



# Towards a hermeneutics of the postmodern transnational space: the case of contemporary Australian literature

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## Abstract

The work analyses the “spatial turn” in recent Australian literature, which has led to a new transnational orientation in many contemporary Australian narratives. To do so, it frames literary production in terms of spatial cognition and analyses spatiality and cognition as presented by several scholars in several realms. This theoretical introduction is followed by a more practical examination of recent Australian literary works and changes. Their features show that they are moving ahead of the post-colonial label and influence into a less ideologised position. They are in tune with the new deterritorialisation of the world, and the critical cognitive approach can provide insightful realisations bridging the gap between the actual world and its fictional representation. Finally, these examples and appreciations of the transnational are returned to theoretical ground to demonstrate that space and place, with their variants, are not only useful to (cognitive) literary studies, but to any socio-cultural approach. One of the key uses in this spatial turn towards the transnational lies in the apprehension of space-place as a pathway. It also speaks to the mobility of Australian society and its cultural productions.

**Keywords** Australian literature · Literary criticism · World literature · Postcolonial · Postmodern · Transnational

Spatiality is a feature of cognition, as we understand that it is not just situated, it is embodied in ways that are inextricable from artistic and literary expression. The idea of spatiality resembles a notion of spatial involvement, an enunciation of space through the varied and diverse conduits of knowledge, simply because it is central to our existence. In this sense, we accept an interpretation of spatiality as cognition through space, a space that integrates both perception and action, as well as the mental representations thereof. Representations—and literature is a capital one—are

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mostly conceived to be static. This is why mobility is fundamental in grasping the full idea of spatiality, precisely because it is fundamentally a mental interaction. This fact is obvious, but recent Australian narratives have offered a new enrichment, as they remarkably portray a sense of space as a “pathway” thanks to the new socio-cultural circumstances. This very sense of space on the move, of route and conduit, has been increased by way of their accolades’ transnationality, plurality, fragmentation, migrancy, and multiculturality. They help us to visualise better the sense of spatiality as an in-motion quality.

### **Bridging the gap between spatial cognition and a spatio-cultural interpretation of transnational Australian literature**

Scholars like Alber (2016, p. 439) have given encouraging signs as to the validity and actuality of the cognitive turn in Australian literature. It is a matter of recognising its interdisciplinary or “cluster” nature with the intention of using the discoveries of cognitive science. A good example is a represented unnatural scenario or event and how it can be conventionalised and turned into a perceptual frame through a process of blending. Cognition, as Tversky (2009) has stated, “is inescapably affected by the immediate who, what, where, when, and perhaps why,” as the world “serves not just our own minds but also our communications with other minds” (p. 201). This remark serves for us to realise the true dimension of the realm of cognition and its implication upon the study of literature as human production. It is not just the interactions of the body in the external world, the trans(formations) of perception and action, but also the symbolic perception that leads to abstract thought. Modern Australian literature operates in a continuum of spaces, and it includes several spatial dimensions: the self; the body; the family, the group, the translocal and transnational spaces; the mediasphere and the global economy.

Before targeting any “spatial turn” in contemporary Australian literature, we must remember how important cognitive linguistics is in that context. Thanks to it, we can aspire to study literature by combining concepts and experiences into a synergistic gestalt. In fact, Lakoff and Johnson (2003, pp. 56, 57) stated that the structure of our spatial concepts emerges from our constant spatial experience and its interaction with physical experience. Hollister (1995) reflected upon the need for a more expansive model of spatial cognition in literature transcending polarisations. He accepted that spatial holism, thanks to the metaphoric nature of literary discourse, privileges literature, as it is a vehicle of interaction between text and all the possible contexts, between the physical reality and the imagination.

