

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## The Spatial Hinge: An Introduction

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This themed section follows up on the publication of ‘Literary Geography and the Spatial Hinge’ (Thurgill 2021) in *Literary Geographies* 7(2). Since that short essay was published, the idea of the spatial hinge has gained traction in literary geography and cognate disciplines, being used in a number of academic writings and in a variety of ways (see, for example, Anderson 2023; McLaughlin 2023; Lovell 2023; Gavin and Gidal 2023; Marland, Edgar and Smith 2023). Clearly, there is something in the term ‘spatial hinge’ which people find useful and/or thought-provoking. From looking at how and where it has been applied, it becomes clear that the concept has spun out in many unpredictable ways since its development in the 2021 paper, perhaps because in some sense the term articulates a broad range of things which people feel, experience, and embody in relation to reading. Another reason for this diversity in interpretation and application can be traced to the first mention of the idea of an affective ‘hinge’ in a co-authored paper (Thurgill and Lovell 2019), which discussed the role of place in the text-as-spatial event (Hones 2008, 2014). This earlier use of a ‘hinge’ was itself rather vague, useful in so much that it was working towards an articulation of the previously unarticulated but complicated by this fact in that the term ‘hinge’ was used in lieu of any pre-existing alternative. The motivation behind this themed section comes not only from the apparent uptake of the term in a broad range of recent publications, but also as a way of exploring further possibilities for the idea in literary geography and beyond.

The idea of a spatial ‘hinge’ first appeared in Thurgill and Lovell’s 2019 ‘Expanding Worlds: Place and Collaboration in (and after) the Text-as-Spatial Event,’ where it featured as an attempt to describe the complex relationship between text and place, one whereby place could be understood not only to influence texts but also to be influenced *by* texts. This was, we felt, an underexplored aspect of the text-as-spatial event. At this time, however, the ‘hinge’

was only a ‘hinge’ and not the ‘spatial hinge’: it was presented rather cautiously as ‘a spatial “hinge”’ rather than the consolidated configuration “spatial hinge” concept which came later). This ‘hinge’ was the precursor of an idea that wouldn’t be worked through and clarified until 2021 with the publication of ‘Literary Geography and the Spatial Hinge’. Rather, the aim of this first use was simply to give a name to a process – an ‘oscillation of affect’ - which had been identified but not conceptualised. In fact, the word ‘hinge’ is only mentioned once in the 2019 article, while the ‘oscillation of affect’ is more clearly expanded on as a process that:

sees the sights, sounds, smells and feel of places that readers experience prior to engaging with literary texts, and which work to inform their understanding of the text’s geography, undergo a transformative process through the ‘text-as-spatial-event’ so that places can come to be seen as displaying the affective properties of the text itself. (16)

So the term ‘hinge’ was an early visualisation of this ‘oscillation of affect’, an undeveloped but accessible metaphor which was not at that time intended to contribute to the working vocabulary of literary geography. But there appeared to be potential in this term ‘hinge,’: it felt useful, moreover appropriate, for describing a ‘something’ which appeared to be present in/emerge from the complex relationship between readers, texts, and geography. When later expanded upon in ‘Literary Geography and the Spatial Hinge’ (Thurgill 2021), that previously identified ‘oscillation of affect’ is named more definitively as the ‘spatial hinge’ – a tentative nomenclature used in the proposal of an idea that was still in the process of being thought out and which required further definition to make it useful in the working vocabulary of literary geography. Now set within inverted commas, the ‘spatial hinge’ was the evolution of the ‘hinge’ referred to by Thurgill and Lovell, one which had been offered as a possible solution to the specific terminological problem of trying to describe situations ‘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).

These varied uses of ‘hinge,’ ‘spatial hinge,’ and now spatial hinge, an issue which forms the basis of Marcus Doel’s contribution to this themed section, show the evolution of the concept from a convenient metaphor, to a proposed solution, and to its current state in which it has been taken up by literary geographers in their analyses of textual geographies. The historicity of the term is, then, not so much conditioned by grammatical inconsistency as it is with a natural process of theoretical development, of *thinking space*. The contributions that follow work with the spatial hinge in a variety of ways, continuing to spin out and away from its original conceptualisation. These contributions neither provide a unified response to the term, nor do they attempt to standardise its use within literary geography; rather, each of the authors offers a different approach to the spatial hinge, a different method for including it in the analysis of textual geographies or thinking about the complexities of social-spatial-textual dynamics (see Hones 2022; forthcoming). Some of the contributions are practical, while others are more theoretical in nature. The disciplinary background of the contributors also varies, with authors based in geography, literary studies, literary geography, tourism studies,

the digital humanities, and political science. While the exact framing and application of the spatial hinge varies across the Thinking Space papers included in this themed section, there remains a common objective: to articulate more precisely the interaction, interpenetration, and intertwining of spaces within and without the literary text.

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