“The stratified record upon which we set our feet”:
The Spatial Turn and the Multilayering of History, Geography, and Geology

Peta Mitchell
School of English, Media Studies, and Art History
The University of Queensland

In Thomas Mann’s tetralogy of the 1930s and 1940s, *Joseph and His Brothers*, the narrator declares history is not only “that which has happened and that which goes on happening in time,” but it is also “the stratified record upon which we set our feet, the ground beneath us.”[^1] By opening up history to its spatial, geographical, and geological dimensions Mann both predicts and encapsulates the twentieth-century’s “spatial turn,”[^2] a critical shift that divested geography of its largely passive role as history’s “stage” and brought to the fore intersections between the humanities and the earth sciences.

In this paper, I wish to draw out particularly the relationships between history, narrative, geography, and geology revealed by this spatial turn and the questions these pose for the disciplinary relationship between geography and the humanities. As Mann’s statement exemplifies, the spatial turn has often been captured most strikingly in fiction, nowhere more so than in Graham Swift’s *Waterland* (1983)[^3] and Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces* (1996).^[^4] Both novels present space, place, and landscape as having a palpable influence on history and memory, and the geographical/geological line that runs through them continues through Tim Robinson’s non-fictional, two-volume “topographical” history *Stones of Aran.*[^5] Robinson’s work—which is not history, geography, or literature, and yet is all three—constructs an imaginative geography that renders inseparable geography, geology, history, memory, and the act of writing.

The interdisciplinarity at the core of the “spatial turn” is, perhaps, most immediately apparent in metaphor. Mann’s geological metaphor of history as a “stratified record” is echoed by Gilles Deleuze, nearly half a century later, when he argues that “the world is made up of superimposed surfaces, archives or strata. The world is thus knowledge.”[^6] More recently, in her study of John McPhee’s acclaimed geological survey of North America, *Annals of the Former World* (1998), Norma Tilden takes up the geological term “stratigraphies,” noting that it “suggests a parallel between written histories and the earth’s own life story.”[^7] As Tilden points out, narrative can also be stratigraphic since it too can “respon[d] to the ebb and flow...
of the land, and its constant refusal to stand still long enough for us to pin it down—to stake our claim to it. This cross-disciplinary metaphor of stratigraphy is particularly germane to the narratives of Swift, Michaels, and Robinson—narratives that spatialize, that sedimentarise, the notion of history; narratives that blend history with folklore, with geology, geography, landscape, memory; narratives that both inscribe and describe the stratified ground they tread. In this paper I want to draw out the stratigraphic line that runs through these texts—all are based on a striated ground that collapses and problematises history and geography, time and space. All three are also explicitly chronotopic in the Bakhtinian sense— at both the thematic and narrative level, all three foreground an irreducible space–time compression.

Before turning to these stratigraphic narratives, I wish to make a historical detour through the Enlightenment, for, I argue, the interdisciplinarity at the heart of the spatial turn is a response to, and an ongoing dialogue with, the eighteenth-century emergence of geography, geology, and history as separate disciplines. The eighteenth century was a time in which, as John Gascoigne explains, “the old all-encompassing categories of the knowledge of Nature—natural philosophy and natural history—began to be broken down into the embryonic scientific disciplines,” such as geography and geology. Immanuel Kant occupies a noteworthy position in the history of geographical thought, standing as he does at the intersection between the disciplines of philosophy and geography and on the threshold of the age of scienticity and discipline-formation. In the 1750s, Kant introduced physical geography as a discipline in his lectures at the University of Königsberg. In these lectures, which were first published as Physische Geographie in 1802, Kant rigorously defined geography in contrast to history: geography related to description and space; history to narration and time. According to Richard Hartshorne, Kant was the first to argue for geography’s status as a separate scientific discipline, preceding both Alexander von Humboldt and Alfred Hettner’s claims for geography’s disciplinary difference. Moreover, just as Kant was de-scribing the boundaries of geography, geology too was shoring up its disciplinary borders. Only two decades after Kant began his physical geography lectures at the University of Königsberg, the term “geology” was used for the first time in its contemporary scientific sense.

