

Article

# The Geography of ‘Otherness’: Spaces of Conflict in Smaro Kamboureli’s *in the Second Person*

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**Abstract:** In today’s “liquid” society, boundaries and limits are shifting or disorienting: belonging to no place, not knowing where ‘home’ is, underlines the sense of uncertainty and in-betweenness experienced by people. This contribution suggests five spatial issues Greek-born Canadian author Smaro Kamboureli has to negotiate with in her ‘poetic diary’ *in the second person*, where she investigates the duality of the self, displaying the double “I” of the writer’s split subjectivity on a concrete (Greece) as well as abstract (language) place of living. Kamboureli’s account of a duel with and a paradoxical courting of what was and is now for her “the place of language” is related to the awareness of inhabiting a “third” zone of expectations: the difference of origin, of country, of point of view. In conclusion, the different levels of spatial negotiations Kamboureli has had to come to terms with have made her a completely different person. Her life on the border, epitomized in turn by airports, boats, Greece, and the Greek islands, is indeed an endless research of, as well as a conflict with, the ‘Other’, which opens up questions about the relativity of the space/place dichotomy.

**Keywords:** person; belonging; displacement

## 1. Introduction

For years now, spatial analysis is no longer confined to disciplines that deal directly with the physical dimensions of social existence, such as geography, architecture, and urban planning. Over the past century, space has infiltrated most of the social sciences and the humanities: sociology, anthropology, philosophy, history, psychology and psychoanalysis, literary criticism, and legal studies. In fact, space has turned into something quite different than “an absolute container of static, though movable, objects and dynamic flows of behavior” (Gleeson 1996, p. 390), and *spatial thinking* has become a privileged way to access a subject’s concrete life and actions in a non-Euclidean world. Edward W. Soja considered the postcolonial criticism of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Arjun Appadurai, as the decisive impulse that has allowed the “spatial turn” to intersect and interchange comparative literature with anthropology, history with philosophy, and so forth. Furthermore, in offering a spatialized conceptualization of worldly phenomena where space is not another merely area to be analyzed, but a central part of the approach itself, Michel Foucault has written that “[t]he present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed” (Foucault 1986, p. 1). On the other hand, the processes of globalization and of a “modernity at large” (Appadurai 1996) problematize nowadays notions of ‘home’ and belonging. So, if in *The Atlantic Sound*, Caryl Phillips asserts that “where a man keeps his memories is the place he should call home” (Phillips 2000, p. 93), the social and cultural constructs that contribute to identity shaping also include dealing with alienation, international and intranational cultures. Cross-cultural aspects reinforce the idea that:

[o]ur identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambitious and shifting the ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. (Rushdie 1991, p. 15)

Greek-Canadian author Smaro Kamboureli's *in the second person* (1985) seems to anticipate Rushdie's concerns about space and identity, yet it has remained marginal to the main literary context: as a matter of fact, it has been out of the publication circuit since 1995, though it is available with an Italian translation edited and introduced by Eleonora Rao and published in Italy (with Gutenberg Press, Salerno) and in Canada (with Guernica Editions, Toronto) in 2019. Investigating her small book means to acknowledge how space/place dichotomy affects identity construction, and what Kamboureli, an important figure in the Canadian literary realm and professor of English at the University of Toronto, has experienced in these terms. A central figure in contemporary Canadian criticism and literature, Kamboureli previously taught English and was the Director of the TransCanada Institute at the University of Guelph. In 2005, she was awarded a Canada Research Chair in Critical Studies in Canadian Literature. Before joining the University of Guelph, she taught for many years at the University of Victoria where she was Director of the English graduate program and the first Associate Dean-Research. Her publications include *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem* (1991), *Making a Difference: Multicultural Literatures in English Canada* (2006). Her book *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000) won the Gabrielle Roy Prize for Canadian Criticism. On the board of NeWest Press (Edmonton) since 1981, Kamboureli is the founder and editor of *The Writer as Critic* series, which includes, among others, Douglas Barbour's *Lyric/Anti-lyric: Essays on Contemporary Poetry*, Daphne Marlatt's *Readings from the Labyrinth*, Fred Wah's *Faking It: Poetics and Hybridity*, and Phyllis Webb's *Nothing But Brush Strokes*. In 2016, Kamboureli was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, the senior national, bilingual council of distinguished Canadian men and women from all branches of learning who have made remarkable contributions in the arts, the humanities, and the sciences.