Other critics also adhere to axiological models. Richardson (2018, p. 70) embraced a recognition of place that implies time and the links between symbolic expression and spatiality. Language, literature’s major vessel, is never free of spatial characteristics. It is always located and place-related. Through literature, then, we necessarily undergo a spatial experience. The space of literature can be imaginative, and even if we recognise its patterns, the literary work can operate autonomously. Richardson articulated the multiple possibilities of space in literature, and how the very notion of space can be widened and amplified. In literature, spatiality

can contain time, a dynamic that becomes easier to apprehend when interpretation dispenses with the association between time-progress and space-stasis. Space can be multi-sided, and it can have multiple implications as it questions or is related to other realms, such as memory, identity, and history. We can even speak of spatiality and the forms of cognition it produces, or of the dimensions of space in different realms.

On the other hand, our theoretical frame, in contrast to exclusive physical analyses, is one that vindicates a spatio-cultural domain for the interpretation of spatiality in Australian literature, it backs Richardson (2018) and what he calls the “oft-mooted dichotomy between absolute *space* and lived *place*” (p. 75), a separation that echoes Hubert L. Dreyfus’s (2009) study on Heidegger and its distinction between “physical space” and “existential spatiality” (p. 139). Alterations *stricto sensu* or nuanced variations of it can also be found in the work of authors like Casey (1996), who states that place is more general and includes space, or in Certeau’s work *The practice of everyday life* (1984), which distinguishes between the representations of space and “spatial practice”—perceived space. All of them lead to the awareness of both abstract space and its concrete realisation. A valid consideration of the spatial dimension of literature must refer to the text, but also certainly to the world beyond the text, as literature has a transformational effect and is full of spatiality. Its ability to operate with and through space allows us, in the same way as the dreamlike qualities of Australian Aboriginal culture and the transformational effect of art do, to inhabit different worlds than ours. It may be that this “excavation” process allows us to return to where space is/was in aboriginal and primaeval cultures. Amos Rapoport has provided us with crucial information about the understanding of space in the Aboriginal culture, noting that identification was sufficient to demarcate a place; there was no need for boundaries. Place has a symbolic nature and is richer than perceived physical space. It is a humanised landscape that can be “cognitivised” through symbols that are not necessarily material. As we know, Aboriginal culture defines place through sacred directions, Dreamtime routes, and “an apparently featureless landscape [that] may become full of meaning and significance, legends and happenings” (Rapoport, 1975, p. 45). In it, physical features are both associational and perceptual and exist as physical, sacred, and symbolic space. What strike us are the coincidence of physical and mythical landscape; the integration and richness of the concept of space, a humanised realm saturated with significations; and the establishment of a system of special places, something that Kerwin (2010) pointed out when referring to the conceptualisations of Aboriginal culture in *Aboriginal dreaming paths and trading routes* and that Khatun (2015) later indicated as “conjectures of spatial epistemologies” and mobilities “structured by different knowledge traditions” (p. 84).

## Postcolonial and transnational positionalities<sup>1</sup> in Australian literature

In recent times, critics like Brigid Rooney (2013), Robert Dixon (2013), Philip Mead (2009), and Tony Simoes da Silva (2014) have pointed out the recent transnational turn of literary studies, and more specifically of Australian literary studies. This “worlding” of literature, this concept of the world as a space of reading, presents the literary work as an element that has “an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture” (Damrosch, 2003, p. 4). On the other hand, literature can be ideologically worlded, or “perspectival,” as Mead (p. 549) has noted. It has given rise to a culture that is varied and rich in material rewards.

Today the new emerging literatures that shared a common cultural trunk that have come to demonstrate that certain essential questions raised by postcolonial criticism are in fact integral elements of the cultural dynamic itself. Many of these were ideologised in the pendular movement of history and after the formal swing sponsored by formalism, structuralism, and deconstructionist criticism. It gave way to forms where content prevailed. Postcolonial studies added a bonus to cultural studies through this ideological turn, something that in most cases acted as a life-giving element of post-modernity. Postcolonial criticism itself represented a magnificent outlet and also allowed for the fragmentation and cohabitation of multiple elements within post-modernity.