While Kant’s Physische Geographie had little direct influence on the discipline of geography until the 20th century, it arguably had a far greater influence on 19th–century philosophy. Michel Foucault—a critical theorist who, along with Henri Lefebvre, is almost synonymous with the spatial turn—claims that “[s]ince Kant what is to be thought by the philosopher is time.” For Foucault, Kant’s separation of geography and history effectively separated space and time. It also accorded history the role of active “becoming,” while the descriptive science of geography was relegated to the passive role of “being.” As a result, Foucault argues, 19th–
and early 20th-century philosophy largely ignored geography and space and concerned itself with studying history as “becoming” or advancement over time.

In his 1969 work *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault suggests an alternative, more spatially aware, method of historical and philosophical inquiry. Foucault’s “archaeological” method—which he later revised as “genealogy,” following Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Knowledge*—mobilises spatial metaphors of cartography and archaeology to bring geography and geology back into the historical/philosophical frame. By employing this “archaeological” method, the historian does not describe or fix the origins or limits of disciplines.17 Rather, the historian of ideas seeks to map “discursive practices in so far as they give rise to a corpus of knowledge, in so far as they assume the status and role of a science” and to reveal the ways in which disciplines or discursive practices, figured as strata, “articulate their own historicities onto one another.”18

For Gilles Deleuze, Foucault’s conception of historical formations as strata creates a new understanding of knowledge and its relation to power. Foucault shows us, Deleuze says, that where knowledge is “stratified, archivized, and endowed with a relatively rigid segmentarity,” power is “diagrammatic: it mobilized non-stratified matter and functions, and unfolds with a very flexible segmentarity.”19 In its compound form, power–knowledge is a shifting terrain shaped by stratifying and non-stratifying forces, and Foucault presents his archaeological–genealogical method as a means by which these forces might be excavated and mapped. Indeed, there are marked resonances between Deleuze’s analysis of Foucault’s archaeology–genealogy and his own work with Félix Guattari, which is similarly characterised by geographical and geological metaphors such as stratification, cartography, territorialisation, and deterritorialisation. In effect, as a number of critics have pointed out, Deleuze and Guattari “transform [Foucault’s] genealogy into geology.”20 This strategic linguistic shift from genealogy to geology makes explicit the shift from layered time to layered space–time implicit in the spatial turn. According to Claire Colebrook, where genealogy “is an attempt to think of time […] as effective history,” Deleuze and Guattari’s geology is “an attempt at a grammar of space: different series, plains, territories, paths and maps.”21

As a new “grammar of space,” Deleuze and Guattari’s revisioning of genealogy as geology requires also a rethinking of geography. Underpinning their framework for a geological approach to epistemology is Deleuze and Guattari’s preoccupation with what they term “geophilosophy.”22 What geophilosophy offers philosophy, they argue, is a release from the restrictive subject–object dualism: “[t]hinking,” they argue, “is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth.”23 Moreover, geophilosophy, as a phenomenon of the spatial turn, is founded upon an awareness of geography as active and strategic rather than
Descriptive. In a move reminiscent of Foucault’s critique of Kant, Deleuze and Guattari claim “[g]eography is not confined to providing historical form with a substance and variable places. It is not merely physical and human but mental, like the landscape. Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a ‘milieu’ […] ‘Becoming’ does not belong to history.”

For Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault, change, or “becoming,” is not the province of history alone in the same way that the spatial science of geography does not simply equate to passive, descriptive “being.” The history of ideas requires also a geography and a geology of ideas: time and space are the two axes that enable its critique. Moreover, the language these theorists use is intimately bound to their critique. By employing spatial geographical and geological metaphors, they lay bare the spatio-temporal striations of emergence, divergence, and convergence that run through the histories of these disciplines. Thus, underpinning the twentieth century’s spatial turn is a historical-geographical-geological nexus that both raises and speaks to the question of disciplinariness and interdisciplinariness. This shift in thinking about the relationships between knowledge, history, geography, and geology further resonates not only in such self-confessed “spatial histories” as Paul Carter’s *Road to Botany Bay* (1987) and Manuel De Landa’s “geological” history *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (1997), but also—returning to my early theme of stratigraphic narrative—in Graham Swift’s *Waterland*, Anne Michaels’s *Fugitive Pieces*, and Tim Robinson’s *Stones of Aran*. These texts attest to a particular form of postmodern chronotope, in which, as Paul Smethurst argues, “space is not merely in the service of time, but has a poetics of its own, which reveals itself through a geographical or topological imagination rather than a historical one.”