## 2. Negotiating Non-Places

As Eva Karpinski notes, *in the second person* is "a borderline text in relation to both Canadian ethnic/immigrant and mainstream autobiography", and as such it is "uniquely positioned to unsettle the construction of margin-centre" (Karpinski 2012, p. 151). From an early entry of her poetic journal, Kamboureli sets out on an exploration of her "other" Selves. The title of the book suggests the duality of a subject split in two, and if at times living in a language that is not originally her own, like English is, leaves her *de-scripted*, erased from a space which once included her, Kamboureli's record reveals its potential when her backgrounds force her to negotiate between several facets of a continually changing Self. It is the Self, indeed, and the different languages it speaks, which is implicated in an interdependent system of symbolic behaviour, as Kamboureli's journal becomes the self-conscious construction of different aspects that go into *representing* a particular woman. As various levels of conceived and perceived spaces are evoked in the book, it aptly fits in the realms of both spatial discourse and displaced/displacing narratives, offering an extremely personal reflection on the different aspects of the space-place relationship in contemporary world. Nevertheless, in her account Kamboureli experiments with several writing techniques with the awareness that each of them could work as an appropriate representation of the inner thoughts and feeling she wants to evoke or provoke. An undefinable and undefined work, *in the second person* mixes travelogue, poetry, confession, and symbiotic/semiotic acts of remembering and forgetting places, events, and even people associated to a specific and rather circumscribed span of time—from 1977 to 1982. In her account, Kamboureli, who is currently Avie Bennett Chair in Canadian Literature at the University of Toronto, and was previously research Chair in Canadian Literature and the Director of the TransCanada Institute at the University of Guelph, performs different personalities and writing techniques according to the spatial situations she is involved in or has to negotiate with. The discontinuous fragments are framed into two complementary yet parallel parts: a very short section titled "An open parenthesis",

made up of ten paragraphs covering the years from 1977 to 1983; and the notebook, where the events between December 1980 and July 1982 are listed and organized in a journalistic pattern. The time span covers the different rites of passage the narrating “I” has to face: from Greece to the United States, where Kamboureli goes for a M.A., to Canada, where she will finally settle after crossing the American border at Fort Erie in 1978. The most suffered and problematic section, however, lays in the temporary return to the home country in 1981. The acts of writing Kamboureli performs “overlap, intermingle, and impersonate each other” (Turchi 2004, p. 12) in both the space used for the narration (the physical work produced) and the space narrated. As the book progresses, rivalries and adversities dissolve. No one element is ever contained or enclosed by the other. “My life”, Kamboureli writes, “seems to draw its own [ . . . ] reversible map: on the one side there is the map of the Greek language and geography that slowly expels me from its territory; on the other side is the map of the English language and Canada that gradually adopts me” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 8). From this reversible map, Kamboureli traces the “deviance of us” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 20), the deviance of her many selves in relation to friends, husband, lovers, relatives, and countries. As Peter Turchi suggests in *Maps of the Imagination: the Writer as Cartographer* (2004), if on one hand *exploration* entails an “assertive action in the face of uncertain assumptions” (Turchi 2004, p. 12), on the other hand *presentation* allows skilled and talented writers to create a document “meant to communicate with, and have effect on, others” (ibid.). Kamboureli’s account consequently creates a suitable context that takes the reader on a journey made up of what Gilles Deleuze termed as multiple flows of becoming or folds (Deleuze 1993). The folded nature of her text positions Kamboureli as the privileged observer who is exploring how peoples actually ‘live’ space and the levels of attachment each person offers to a specific space or portion of space in order to find a sense of place within it. Many of the journal entries emphasize the lack of place, of selfhood, the alienated sense of exclusion from the system of borders and nationalities.