It may be that to speak of postcolonial critique is nothing but the arrogance of the centrism of Western thought sponsored by the system of economic liberalism. This creates an illusory image of subversion, independence and freedom for the former colonies, but it bequeaths a *de facto* form of cultural vassalage, since it forces certain forms of analysis. It is a procedure that does not cease to be a false form of atoning for the faults of Western culture. In spite of this, it must be said that postcolonial criticism has given and will give interesting perspectives in the face of subjugation and submission to other ideologies and that it will always be a matrix of subversion in the face of established powers—without forgetting that postcolonial criticism itself obeys political-ideological patterns with clear interests.

Postcolonial studies have shown that cultural hybridisation, although not a recent phenomenon, has been accelerated by new types of life. In this sense, there has been a confluence with the idea of post-modernity in terms of the way of proceeding, since its effects have become more palpable thanks to the way of life of today’s society. On the other hand, literature, as a cultural manifestation, and more specifically the division into literatures based on cultural traditions or on particular forms of identity, has come to be considered as simple essentialism. The purity, the essential,

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<sup>1</sup> We understand “positionality” as the context that shapes one’s identity in terms of class, gender, sexuality, personal values, and location in time and space. It shapes one’s understanding of and outlook on the world. In most cases, it evidences that social and spatial positions are not fixed, given qualities. To understand positionalities, we must pay attention to subjectivity, as it is directly linked to the processes that generate knowledge and identities, and subsequently to cognition.

the monochrome of identity has been replaced by paradigms of the plural, and this is where postcolonial studies have been of real help. Thus, what was previously marginal and secondary because it did not present features of essentiality has become central, with the postcolonial being an element of recognition of what was previously marginal, a kind of what Bennett (1966, pp. 179, 180) called “Colonization in reverse,” questioning monocultural Western models. This has had interesting benefits and analyses, but far from being a perfect world, it has sometimes ignored the transtemporal sense of cultural productions. Thus, recent productions with the idea of creating a global and abstract sense of the phenomenon of hybridisation have been given priority, leaving sometimes important factors that have not clarified the particular specifications of each literature. That, without forgetting that every creation, every principle, is an exercise in otherness, an encounter with another reality. Gleeson-White (2010, pp. 6, 7), referring to the history of Australian literature, mentioned how this was a contingency of othernesses.

Postcolonial discourse created alterity while looking or trying to restore an absent origin. The “post” position was good at deconstructing and analysing what the dominant colonial constructed, but it was mostly valid as a counter-discourse. It made clear that there was a new space to be opened, but the critical apparatus its adherents used was sometimes narrow and its epistemology not broad enough to enable reconstruction, precisely because it was born out of deconstruction and counter-discourse. It produced *Angst* because of the impossibility of restoring a *primaevae* age, the point of origin, the original sense, as Bill Ashcroft, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha have variously characterised it. These critics and their vantage points must accept a new syncretic society where returning to the pure pre-colonial cultural condition was impossible. For others, applying this discourse to Australian literary productions prompts a “decentering of Australia’s postcolonial nature and a beginning to wonder about the genealogies of cultures” (Ben-Messahel, 2017, p. 192).

Postcoloniality as a space of hybridisation is enormously interesting, since it creates true consciousness, but the obstacles of trends and temporal distance must be overcome. No one can ignore the bigotry of colonial discourse or that postcolonial poetics is primarily a subversive process, so theory presents it as a promising ideological space, but its practice reveals that it is sometimes a binary reading of reality.

On the other hand, postcolonial studies is nevertheless engaged in a broad network of disputing involvements into the dominant narrative of Western discourse. It is not without surprise that, as Gugelberger (2012) recalled, it was “largely due to Australian efforts [that] the terms ‘postcolonial literature’ and ‘postcolonial culture’ were well established along with such other postist constructions as ‘postindustrialism’, ‘poststructuralism’, ‘postmodernism’, ‘post-Marxism’, and ‘postfeminism’” (p. 385). It is true that postmodernism, in its eagerness to incorporate everything, including its oppositional other, has absorbed the postcolonial paradigm to a good degree. It is so much to the extent that one can speak of “the postmodern colonialization of the postcolonial” (Gugelberger, 2012, p. 385). Hence, many postcolonial critics have wanted to delimit their space by affirming that the postcolonial fundamentally covers the cultures altered by the imperial process, but this does not imply homogenisation, since among the various schools of postcolonial criticism, there are

those who homogenise and see postcolonial writing as resistance and those who see no unitary quality to postcolonial writing.