**History as situlation: Graham Swift’s Waterland**

Indeed, Swift’s *Waterland* appears almost perfect in its commingling of history and geography. The waterland of the title of Graham Swift’s 1983 novel is the silt-clogged, eel-ridden wetlands and peat bogs of the Fens in eastern England, whose constant geographical flux between earth and water suggests the very nature of history. *Waterland*’s narrator is Tom Crick, a history teacher living, tellingly, in Greenwich. At zero degrees longitude—the geographical site of the zero hour—the prime meridian is perhaps the exemplary chronotope. Greenwich is, as Smethurst notes, “the zero space–time, from which the rest of the world was marked out.” A family and, by extension, career crisis has led Crick to begin to remember, to recount to his history students the story of his life, a life dominated by the landscape of the Fens in which he grew up.

The Fens is also a landscape whose history is intertwined with the history of his ancestors, and is a landscape whose form suggests an alternative vision of history. History, Tom Crick
tells his students, departing from the curriculum, “goes in two directions at once. It goes backwards as it goes forwards. It loops. It takes detours. Do not fall into the illusion that history is a well-disciplined and unflagging column marching unswervingly into the future” (135). His own “humble model for progress,” Crick tells them, “is the reclamation of land,” and he enjoins his students to “forget […] your revolutions, your turning-points, your grand metamorphoses of history. Consider, instead, the slow and arduous process, the interminable and ambiguous process—the process of human siltation—of land reclamation” (10). In this waterland—this hybrid space, which “of all landscapes, most approximates to Nothing” (13)—human progress must pit itself against the most ambivalent, the most equivocal of sedimentary forces: silt, “which shapes and undermines continents; which demolishes as it builds; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay” (8–9).

According to William Howarth, humans have throughout history treated wetlands in an ambivalent way, both in a physical and a representational sense. Until relatively recently, he argues, wetlands were maligned and systematically destroyed because they impeded human progress in the landscape. However, he states, “[b]y the mid-nineteenth century, shifting attitudes changed wetlands from economic liability into cultural asset. Writers began to read places not as reflected power or virtue, but as states of emotion and perception.” The ambiguous position of wetlands in the cultural imaginary reflects the very ambiguity of wetland itself. As Howarth argues,

We cannot essentialize wetlands, because they are hybrid and multivalent: neither land nor water alone, they are water-land; a continuum between terra and aqua. In rhetorical terms they are not syntax but parataxis, phrases placed side by side without apparent connection, a term Joseph Frank used to describe spatial forms that evoke a great variety of response. In their wildness, wetlands dispossess readers of old codes and lead toward new syntax, where phrases may begin to reassemble.39

Swift’s wetlands—the Fens—can neither be essentialised nor reduced. In Pamela Cooper’s reading, they are at once “densely literal but embedded in the multiple transformations of metaphor; obtrusively material yet (like history) always already mediated by prior inscription.” As a result, “[a]t once a geography and a topography, Waterland’s marshes become effectively a phantasmagoria, more hallucination than fairy-tale; and here the contradictory physical properties of the Fens acquire other dimensions of significance.30 The physical flatness of the Fens, its tendency to collapse geography and topography and space and time, and the horizontality of the process of siltation suggest again a paratactic rhetoric of spatiality and temporality. Siltation is a geological process, but, as Smethurst suggests, the “horizontal nature of the water–land chronotope” does not suggest a deep, vertical geological time.31 Rather, Swift’s novel tends to invoke the geology of Deleuze or the genealogy-
archaeology of Foucault. In effect, Waterland provides a metanarrative on the interrelationship between history and geography by way of a microcosmic, fictionalised spatial history of the Fens, which has itself been sheltered from many of the global historical events going on beyond its watery borders.

