

## [Hinterlands: Cultural and Literary Perspectives](#)

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Conference

Date:

March 18, 2022 to March 20, 2022

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Poland

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Cultural History / Studies, Literature, Urban History / Studies, Borderlands, Humanities

Dictionaries, which are written from a metropolitan perspective, tend to be biased against the term 'hinterland', variously defining it as the area beyond that which is visible or known; the back country that lies behind the strip adjacent to a coast or river shore; and the fringe areas of a port, town, or city. Geographically, 'hinterland' denotes underdeveloped heterotopias perceived as lacking an elite and 'cultural currency'. Yet from the perspective of those who live beyond metropolitan centers, their environments are neither invisible nor unknown. Arguably, then, 'hinterland' stands for fullness as much as it does for lack. From a psychoanalytic or trauma studies perspective, in turn, 'the area lying beyond that which is visible or known' can serve as a productive metaphor, for it is in the real or metaphorical 'land behind', or the place over the border, that the repressed can be explored. Thus the hinterland may function as a 'Gothic repository'.

'Hinterland' implies hybridity. As far back as the 1990s, the concept of the 'spatially bounded city' was questioned by, among others, William Cronon (*Nature's Metropolis*, 1991) and Matthew Gandy (*Concrete and Clay: Reworking Nature in New York City*, 2002). The cities emerging from their books are both defined by and define their hinterlands, and the line of demarcation between the two spaces becomes fuzzy. We wish to go a step further and displace the bounded city concept with processes traceable within dynamically transforming spaces called hinterlands. By invoking current understandings of the hinterland, we hope to avoid the no longer sustainable demarcation of a 'coherent urban' and non-urban realm (Wachsmuth) naturalized by such writings as Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*. We propose that the city is no more than a 'regulatory fiction' (Robinson 112), an 'ideology' (Wachsmuth) rather than a 'reality'. Neither can the city account either for transnational networks. As Andy Merrifield observes, 'The urbanization of the world is a kind of exteriorization

of the inside as well as interiorization of the outside. . . . The urban *unfolds* into the countryside just as the countryside *folds* back into the city' (542). Shifting the focus from cities to real and imagined hinterlands, this conference sets out to address a spectrum of topics, 'an assemblage of material and cultural practices' (Foster), hitherto discussed in the urban context, and to revise their re/presentation in literary and cultural studies.

To describe a place as a hinterland in colonial and imperial contexts, Douglas Kerr argues, 'might already be to make a territorial claim on it' (11). It is a conceptual space imbued with connotations of imperial possession, othering and marginality. In the last century or so, agglomeration centres rather than colonial empires began to draw on or engulf both near and distant hinterlands. Writing *The Sound and the Fury*, William Faulkner acknowledged yet resisted the urban North's perception of the American South as a hinterland. For the post-World War II Polish 'settlers' arriving in the former German region of Silesia, the land posed the enigma of a hinterland, a Gothic text whose hidden, obscured and unspeakable histories remained illegible, while its 'natural' resources retrieved from the rubble were swiftly packed and transported to the capital, to be used in the reconstruction of Poland's urban core. The popular detective drama series *Hinterland*, set in Aberystwyth, Wales, is shot in and around the town, often in rural locations and emotionally charged landscapes 'newly discovered' by the film industry. In South African writing, the hinterland is the heartland once controlled by fortified farms (Foster). Ivan Vladislavić remarks that after the fall of apartheid, followed by massive migrations, there has been a relentless urban expansion whose symptom is the Restless Supermarket established on an 'abandoned aerodrome in the hinterland, at the end of a country road' (245). Once invisible, hinterlands emerge from obscurity by contributing to the rising, global high-intensity infrastructures/networks.

Our interest is in three categories of hinterlands. Firstly, in extensions of agglomeration centres into what has been historically defined as peripheries, fringes or fuzzy edges – suburban and rural developments sometimes referred to as 'up-building' (industrial and infrastructural clustering) and 'un-building' (post-industrial degradation of landscape) in hinterlands. Secondly, in far-away lands, territories, and heartlands – non-city spaces tied to urban cores and transformed into high-intensity infrastructure called operational landscapes. Thirdly, in metaphorical and real territories that function as hinterlands, and are thus invested with special qualities which contribute to their representation even though they are located close to the heart of urban cores, e.g. London's East End.

We invite papers and presentations that address the subject of hinterlands by adopting either a literary studies or a cultural studies perspective. The welcome topics are related but not limited to the following fields of research:

- Hinterland or non-city: material and cultural practices in the rural urban fringe, urban hinterland and in distant hinterlands functioning as operational networks or historical sources of natural supplies,
- Hinterlands as neglected and disturbed landscapes of refuse, waste and loss, marked by histories of ecological violence and climate change, junkspace (Rem Koolhaas),
- Reclaiming and inhabiting hinterlands,
- Reinvention, appropriation and gentrification of hinterlands
- Hinterland as a tourist retreat and idyll,
- Memory, nostalgia, trauma and search for roots in hinterlands with histories of colonial, imperial, and political violence,
- Ethical considerations of hinterlands: incorporating otherness and embodying the self in hinterlands,
- The politics of memory in the hinterland - controlling, censoring, and restoring memory,
- Transforming and representing hinterlands: land, landscape, territory, and their populations
- Re-imagining and remapping hinterlands. Writing hinterlands as mediation between analytic maps and new pathways of meaning, between a psychogeographical understanding of particular landscapes and locations and the imagined narratives that rewrite these maps from new perspectives,
- Writing hinterlands as a 'writing of excess' (Botting) and the repressed to be explored, representing hinterlands in various literary genres,
- Hinterland as a projected space and metaphor; metaphorical land behind a person; the ground on which political thought, knowledge and conviction are built.

## References

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This conference is planned as an online event. The organizers intend to publish selected proceedings in the form of a journal issue or essay collection.

**Proposals** of about 300 words, together with a biographical note, should be sent to [hinterlands2022@gmail.com](mailto:hinterlands2022@gmail.com) by September 31, 2021.

**Conference fee:** € 50.00

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