Nevertheless, if there has been a virtue in postcolonial studies, it has been to promote a change in emphasis, a new way of reading, or to be an attempt to rescue or highlight elements that were ignored in previous analyses. Its validity lies in being a correcting instrument that believes in facilitating change. From such an awareness, an Australian literature comes into being that must always be in dialogue with, or shadowed by, another version itself that is superior, older, unbound; a literature deeply from beyond the limits of world-literature, and not one that can be merely appropriated as an appendage.

Today, it seems that Australian literature, like many other young/new literatures that are/were labelled as “postcolonial,” is moving away from this pattern—if we take the pattern to mean only a counter-discourse and a stable, ideologised position. Some writers have already jumped into this new vision, as Stephen Muecke (2017) notes: “others, especially those of European heritage, have the necessary stereoscopic vision that enables a break from the psychotic dialogue the settler-colonials have been locked in with Indigenous Australia” (p. x).

Discourses with a totalising inclination are *démodé* today. Literary spaces filled with nomadic, creative egos, where mobility through space is what makes sense at the same time that territorialisation constitutes itself as a necessary move, are a staple of the new “mobile” humankind. de Toro (1995) mentioned this trend together with the blurring of boundaries: “we can only position ourselves with regard to a nomadic subjectivity, in a non-hierarchical space, where discourses are being constantly territorialized, deterritorialized, and reterritorialized” (p. 39). This suggested shift away from sedentary visions of literature, which is clearly compatible with Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of the rhizome and nomadology, is something clearly visible in the novel *Death of a river guide* (1994) by Richard Flanagan, a haunting, ambitious production with rhizomatic writing, where spaces turn inside out and where the river constitutes a moral geography of truth and reality.

In contemporary Australian literature, spatiality is a transnational concept. More than *terra nullius*, it is *terra omnium*, a multiplicity of natures. If in the beginning, the simplified cultural context of space in Australia represented the Aboriginal, the invaders, the post-colonised, and their creations, today’s Australian space has changed into a fragmented imaginary. It can be interpreted as a coexistence of different cultural cartographies.

Today’s Australian literature, or at least the role undertaken by some authors who could be labelled as “cosmopolitan”—David Malouf, Eva Sallis, Nam Le, Christos Tsolkias, Brian Castro, or Beth Yah, for example—shows that there is a clear deterritorialisation of the Australian literary canon and of the Australian literary space. This “multicultural fiction” presents a new dimension of space where “home” and “belonging” have to be re-evaluated and reconceptualised. The new transnational element present in Australian literature encompasses space through the cognition and incorporation of the features of plurality, fragmentation, and ambivalence, without ignoring that identity and place are sometimes a migrancy condition.

We can at least wonder if this move, transition, or progress from the postcolonial into the transnational has a parallel with Australia’s geopolitical realignment from

the Western European axis to the Asia-Pacific one. Nevertheless, the new social and literary themes are now distanced from the closed-in system into one of wider cultural truths. It may be that they are the first part of the transnational move, because they are the ones that enable this fluidity of identity and the mobility of Australia through their writing. For others, this process towards the transnational is not only one of reconfiguration, but also one away from any postcolonial nostalgia, or “post-colonial melancholia,” as Gilroy (2006) termed it in his study of the same name. The consideration of forms and traces of the past, powers that could still be having an important influence on the shaping of the political and cultural life of Australia, are also fears still there. This sanitised or disguised imperialism sometimes appears in the guise of Anglo-centric discourse and operates counter to cultural diversity. It is the shadow of the colonial still looming over apparent efforts at reconciliation. We wonder if we can speak of “the postcolonial” as a hybridity phenomenon and of “the transnational” as a post-hybridity phenomenon, but these are not clearly chronological sequential phenomena, as populations have been for long been coexistent. It may be that the modernity eased the chance to untangle them, but in the past, they were interwoven. The postmodernity has also referred to the move to the transnational as a wish to unfetter or unleash the country and move from a dual world filled with assurances of progress, and yet colonial under the surface, into a world beyond the limits of the country’s inherited culture. In this case the transnational tunes with the postmodernity as a phenomenon of scattered hegemonies.