‘Lyric Geology’: History, Geology, and Metaphor in Anne Michaels’s Fugitive Pieces

Where Waterland is geographically relatively insular and focussed on the ways in which individual and local history speak to grand historical narratives, Anne Michaels’s 1996 novel of the Holocaust, Fugitive Pieces, is necessarily more global. Fugitive Pieces also opens in a liminal space between land and water—a peat bog near the Polish archeological site of Biskupin, in which the seven-year-old Jewish boy Jakob Beer hides—buried like a bog body—after his family is murdered by German soldiers. Jakob is saved by a Greek geologist, Athos, whom he describes as being “dedicated to a private trinity of peat, limestone, and archaeological wood.” Of the three, Athos has a “special affection for limestone—that crushed reef of memory, that living stone, organic history squeezed into massive mountain tombs” (32). In Fugitive Pieces, limestone bears with it witness to the suffering of the Jews set to work in the Golleschau quarry who “carried their lives in their hands” as they “were forced to haul huge blocks of limestone endlessly” (53). Also, like a geological layer within the text, limestone links the three geographical “sites” of the novel: Poland, Greece, and Canada.32

Jakob flees with Athos to the Ionian island of Zakynthos with its limestone cliffs, where he remains hidden in a room for four years until the Germans leave the island in 1944. Soon after, Athos takes up a position in the new geography department at the University of Toronto to teach a course entitled The History of Geographical Thought, and Jakob eventually enrolls as well, taking courses in literature, history, and geography (94, 108). As a boy, Jakob is “transfixed by the way time buckled, met itself in pleats and folds” (30), by “Athos’s tales of geologists and explorers, cartographers and navigators” (54). Jakob mulls upon the Catalan Atlas, the “most definitive mappamondo of its time,” which in its quest for truth and fact left terrae incognitae blank unlike “maps of history,” which he sees as being “less honest” (136–37). While he is fascinated by these romanticised objects and narratives that stand testament to human endeavour and scientific progress, Jakob is also constantly attuned to the watermark that stains them. He is similarly attuned to his own watermark, his genetic and historical burden of remembering the dead, and to the way in which these stories, maps, and rocks lay bare to him that memory cannot be separated from landscape; history from geography. “It’s no metaphor,” Jakob states,

to feel the influence of the dead in the world, just as it’s no metaphor to hear the radiocarbon chronometer, the Geiger counter amplifying the faint breathing of rock,
fifty thousand years old. (Like the faint thump from behind the womb wall.) It is no metaphor to witness the astonishing fidelity of minerals magnetized, even after hundreds of millions of years, pointing to the magnetic pole, minerals that have never forgotten magma whose cooling off has left them forever desirous. We long for place; but place itself longs. Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment. Eskers of ash wait to be scooped up, lives reconstituted. (53)

However, the only means by which Jakob (and Michaels) can convey this complex interpenetration of history, geography, memory, and landscape is through metaphor, a mode “annihilated” by the German language, which turned “humans into objects” (143). In his attempt to untangle history, and inspired by Athos’s “lyric geology” (209), Jakob becomes a poet. His anthology, aptly titled Groundwork, documents his childhood experiences and “recounts the geology of the mass graves” (209)—in one move contradicting Theodor Adorno’s injunction that to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric and providing a corrective to Simon Schama’s observation that “In our mind’s eye we are accustomed to thinking of the Holocaust as having no landscape.” Indeed, Jakob’s choice to become a poet suggests how vital poetry is to his task of reconnecting history and geography. Poetic language, particularly metaphor, allows for a kind of border-crossing that exposes disciplinary and linguistic striations even as it traverses them.

