

BERTRAND WESTPHAL: Atlas des égarements: Études géocritiques [Atlas of bewilderment: geocritical studies]

Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2019. 192 pp. ISBN 978-2707345370

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2023.15.1.12>

Bertrand Westphal is a French professor and researcher in comparative literature, which he considers a fragile and fascinating discipline, and he has introduced the term geocriticism, which can be loosely defined as a science of literary spaces. His monograph *Atlas des égarements: Études géocritiques* (Atlas of bewilderment: geocritical studies) is a collection of lectures (given in various places between 2013 and 2018) presenting and citing a wide range of writers, artists, and philosophers. Westphal defines geocriticism as a dynamic discipline studying interactions between real and fictional spaces. Despite the short existence of this discipline, it is becoming increasingly studied in interdisciplinary approaches to literature alongside disciplines such as psychology, philosophy, urbanism, architecture. The publication under review is of an informative nature but at the same time it offers geocritical analyses of chosen phenomena.

In the last century, there has been renewed interest in the study of space in literature, after the so-called spatial turn Westphal writes about in his theory. Westphal reflects on the perception of space in *Atlas des égarements*. But what led the author to use this phrase as the title? At the beginning of the publication, there is an explanation of the title, which is very convenient, as the title itself may be misleading or vague. In dictionaries, *égarement* is a state of being confused or lost, but it also means to turn away from what is right (physically or morally). Westphal provides his own definition: to leave a station/parking lot. For the word *atlas*, he borrows Georges Didi-Huberman's definition, saying that an atlas is a dynamic composition of heterogeneity (17). The word heterogeneity repeatedly appears in the text and represents the essence of the world

and one of the principles of the discipline in question.

The book under review starts with an apt quote: “On dit que la carte n'est pas le territoire” (9; “The map is not the territory”, trans. T.G.). Westphal, inspired by Alfred Korzybski's claim on the representation by words and images (a map), agrees that a map does not show the complete reduction of a referent (a territory). In today's world, there is a tendency to believe that a map represents a territory to ensure certainty. However, Korzybski is not the only one to claim that maps do not reproduce the world in its true nature. Throughout the book, variances between the maps and the territories are demonstrated and several different points of view on what the territory is are introduced; e.g. Estrella de Diego's comment that the territory is nothing but a cultural pact. She was perhaps inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's famous terms *déterritorialisation* and *reterritorialisation*. After all, Westphal himself was inspired by the two philosophers when defining the principles of geocriticism.

Referring to the work of French journalist and writer Alain Schifres, Westphal's chapter “Cartographies mobiles” (Mobile cartographies) reflects on the reliability of maps, and depicts the contrast between a real paper map and online tools such as GPS, Google Maps, Google Earth, etc. Although it is believed that a map should be the most exact representation of the world, is it not the most misleading one? He follows up with a question on the stability and seriousness of the world's image presented in maps. Unfortunately, although it desires to reflect reality and the present time, representation is always delayed. In his book *How to Lie with Maps* (1991), the professor of geography and the environment Mark Monmonier says that

a map is just one of countless representations of a situation. If we want to reproduce a three-dimensional world on paper we must deform reality. It is no longer certain what exactly a territory is.

In the next chapter, “La carte pourpre” (The purple map), Westphal refers to the Tibetan writer Tsering Woeser, who published the controversial monograph *Notes sur le Tibet* (Notes on Tibet, 2004), which is no longer available in French, English, or Mandarin. Woeser believes that maps are magic; they give her a sensation of vertigo. She compares them to labyrinths, since they create a feeling of being completely lost. By “traveling” on a map, she says, we can discover an explorer in each of us. After all, a map is a strange object: it is not our experience, but one lived by someone else and as we re-live it, we personalize, modify, and bring new subjectivity into it. By creating a map, we reconstruct the world, meaning that it is not stable anymore.

There is more to discover about the constant instability of representations of our planet in the chapter “La dérivés des continents” (Derivation of the continents). The interpretation and description of places will never grasp the world’s true substance. Following one of the principles of geocriticism, there is a huge space for subjectivity in understanding the world.

The chapter “La géocritique au cribles des espaces brésiliens” (Geocriticism in the sieves of Brazilian spaces) is divided into ten keywords, each one representing a definition of geocriticism. The first keyword, postmodern, reflects on what a map is capable of representing given that the world is an unstable phenomenon. The keywords are interconnected by assenting to this global instability. Through *multifocalisation*, another keyword, we can get multiple perspectives on things – but what and where is the value of these points of view? Westphal reflects on this problem through the example of the classic Brazilian movie *Boca de Ouro*, and explains another keyword, *stratigraphy*, showing that spatial representation is never

the same and homogeneous. The Brazilian translator and writer Alberto Mussa’s book *O senhor do lado esquerdo* (2011; *The Mystery of Rio*, 2013) imagines research conducted on a quarter in Rio de Janeiro in 1913. He uses the concept of stratigraphy to expose the history of this city from its foundation through the crimes that happened there. It goes without saying that the reception of places and situations differed from person to person. Finally, the abovementioned keyword *déterritorialisation* is defined by João Machado as a space that refuses to adapt itself to a map. Latin-American artists often use maps and cartographic motifs to offer their own vision of the world. Machado grasps the world in his collage *Swimming*, showing a man swimming in the Atlantic, in which the seawater is represented by pieces of maps all around him as if the world had become liquid and decomposed. He liberates the space and makes it unconventional.