However, in Australian literature, the transnational is more than a wish. It is becoming a constituted reality, a space. One of the prominent initiators of that becoming is David Malouf. He tries to build the space pathways mentioned earlier, and many of his projects and themes have to do with this process of construction in non-English cultures, as one can clearly appreciate in his novel *Remembering Babylon* (1993). In the novel, he focuses on the country’s British heritage, but does so through the exposition of four themes: language, cultural contacts, the marginal other via Aboriginal peoples, and the subversion of the pastoral idea. He presents hybrids—black and white, individuals and objects, natural and alien—in contiguous cultural spaces, leading to an overall presentation of Australia as a space of both the Old and the New World, but adding that this colonial mimicry leads them nowhere and leaves them as half-breed or cultural amphibians. These (de)constructions—territorialisation and deterritorialisation phenomena—become spaces to understand once they are assumed to be postcolonial assumptions or are presented as environments of deconstructed “coloniality” and stepping stones for the transnational.

More recent deployments of the transnational in Australian literature have been performed by Kate Grenville. Her novel *The secret river* (2005), comparable in theme to Thomas Keneally’s *The chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972) and Peter Carey’s *True history of the Kelly gang* (2000), is a work that partly dramatises the colonial dream through the settler experience and denounces the convicts’ and indigenous people’s nightmares of being sent to a colony. In it, the ideas of place and otherness overlap to create a wider sense of space. William Thornbill, an ex-convict, undergoes a process of enrooting and becoming other, wishing to coexist with indigenous people and showing that hybridisation and otherness are not far from the feeling of “home.” A good example of identity through space-place treatment

is the work of Kim Scott. In *That deadman dance* (2010), for some “an exercise in lush impressionism,” the author navigates through otherness by extending assimilation and showing that both colonisers—“a ragtag bunch of idealist, opportunists and misfits”—and colonised assimilated to the space of Australia (Birch, 2012). The brand-new product, the new citizen, has a non-Anglo-Celtic destiny that is weirdly in the southern hemisphere, where he has to cohabitate with an indigenous group that he completely ignores. It represents an attempt at a second layering in the empathy process after the postcolonial stage.

Identity and belonging, and their bonds with place, are issues that have re-emerged in Australia in our time, especially after new migrants and many refugees from the Middle East and Africa reached the shores of the country. That immigration led to parliamentary debates on asylum seekers their right to apply for citizenship. The debate extended beyond the political arena and into literary production, making it obvious that otherness was not new and that one could travel back and forward to it. In Eva Sallis’s novel *Hiam* (1998), the confrontations with time and place experienced by a Middle-Eastern female migrant allow her to know the “indigenous other” thanks to the “oriental other.” Travelling to the interior of the country allows her to move from the Anglo-Celtic cultural pattern into the true nature and real expanse of the country, allowing the reader a more plural vision of Australia. Sallis is a writer who tackles the issue of being different from what is mainstream; in her work, travelling to the past through genealogy is used to understand the difference in the present. It is trans-temporality as trans-space. In Nam Le’s *The boat* (2008), a collection of short stories, we find identity displaced or diasporic identity, for Le’s production “marks the emergence of a new and distinct stage in transnational writing in Australia” (Ben-Messahel, 2017, p. 121). Tsiolkas is another writer who questions the idea of Australia as “home.” For him, place is personal experience and consciousness. In his works, he represents subjects as joined pieces beyond the binary opposition of same/other. He moves towards an ambivalent, polyvalent vision of Australia, a place that is filled with identities and different cultural cartographies, something visible in his works *Dead Europe* (2005), *The slap* (2008), or *Barracuda* (2013). In them, he creates new spaces where the nomadic individual, the new migrant, and the other can become enrooted, as culture spreads well in new spaces.