In the form of a multi-genre memoir, with the style and content ranging from accessible to experimental (the more abstract and poetic entries are often achronological and reflective), *in the second person* presents a physical and psychological journey made by a woman divided between competing identities. The narrative is basically linear, beginning in 1977 with Kamboureli’s flight from Greece to North America and ending in 1982 on a flight back to Europe with her husband, the late Canadian novelist Robert Kroetsch (to whom the book is dedicated). Though Kamboureli’s map is mostly limited to the Greece–Canada dichotomy, and not much is said about her childhood or family history except for when she recollects the memories of a trip back to Greece to visit her parents in 1981, what pervades the narration is the pursuit of a sense of place through a divided but dialogic self-examination, whose hybrid identity endlessly eludes a full integration and affirmation. The narrating “I” has always to negotiate between conflicted outer/concrete and inner/abstract spaces that, apparently, never turn into “place” (that is to say, they never become “felt” as her own). They become instead the frame inside which a double/in-between subject can encounter what she calls “the Other”. Kamboureli’s ‘poetic diary’ portrays a woman living the suspension of non-belonging, of being on a sort of threshold or zone of indistinction between inside and outside. To quote Giorgio Agamben,

The threshold [ . . . ] is, to speak, the experience of the limit itself, the experience of being-*within* an *outside*. (Agamben 1993, p. xvi)

Agamben, indeed, considers the *outside* “not another space that resides beyond a determinate space, but rather, it is the passage, the exteriority that gives access” (ibid.).

The *threshold* becomes a metaphor associated with a turning point in an individual’s life, a crisis, a decision that can change the flow of life. Yet it is a fundamental passage, which transforms one’s own identity and allows the necessary *metamorphosis* demanded by contemporary liquid modernity. *in the second person* begins with such a transformation, “An open parenthesis”. It is July 7, 1977: Kamboureli is at the International Airport in Athens, waiting to board the plane to the United States, where she will enroll for a M.A. at an American University, understand American culture, and gain competence in the English language. Significantly, the act of leaving the mother

country means both a betrayal and a step towards the unknown to Kamboureli. Probably, the choice of such a beginning is not accidental: non-place *par excellence*, airports' conformation and organization actually represent "in between zones where all ties are suspended and time stretched to a sort of continuous present. Oases of nonbelonging, spaces of detachment. No-(wo)man's lands" (Braidotti 1994, pp. 18–19). In an increasingly 'su(pe)rmodern' Western world with the speed-up of communications and an excess of simultaneous events, Marc Augé has suggested that the perception of place is undergoing a transformation. In a more pessimistic view than Doreen Massey's ideal that movement, globalization, and transient relations could lead to more relational, open, dynamic, and inclusive conceptions of place (Massey 2005), Augé clearly states that place is rooted, organic, and static, and creates a negative counterpart, 'non-place', "a space completely emptied out of eventfulness" (Bosteels 2003, p. 136). Though he admits that non-place never exists in pure form:

places reconstitute themselves in it; relations are restored and resumed in it; [ . . . ] Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten. (Augé 1995, pp. 78–79)