It is worth noting that the word *criticism* is featured in the name of the discipline. Westphal criticizes an exhibition at the Centre George-Pompidou and the Grand Halle de la Villette featuring the Congolese sculptor and artist Bodys Isek Kingelez. Although the exhibition’s goals were to reunite artists from around the world to sum up the state of contemporary art, it raised questions on how we manifest the world’s heterogeneity when the dominant culture is an Occidental one. The title of the chapter, “Kimbembele Ihunga”, represents the name of a village (which has not existed on maps since 2015) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as a 1994 work by Kingelez depicting urban life in his home village. Kingelez imagines how his home village could plausibly be. Presented at New York’s MOMA, in Parisian exposition halls and elsewhere, he says that he is like a stranger in the Congo, where he is not recognized, and criticizes globalization.

Globalization goes hand in hand with borders. The chapters “Mapas invertidos” and “Hors de la cage ou le Liechtenstein déchainé” (Out of the cage or Liechtenstein

unchained) deal with border phenomena. Long ago, people demarked their space only in relation to nature, and rivers or mountains represented borders, but later, an interdisciplinary shift occurred. European geography went together with geometry and geopolitics, and in the 17th or 18th centuries, debates on geography were mainly political. The French sound poet Bernard Heidsieck claims that most of the time we perceive in maps static representations of a stiff world.

The chapter “Lignes de villes, lignes de vie” (Lines of cities, lines of life) discusses the lines that are present everywhere and their relation to cities, maps and, finally, to life. But lines can also be considered as limits or borders. They introduce the heterogeneity of the world, for example, the lines of a city are wanted by urbanists and city governments and, from the *flâneurs*’ or readers’ perspective, they can have various representations.

To conclude, *lespace* (space), city, or map are narratives that are not univocal. Thanks to their ambiguity we can read literary works as a puzzle and perceive them in their decomposed form. The interdisciplinarity of geocriticism allows for the illustration of combined zones where new perceptions are created. The monograph *Atlas des égarements: Études géocritiques* represents a diverse way of applying geocritical analysis to a variety of subjects. Even though Bertrand Westphal’s reflections on space do not constitute an extensive theoretical consideration of geocritical theory, the book is interesting to read and very enriching. However, it should be said that prior knowledge of the subject and its sometimes esoteric terminology would be beneficial, if one is to properly understand the book.

TERÉZIA GUIMARD

Institute of World Literature SAS

Slovak Republic

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2544-7584>

JANA TRUHLÁŘOVÁ: Dlhá cesta k porozumeniu. Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant v slovenskej literatúre a kritike [A long way to understanding. Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant in Slovak literature and criticism]

Bratislava: Ústav svetovej literatúry SAV – VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV, 2021. 296 s. ISBN 978-80-224-1926-0, DOI 10.31577/2021.9788022419260

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/WLS.2023.15.1.13>

Monografia Jany Truhlářovej *Dlhá cesta k porozumeniu. Émile Zola, Gustave Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant v slovenskej literatúre a kritike* sa venuje, ako už jej názov napovedá, problematike slovenskej recepcie troch najvýznamnejších francúzskych románopiscov druhej polovice 19. storočia. Truhlářová ňou prispieva na jednej strane k aktuálnemu výskumu francúzskej literárnej vedy, starostlivo mapujúcemu ohlasy a vplyvy francúzskych autorov na inonárodnú literatúru, na strane druhej k hlbšiemu pochopeniu formovania slovenskej literatúry v období od konca 19. do konca 20. storočia, a to z pohľadu komplexnosti vzťahov,

ktoré vznikli medzi domácou tvorbou a impulzmi prichádzajúcimi od spomínaných troch autorov.

Monografia podáva ucelený a podrobný, dá sa povedať vyčerpávajúci, pohľad na dejiny recepcie Émila Zolu, Gustava Flauberta a Guy de Maupassanta v slovenskom kultúrnom a literárnom prostredí, pričom je koncipovaná na základe intenzity polemík, ktoré sprevádzali diskusie okolo jednotlivých spisovateľov – od radikálne zaujatého postoja voči Zolovi, cez menej odmietavú, no podobne problematickú recepciu Flaubertovho diela, až po napohľad najjednoduchšie prijatie Maupassantovej krátkej prózy. Autorka spája