Home as space is as enthralling for Anglo-Celtic Australians as for migrants of non-Anglo-Celtic Australian origin. To understand it in a better way, it requires a shift from a previous attachment to a homogenous national identity, to a heterogeneous global outlook. The difference is that the term “diaspora,” if not understood in an exclusivist way, has transnationality appended to it. Brian Castro is another transnational writer who shows an interest in the vindication of transculturality as a multi-layered background that conducts him to a continuous rediscovery of the self and a better acquaintance with “the other.” This transcultural time-space pattern of mobility that we see in Australian transnational writing is equally visible in Castro’s *Shanghai dancing* (2003), a partly biographical and partly fictional work in which the main character, Antonio Castro, decides to go on a transcultural Australia–Shanghai–Macau–Liverpool–Brazil–Japan–Australia journey at different moments between the seventeenth century and our time, in search of his self and identity. Reconfigurations of space also appear in Arlene Chai’s *The last time I saw*



*my mother* (1996) and Beth Yahp's *The crocodile fury* (1992), showing a kind of identification that mostly points to unrelatedness to both Australia and Asia. The fluidity of the settings and the inclusion of Asia in Australia emphasise a shifting away from Anglo-centric positions and the appearance of new intersections between cultural spaces, leading to the creation of a mythography of the displaced by incorporating the other—the marginal—into the national space of Australia.

These deterritorialisations of Australia, this widening of scope through the complexity of the country's multiculturalism, has been addressed by Wenche Ommundsen. For her, its focal points are ambivalence, fragmentation and plurality (Ommundsen, 2004, p. 5, 2018, p. 5). Other theorists like Wolfgang Welsch see it at a macro-level and refer to "Transculturality" as a result of "the inner consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures [...] which also interpenetrate or emerge from one another" (Welsch, 1999, p.198). For Ahmed Gamal, there are two important spaces that constitute reality: "home," a social reality structured through different discourses, and "abroad," close to the borderline existence of the cultural other, a space for empathy and integral to identity construction during intercultural encounters. For him, this post-migratory literature outmaneuvers the binaristic essentialism of the "traditional postcolonial" (Gamal, 2013, p. 598). They are vessels for a new way of thinking about space and identity. It is an interpretation attempting to create new contacts and new cosmopolitan zones that can rescue past settings through the combination of history and transnationality, as happens in the works of Nam Le, Beth Yahp and Arlene Chai. Many contemporary writers of this inclination emphasise the mythography of the displaced, so their books could be interpreted as variations of space. For Eva Sallis, Andrew McGahan, Christos Tsolkias and Richard Flanagan, the intention is to highlight personal experiences occurring within national boundaries, but entangled in global histories.

Another approach to the transnational, but with an emphasis on modern space, appears in Gail Jones's work *Dreams of speaking* (2006). The book shows our time as divided-up space where the contradiction is modern technology. It allows unprecedented levels of connection but makes humans lonely. In this novel, the transnational represents more a kind of globalised cultural stratum whose major developers are the internet and the networking of media outlets. In the end, there is no centre or margins from which to construct a space, so what remains is an empty space. In this Gail Jones work, time can be manipulated and runs through transitory spaces, connecting equally with the Sartrean idea that meaning is unfixated and with the migrant condition of other recent Australian writers. Displacement through modernisation is a theme that is also visible in Tim Winton's novel *Eyrie* (2013), in which the paradox of being enclosed in the unrealities of cyberspace is explored. The book represents a world of gadgetry and fatuous fashion that creates a new social landscape, so the reader can feel a kind of nostalgia for the years of egalitarianism and the suburban dream. In addition to it the attacks on the emptiness of a new society that manufactures smoke-filled illusions are completed with the depiction of the underclass, the complex identities of the characters, and the symbolism of the postcolonial cultural transformations of Australia.

This approach to the transnational also involves what Chance (2012) has termed "cognitive alterities" (p. 248), a reference to the differences between groups of like

people, among members within a group, or the differences within the individual over time, as the common denominator in cognitive studies is our humanity and how we are human. Not far from that is the study of what Nikolajeva (2014) called “a possible xenotopic world” (p. 44), a domain presented as mimetic or truthful reality, where some phenomena deviate from it at the same time. This contrast is a precondition when applying a critical cognitive approach; in fact, Zunshine (2006) recognised that one of the cognitive rewards of reading fiction is “our ‘trying on’ mental states potentially available to us but at a given moment differing from our own” (p. 17). In this, I see the potentiality of spatiality phenomena as heteroscopic focalisations.