Méira Cook has examined the ways in which Fugitive Pieces itself responds to Adorno’s dictum, which she states “is not merely an indictment against lyric poetry as a genre but against all writing that in the wake of the Holocaust it must find new ways to represent the elisions and failures of grief when it is used as a system of discourse.” Michaels’s response to Adorno, Cook argues, lies in her use of metaphor—by speaking in a “foreign language,” Michaels’s aim is “to bring to the prose of the traumatic narrative the unruly compulsions of poetry, and in so doing to restore to language what Adorno once mourned as necessarily lost for ever.” Meredith Criglington also remarks upon Michaels’s use of “chronotopic metaphors drawn from fields such as archaeology, geology, and physics,” arguing that Michaels employs these metaphors strategically “in order to explore the relative, shaping perspective of the person who witnesses, remembers, or researches the events of the past.” Cook, however, is more ambivalent about Michaels’s intensely metaphorical language, describing it as at certain times “over-lush,” “contrived,” and even “clichéd,” but at other times as “unparalleled.” Nonetheless, she maintains that Michaels’s use of metaphor as a “device of memory” is central to the way in which she investigates the problematics of witnessing and memory in relation to trauma.

Certainly Michaels’s figurative language is strategic and active, rather than ornamental as in the Classical theory of metaphor. It re-presents at both the textual and thematic levels the
impossibility of literality, of perfect witnessing or perfect memory. As Howarth notes, metaphor itself is both constructive and erosive; metaphor “alters the meanings of words, undermining their stability until land and sea intertwine.” Just as it is suffused with metaphors of geography, geology, and archaeology, Fugitive Pieces demands a reader who is at once an archaeologist, geologist, and geographer, a reader who, like its character Athos, is at all times attentive to the stratification of history, memory, language, and landscape and who can read obliquely through their layers.

**Hybridity, Disciplinarity, and the Linguistic Politics of the Spatial Turn: Tim Robinson’s Stones of Aran**

Before I turn to the question of polymathy or interdisciplinarity inherent in the spatial turn, I will look at one final chronotopic text, Tim Robinson’s non-fiction Stones of Aran. Stones of Aran is a two-volume “topographical” or spatial history of Árainn, the largest of the Aran Islands, which lie off the west coast of Ireland. The first book, Pilgrimage (1986), “makes a circuit” of the island’s coastline, while the companion volume, Labyrinth (1995), explores the island’s interior. Robinson’s tours are driven by his quest for a theory of the “adequate step”—to him, “walking is a way of expressing, acting out, a relationship to the physical world,” an “intense cognitive and physical involvement with the terrain.” Like Swift’s and Michaels’s novels, Stones of Aran is a stratigraphic narrative, but through its non-fictional yet still literary blending of geography, geology, and history, Robinson’s work plays out in interesting ways both the poetics and politics of the spatial turn.

Robinson himself is, like Michaels’s character Athos, a polymath fascinated by karst limestone topography. A former visual artist (under the name Drever) and student of physics and mathematics, Robinson and his wife moved to the Aran Islands in the early 1970s. Captivated by the entirely soil-less topography and the geological and mythic history of the islands, Robinson recasts himself as a cartographer and begins to draw and publish maps of the islands. But as he does so, he also begins to write the islands as well. Robinson relates the humorous anecdote of his and his wife Mairéad’s first encounter with Aran. “On the day of our arrival,” he writes, “we met an old man who explained the basic geography: ‘The ocean,’ he told us, ‘goes all around the island.’” As Robinson and his wife allow the man’s remark to guide their “rambles,” he discovers that the absurd obviousness of the statement belies a more profound truth about the island’s geography: “indeed the ocean encircles Aran like the rim of a magnifying glass, focusing attention to the point of obsession.” This fascination with the island would, within the space of a few months, lead Robinson and his wife to decide to leave London for Aran.

Arriving with Robinson on Aran’s limestone terrain, we have moved from the water–land chronotope of Swift’s Waterland, through the water–land–rock trinity of Fugitive Pieces, to
this almost alien landscape that we might think of as a water–rock chronotope. In Pilgrimage, Robinson describes the “bare, soluble limestone” of Aran as “a uniquely tender and memorious ground”:

Every shower sends rivulets wandering across its surface, deepening the ways of their predecessors and gradually engraving their initial caprices as law into the stone. This recording of the weather of the ages also revivifies much more ancient fossils, which are precisely etched by the rain’s delicate acids, so that now when a rising or setting sun shadows them forth, prehistory is as urgent underfoot as last night’s graffiti in city streets. […] Further, this land has provided its inhabitants […] with one material only, stone, which may fall, but still endures.43