Place and non-place are in a reciprocal, contingent, and in-process relationship. They are "empirically measurable physical spaces" (p. 115) to be filled with accounts of boredom, solitariness, and detachment people may experience as a consequence of consumption and mobility. Travelling individuals, like Kamboureli is as soon as the subjective I/eye enters self-narration, are passified, fabricated by signs, texts and interfaces, becoming "merely a gaze" (Augé 1998, p. 103): solitary users, temporarily dwelling in archetypal non-places such as motorways, shopping centers, hotels, airports. At Athens' airport, then, the only thing Kamboureli is left with is "a last look at the Greek landscape, nostalgia is already my invisible companion. It embraces both my past and my future. My present is practically non-existent" (Kamboureli 2019, p. 2). The first space to negotiate with, here, is *landscape*. Definitions of landscape range from encompassing descriptions to more circumscribed ones. The fact that Kamboureli writes "landscape" means that she is leaving an environment which has in some sense made a lot for her. Indeed, Barry Cunliffe, basing on the proportion "environment is to landscape as space is to place", opposes landscape as a construct—"enmeshed in a network of beliefs and values" (Cunliffe 1997, p. iii)—to the concept of environment as a neutral process existing outside the specificities of any culture. Consequently, environment's existence (like space) is independent from the subject who observes, while landscape (like place) is specific to time and people. Kamboureli is the subject who, in departure, is reshaping an objective environment into a personal landscape that "only emerges when a subject [ . . . ] perceives the world as it displays before his/[her] eyes" (Jakob 2005, p. 10). The Greek landscape is now for Kamboureli an exchange of the secure for the insecure. A jump into the *uncanny*, the undefined/undefinable. A spatial detachment, a necessary act with the constant desire to return which does not necessarily mean stillness or change for better: in "Páno Petáli/10 July 1981", for example, she writes that "[t]he living room is almost empty. Only and old uncomfortable couch against the wall, the old maple table in the center of the room with the antique chandelier above it, and the old family portraits" (Kamboureli 2019, p. 96). If anything has physically moved in the places that used to be hers, a person has changed her approach of viewing and considering even the smallest things. A tangible tension permeates such spaces, which will flood in "Thessaloniki/21 July 1981": there is now "[t]ension in the house. Tension on the phone with Robert. Emotional distances, the geographies of our desire, speak for us" (p. 100).

### 3. Landguaging, Langscaping

Some pages and some years later, Kamboureli will recognize that she is not the same person who had left Greece six years before but

what Canadians have made of me, those anonymous faces that turn toward me when they hear my accent (not my voice), those friends who embraced me and my otherness together. (Kambourelis 2019, pp. 6–8)

The Canadian *here* is strongly associated with the natural environment. And Kambourelis's second negotiation is now with and within a more determined space. In 1983, she had entered Canada, and now Kambourelis admits that now she is "what I've become after I got lost in the open space of the Canadian prairies" (p. 6). The unknown has been transformed into partial acceptance of the *status quo*. Here "language" fuses with "land" or "landscape" and helps the subject to draw the physical world always present in language. Sten P. Moslund correctly suggests that moving away from landscapes to *langscapes* entails a shift "from the detached contemplation of place as scenery" and a way into complex and cultural experiences of "place as a lived-in world" (Moslund 2011, p. 31). As Lefebvre noted, space is "second nature, an effect of the action of societies on 'first nature'" (Lefebvre 2000, p. xix). In other words, Kambourelis's Canadian spatial appropriation is a social action that does not simply take place in space, but it constitutes her 'new' spaces: the prairies, and the English language. When language and landscape melt, the "I" is always in transit—and in becoming: place is not just a space perceived as one's own, or a decorative background for the story's action, but is experienced as a presence within language and as one of the primary events of the story. Kambourelis's present condition affords her "the (perverse?) pleasure of a doubled view"; language becomes "the window that looks onto my home and into my homelessness. [It] knows no boundaries"; therefore, "[i]t does not express the geography that puts labels on writing, speech, or thought" (Kambourelis 2019, p. 4). Her parting rituals have already epitomized the linguistic rupture, "a refusal to envision continuity or coexistence of her Greek and English linguistic selves" (Karpinski 2012, p. 152).