The postcolonial space in Australian literature constitutes an invitation for empathic identification of alterities, an offer to understand characters’ emotions without fully ascribing our own to them. Examples of it occur through Asian Australian fiction, it is the case of Adib Khan’s *Seasonal Adjustments* (1994), Hsu-Ming Teo’s *Behind the moon* (2000), or Merlinda Bobis’s *The solemn lantern maker* (2008). In these novels, ties of affection and empathy assume an intermediary role in developing intercultural conversations. If the postcolonial literary theory, as Bradford (2017, p. 8) remarked, “resist(s) universalizing [...] preferring to focus on the local and the particular,” the impulse must be wisely counterbalanced with a wider scope and vision on the other hand. Spatiality studies and, above all, cognitive narratology bridge the gap between the actual world and its fictional representations. Thanks to fiction and our engagement with it, we enter other people’s minds, something impossible in real life.

## A coda through cognition values

As derived from the analysis and nuances of the previously mentioned works, any application of cognition to any culture or its production will certainly benefit from anthropology and its implications. The space/place distinction and its variants are not only useful for literary/cognitive or cognitive literary studies but for any socio-cultural approach. We cannot afford the claim of the primacy of one over the other. Therefore, a permeation between cognitive science and Australian literary studies would nurture both literary criticism and cognitive methodology in an interdisciplinary field renewing traditional paradigms of study. Tversky (2009, p. 207) has referred to “spatiomental transformations” and the way spatial thinking configures our existence. This is not exempt from paradox, as on the one hand, Australian literature consists of representations that can be interpreted as “static mappings,” but as we know, the world is never static—there is a constant flux, and “the mind captures change in packets, called events” (Tversky, 2009, p. 208).

Australian literature, and Australian studies more generally, must account for the fact that social relationships “are inherently spatial,” accordingly, space’s sociality is a nuance and dimension of space (Corsín Jiménez, 2003, p. 140). Thus, critics need to consider the materiality of space and language in an embodied way to function as a forum for discussion of any human production. It may be that we would like to talk about Australian literature as a socio-spatial form as narratives behave as depictions

of physical space in mental spaces. It is clear that no matter what our approach is, we have a dialectical understanding of space, and we know that at least two elements are clearly present in it: conflict and inclusiveness.

For me, this is not an issue of privileging space over place, or vice versa. Both are embodied in each other because, as Low (2009) said, “one way to solve this problem is to acknowledge that place and space are always embodied. Their materiality can be metaphoric and discursive, as well as physically located, and thus carried about” (p. 22). On the other hand, a socio-cognitive approach to literary issues will be effective as long as it does not default to biological reductionism. This standpoint must deal with the intrinsically social and cultural character of humans and the human body.

Australian literature today operates well within the globalisation–deterritorialisation model. It is an experience more concerned with the horizontal and relational nature of contemporary processes and is no longer based upon citizenship or its reformulations. We are now in a post-national geography, a transnational geography that renders a new approach to spatiality and the production of space. What marks this in Australian literature is the emphasis on individuals’ movement into spaces, and the leaving of their records as pathways. Therefore, it could be that we could start talking about spaces as “pathways” rather than drawing on the former idea of the “locus” as fixed space. In some Australian narratives, memory is a space of reflection, and the subject and home are shifting locations for many writers, including Le, Yahp, Sallis, Chai, and Tsiolkas. Culture is now “a mobile entity, unconnected to any soil,” and subjectivity “cannot be circumscribed to enrootedness and integration” (Ben-Messahel, 2017, p. 192). If the nation exists, it suggests a plurality of spaces that are polyvalent and somewhat dishevelled because of the nature of the encounters in them. Not by chance, James Greeno (1994, p. 338) recalled how J. J. Gibson developed a singular view of perception linked to this idea. He introduced the idea of affordance, which relates the attributes of something in the environment to an interactive activity by an agent who has some ability. Therefore, cognitive processes are analysed as relations between agents and other systems. This interaction was also expressed by the philosopher Noë (2004) when he stated that experiences in the real world are themselves virtual because we build models of the world in our minds as we navigate space.