Not only does Robinson’s lyrical description of the limestone topography recall Athos’s “crushed reefs of memory,” but also the narrative voice of W. H. Auden’s 1948 poem “In Praise of Limestone.” Auden’s limestone, with its peculiar ability to dissolve in water, is innately different from the “immoderate soils”—the “granite wastes,” the plains of clay and gravel—colonised by humans where “there is room for armies to drill” and where “rivers / wait to be tamed.” Limestone might metamorphose into marble—that symbol of monumental history, of civilization, and classical art—but in Auden’s poem the stone’s truer form is its soluble one: “an older colder voice, the oceanic whisper.” No tempered granite or marble for Auden; limestone is reserved his highest praise: “when I try to imagine a faultless love / Or the life to come, what I hear is the murmur / Of underground streams, what I see is a limestone landscape.”44

Likewise for Robinson, Aran’s limestone topography presents itself as the ideal landscape upon which to practice a history and cartography that does not neglect the stratified record beneath his feet. Robinson hints that this kind of chronotopic spatial history might be impossible, or at the very least vertiginous in scale, if practised in a landscape that had experienced more human development—for instance, on Auden’s colonised and civilized granite wastes or plains of clay and gravel. He writes of “our craggy, boggy, overgrown and overbuilt terrain, on which every step carries us across geologies, biologies, myths, histories, politics, etcetera [sic], and trips us with the trailing Rosa spinosissima of personal associations. To forget these dimensions of the step is to forgo our honour as human beings, but an awareness of them equal to the involuted complexities under foot at any given moment would be a crushing backload to have to carry.”45 Unlike these heavily overwritten landscapes, Robinson continues, “Aran, of the world’s countless facets one of the most finely carved by nature, closely structured by labour and minutely commented by tradition, is the exemplary terrain upon which to dream of that work, the guide-book to the adequate step.”46
Aran, though, is not a simple landscape—it is at once rugged and enduring and fragile and protean, both geologically and sociologically. In Pilgrimage, when Robinson reaches the narrowest point of the island—Blind Sound, or An Sunda Caoch—he writes that “[h]ere it is that the sea will some day break through and divide the island—the belief recurs in Aran folklore and, I have been told, in Aran people’s dreams.” In his description of Aran’s turloughs, we see Robinson’s attentiveness to etymology and to geology as he explains the island’s unpredictable geography:

The genitive form in this toponym, Róidin an Turlaigh, shows that the final syllable of turlach is not, as the OED states and as the anglicization ‘turlough’ implies, the word loch (genitive locha), a lake or lough, but is in fact a mere postfix of place; thus turlach, from tur, dry, could be explicated as ‘a place that dries up’. Turloughs […] form in enclosed depressions and are filled and emptied not by streams but from below, through openings in their beds which act alternately as springs and swallow-holes, as the general level of ground-water held in the fissures of the limestone rises or falls. In Aran the joints in the limestone have been opened by solution only down to a depth of twenty or thirty feet, below which they are tight, with the result that the water contained in them is draped like a mantle over the island’s core of unfissured rock. The thickness of this mantle varies in average with the seasons, and fluctuates with every shower of rain, and wherever and whenever it rises above ground-level in the bottom of a hollow, a marsh or pond or lake appears. In An Turlach Móir, this hydrology works like a dream: one day you see cattle grazing in a meadow; the next, when you pass, water lies there like a drawn blade.

This passage, which I have quoted at length, also provides a characteristic example of Robinson’s use of language. Throughout Stones of Aran, he consistently, almost seamlessly, modulates between unembellished, quasi-scientific language and lyrical, metaphorical language.