In the empty spaces between the places Kambourelis tries to negotiate with, worlds are created through language. Since linguistic displacement appears to be of immediate concern in her text, Kambourelis sets translation as the only suitable means of analysing "a complex web of relationships between language, memory, immigrant self, desire, and the body" (Karpinski 2012, p. 151). Although Kambourelis's last entry insists that everything is a "repetition backwards", it also states the main danger in going backwards "lurks in the act of translation" (Kambourelis 2019, p. 162). Rather than locating itself, defining itself through one culture, one language, and history, the mediated subject declares itself as the subject of its own translation and representation whose dynamic of retrospect can only be based in Kambourelis's own personal illusion. Paradoxically, language is for Kambourelis the *thetic* or representative symbolic space. It is the place of language's *fixedness*: "Linguistic structures are the blockages of the process. They intercept and immobilize it, subordinating it to semantic and institutional *unities* which are in deep solidarity with each other" (Kristeva 1998, p. 167). She feels the urge to "move out of the enclosure of language in order to grasp what is going on in the genetic temporality which logically precedes the constitution of the symbolic function" (Kristeva 1998, p. 140). As Julia Kristeva infers, while the symbolic function governs unity, the *semiotic function* demonstrates the *heterogeneity of meaning* as it represents that which precedes the creation of the subject (the pulsional network, or network of drives). By including both stasis (the closed nature of the signifier) and expulsion (the multiplicity of signification), which represent the two facets of a heterogeneous contradiction, Kambourelis takes into account the infinitesimal differentiation occurring in the *pheno-text* (the concrete manifestation of the text; the closed text) during the signifying process, while constantly evoking the space where production originates, the *geno-text*. While the speaker's quest is for home and identity, she explores a condition of exile from her native land also in language. Indeed, the final word of the final entry is "translation" (Kambourelis 2019, p. 162): it is like the author is writing to some extent the language as place in order to resolve the division of the Self.

#### 4. The Canadian Spatiality

From the beginning, both the impossibility of going back to origins and the hypothetical reconstruction of origins is made clear. Kambourelis's language of homelessness and non-belonging

pushes the analysis forward to the book's third negotiation and conflict: though geographical movements will lead to a dislocation of the authorial "I" and to an ambiguous relation with both Greece, the mother country, and Canada, the adoptive country, Kamboureli opens and concludes her book in this same non-place, the airport. Here, "the four hours at the Toronto airport were a repetition backwards" (Kamboureli 2019, p. 162), like she has never moved nor changed throughout the narration. However, she did move and change, and lived on her skin all the problems associated with concepts such as identity, movement, multiplicity, and difference, as well as the "longing for languages that open up and that are shaped by the specific spaces that we call ours" (Gumbrecht 2009, p. 240). Though sharing the common *leitmotiv* of displacement related to the abandoning of mother country, at the same time, *in the second person* differentiates from other similar literature because Kamboureli's departure is not due to a cruel and suffered experience such as a war or a dictatorship can be; nevertheless, she is a migrant, and an immigrant:

Immigration is a form of abjection. It is a desire for a yet unknown object, a desire that kills its subject. I sit beside myself in everyday life. I look over my shoulder when I write. I said that I'm home here. Yes, but I don't feel at home with myself. (Kamboureli 2019, p. 4)

In negotiating the shared and contested spaces of the Canadian realm, Canadian writers have long charted and re-charted the contours not just of identities and communities but also of geographical places. With, or perhaps because of, the varying degrees of national and regional affiliation that accompany their Indigenous, settler, immigrant, and diasporic imaginaries, they reveal the persistent relevance of Northrop Frye's famous question "Where is here?"—a key question in the 1960s. As a matter of fact, before the pronounced spatial turn, Canadian literature had already established a distinct tradition of concern with space. To characterize Canadian culture, Frye himself coined the expression 'garrison mentality' in his 1965 conclusion to *Literary History of Canada* (Frye 1971, p. 225). A metaphor that conjures up the image of a fenced community surrounded by a harsh and hostile wilderness, the "Terra Incognita".

