drift (*différance*), the *trace* of which we will struggle in vain to pin/peg down and enchain, least of all with clothes pegs, plungers, tongs, and tweezers. ‘*Spacing* (notice that this word speaks the articulation of space and time, the becoming-space of time and the becoming-time of space)’ (Derrida 1976: 68, original italics). It is not so much that the hinge-line *extends* the textual into the extra-textual and vice versa. Rather, the hinge-line *folds away*. Hereinafter, past, present, and future are all *folded away*. ‘Now makes a hinge between not yet and no longer’ (Lyotard 1990: 199). I will leave you to ponder what becomes of the near and the far when they (are also) both fold(ed) away (Derrida 2011). For my part, all of this talk of hinges, pegs, and pins makes me want to curl up and re-read Robert Coover’s (2005) *A Child Again*:

Once there was a house, the storyteller continues, which was struck by a hurricane and turned inside out, the outside closed within it, its own dimensions infinite and unknowable at what was once the core, more like the edge. Those within moved out,

which of course was further in, and there they built a new house looking out in all directions upon the inverted old. (Coover 2005: 65).

Meanwhile, since the lynchpin upon which everything hangs is simply *space*, I am tempted to leave you with an open-ended clipping as the *spatial hinge* is once again folded away: ‘

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