While Robinson might readily recognise Aran as the “exemplary terrain” for his spatial history, the question of the language in which this history might best be conveyed is always at stake. Written language is both an escape and a trap for Robinson—writing is, he maintains, “my way out of this labyrinth. But I am no abstract, deep-sea philosopher; if I raise a metaphor as a sail to catch the winds of thought, I am soon overturned by shoals, or fly to the horizon and lie becalmed there.” In his collection of essays My Time in Space, Robinson speaks of his desire to discover a language that will express this complex relationship to geography—a language that will not simply anthropomorphise, sexualise, or spiritualise the landscape. Indeed, in Labyrinth he describes his practice of writing as being inextricable from his practice of walking in the landscape: “If I cannot lay my hand on the phrase I am
searching for in my room, I stroll out, scramble over the back wall and go rooting for words among the crevices of the rock. The crag is my testing-ground for the aerodynamics of sentences, a rebounding-place to prance upon when a chapter comes to its own conclusions and sets me free.”51

Robinson’s intensely beautiful and detailed works are virtually unclassifiable—subtly and deftly he overlays geographical, social, and mythic histories of the island one with the other, constructing an imaginative geography of the island. These histories are themselves like the sedimentary layers of the limestone topography of the islands; they are distinct but inseparable, and open to erosion. Yet, while the extraordinary hybridity of Robinson’s work has largely been praised by critics, at least one, whose review Robinson quotes in Labyrinth, is equally sceptical of this blending of disciplines: “Striding roughshod,” the critic writes, “over the bounds of specialisms and genres, […] and in trying to be ‘not just’ a historian or geologist or botanist or even a poet, Robinson ends up being nothing in particular.”52

Robinson’s bad review might simply be that—a bad review—but I would argue it raises a central problematic for any interdisciplinary study of the spatial turn: the stratification of academic/scientific disciplines. What I have attempted to outline in this paper is the ways in which “postmodern” fictional and non-fictional spatial and stratigraphic theories and narratives blur disciplinary borders, privileging hybridity. To use Swift’s metaphor of land-reclamation, these postmodern texts could be considered the water that threatens to obscure the borders of those disciplinary fields fought for and marked out by the Enlightenment tradition.

Metaphor, as I have argued, is central to these questions of hybridity and interdisciplinarity, and over the past twenty years it has become commonplace for scholars in geography and in the humanities to comment upon the prevalence of spatial and geographic metaphors in later-twentieth-century theory and fiction. Tracing metaphors of geology and geography through fictional and theoretical texts of the later twentieth century opens them up to a stratigraphic enquiry that does not separate history from geography or geography from language but that also does not simply elide disciplinary borders. In effect, I argue, what the spatial turn requires of scholars who investigate the dynamic intersection where the disciplinary strata of geography and the humanities abut and blur is an attentiveness to the stratified record of those disciplines and its relationship to language. And the question for a project that conjoins geography and the humanities is the question of how do we negotiate between this desire for convergence and a recognition of the inescapable stratification of disciplinary ground.

Notes

1 Thomas Mann, Joseph and His Brothers (New York: Knopf, 1983), 121.


Ibid.

In his 1937–1938 essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics,” Mikhail Bakhtin states, “[w]e will give the name chronotope (literally, ‘time space’) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. […] In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history.” In M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 250.


Peta Mitchell, *Cartographic Strategies of Postmodernity: The Figure of the Map in Contemporary Theory and Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 52.


Ibid., 190, 191.

Deleuze, *Foucault*, 61.


For a fuller account of Deleuze and Guattari’s “geophilosophy,” see Mark Bonta and John Protevi *Deleuze and Geophilosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).


Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 96


Ibid., 166.


Jakob and Athos’s first encounter with Toronto is the “great limestone hall” of Union Station (90).


Simon Schama, Landscape and Memory (New York: Vintage, 1996), 26. See also Coffey, who examines the “unsettling affinities” between Fugitive Pieces and Schama’s analysis of Nazi pastoral fantasies in Landscape and Memory (Coffey, 40).

Cook, 12.

Ibid., 29.

Meredith Criglington, “The City as a Site of Counter-Memory in Anne Michaels’s Fugitive Pieces and Michael Ondaatje’s In the Skin of a Lion,” Essays on Canadian Writing 81 (2004): 141.

Cook., 17–19.

Ibid., 26.

Howarth, 526.


Robinson, Pilgrimage, 10.

Robinson, Pilgrimage, 4


Robinson, Pilgrimage, 12.

Ibid., 13.

Ibid., 65.

Robinson, Labyrinth, 91.

Ibid., 455.

Robinson, My Time in Space, 103.

Robinson, Labyrinth, 294.

Ibid., 307.