This sense of space as a pathway recalls a term related to Aboriginal culture—Nancy D. Munn’s “transposabilities.” Munn (1996) used the term to denote where “these interactions [...] emerge between Aboriginal locales of power and the mobile, spatial fields of actors. In different ways, and for variable time spans, Aboriginal power places and the immobilized powers in the topography switch over or are transposed into actors and their mobile spatial fields” (p. 462). If a pathway is a transfixation of or a more movable consideration of space, then that is the change, and we operate within a new transnationality or a new translocality of Australian literature that poses a critical approach to spatiality. In most cases, space and place are embedded in our contemporary world and that is why misplaced rootedness or roots in motion define humanity in a postmodern age. Placing contingencies upon them was useful in the past, but no longer. Modern Australian literature is now, more than

ever, “embodied space,” because of the variety of its spaces’ corpora.<sup>2</sup> It tackles how bodily experience and perception become material, and how that material experience is transformed into symbol and literature. Interestingly it gets reconnected with the Indigenous tradition through the mobile body separated from any fixed centre. It is an interpretation that derives from the interaction of two actors: moving spatial fields and the terrestrial spaces of body action. Not by chance, it reinforces the idea of social space and time.

In the global humanity of our time there is a new perspective based on an extensive transformation of what places are. We find that “leaving” and “living” are not dichotomies, but are continuously shifting. There is for example an interchangeable sense of space that is the goal of many diaspora and non-diaspora narratives. Space in Australian literature nowadays is neither monolithically Anglo-Celtic nor Eurocentric—that is clear. Rather, it is interpreted through the prism of a more urbanised and ethnically diverse community. It is true that for some, strangeness is a feature of this space, and that far from offering the potential for happiness, it is a space of apparent lushness that sometimes contains calamity, as we can see the convicts’ inheritance or the tragic and ongoing discourse between displaced natives and immigrant society. Despite all this inheritance and the postcolonial strain of the present, the arrival of new peoples presents rich questions and enlivening solutions that are going to influence and transform Australian culture and literature.

Our analysis on spatiality and the cognitive vantage, and their visitations in contemporary Australian narratives, signals that the transnational narratives in Australian literature reinforce and make more evident that space, understood as spatiality, is a conceptualisation of identity. Nowadays few can deny that there is a transnationalising of Australian literature, and that it is envisioned as a postmodern transnational network rather than a national corpus of texts. It has helped the spreading and richness of Australian culture. These reconfigurations and the novelty of features in Australian literature are precisely what has attracted the attention of many scholars around the world and what has made Australian literature familiar to global critics and readers alike. This new kind of universalism, thanks to its postmodern transnational features, not only provides a wider vision of what Australian literature is today—it also offers different contours of fluidity and postmodernity in the positioning of current Australian culture. Today more than ever, Australian literature is an ongoing process, but it is embedded in world literature and getting rid of colonial labels and robes. Kane (1993), referring to Peter Carey’s work, once affirmed: “the postmodern is the postcolonial, and Australian Literature comes to occupy a space of its own” (p. 522). The time has come for an alternative modernity in a transnational way within Australian literature. We have seen a lapse of much of the postcolonial rhetoric and Australia has changed in the same way that the world has changed too. Australia is now a crossroads for people for all over the world and Australian writers already have an international audience, a well-established postmodern intellectual register and a global standard of quality. These writers draw their inspiration from a rich milieu defined by migration, land and the environment, the

<sup>2</sup> We refer to the collections or bodies of evidence of space leading to different spatialities.

city, cross-cultural experiences and the interaction of people. It is in this environment where space has shaped a culture with its own dynamic personality and where new literary trends reflect the diversity of a population that participates in the transnational while presenting a voice of its own.

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