Similarly, Margaret Atwood identified 'survival' as a prevailing theme in Canadian literature: "For early explorers and settlers, it meant bare survival in the face of 'hostile' elements and/or natives" (Atwood 1972, p. 32). Though Frye's overarching applicability of his spatial metaphor came under critical scrutiny for privileging or excluding portions of Canadian literary contributions, its basic correctness stays intact as it underlies the dual opposition between garrison and wilderness. Undoubtedly, garrison mentality is used by Frye not only for homogenizing diversity of geography but for justifying the colonial invasion and occupation of the Canadian space; a defense which is further fortified in failing to, or refusing to, acknowledge the Native presence when he designs Canada as "no-man's-land" (Frye 1971, p. 220) and displaces the colonial practice as a physical/psychic relationship between menacing nature and individuals in need of protection.

The Canadian experience is changing Kamboureli's vision of space: it is not connected to a concrete, fixed, well-defined idea of the world anymore; it is not just a human's life container or backdrop anymore; moreover, it is not just "the fictionalized environment in which the author unfolds the plot and against which the protagonists are characterized" (Vermette 1987, p. 146). Tuan Yi-Fu's equivalence of place as security and space as freedom (Tuan 1977, p. 3) is not working anymore. Globalization and postcolonial border shifting have subverted both the material and imaginative relationship with space. This is even more emphasized in the Canadian context historically determined by what Kamboureli herself identifies as an *elsewhereness* "that is not yet legible, that defamiliarizes the tropes that produce transparency [and which demand] epistemic breaks that requires new tools to comprehend its materiality" (Kamboureli and Miki 2007, p. ix). Again, the garrison mentality neutralizes the image of the alien's intrusion and inclusion into the Native's landscape, and transforms the spatial expansion of colonial power into a struggle for the occupation of a blank space waiting for European exploration and settlement. In this respect, Edward Said theorized the cultural processes and discursive formations that aid colonial or imperial control over people and place. His groundbreaking

works, such as *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), helped to standardize the complex cultural, ideological, and intellectual processes involved in domination and control. In the face of the impermanence embedded in colonial discourse, Said proposed the notion of “imaginative geography” to refer to the invention and construction of geographical space and place beyond a physical territory (Said 2000, p. 181). The risk, as Homi Bhabha states, is to impose a firm distinction between European and Native identities. Instead, Bhabha suggests that colonial texts are characterized by *ambivalence*, “a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha 1994, p. 66). Colonial discourse, in Canada, is then both authorial and limited as everything is moving, and it is difficult to assign identity to a space that is constantly shifting.

Where history has failed, geography becomes important for identity’s definition in a continuing meditation on the Canadian space/place dichotomy, interpreted based on different critical perspectives: as a geographical box, as a metaphor of mental processes, and as a myth of Canadian culture. In her words, Kamboureli projects a conflicted space that has modified her vision; even if she has built a new body and a new mind, Canada remains the arrival point of a displacing experience. Non-belonging, “not to know where home is” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 42), is circularly repeated in the text through the several movements the narrating I makes. Journeys by boat, airplane, or train give the symbolic sensation of lack, the feeling of exclusion out from the closed systems of borders and nationalities, because “[t]he space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plain in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping. As to landmarks, there are none” (Kristeva 1991, pp. 7–8).

## 5. The Poetic Artifice

It may be for this reason that, in the following pages, and until the final pages, the narration shifts from prose to poetry. The fourth negotiation allows Kamboureli to suggest that if it is true that landscape and map-making inform the literary work, in the same way poetry, better than prose, can likely lead to a topographical explanation of the (divided) self. As a practice of exploration and discovery of the possibilities of language, poetry is in proximity with death (from the standpoint of deconstruction of meaning). Poetic language does not represent “a reality posed in advance and forever detached from the pulsional process” (Kristeva 1998, p. 142), but rather, it experiments on the symbolic line with the possibilities of semiotic space. Just as the subject’s drives threaten its unity, poetic language threatens signifying unity. In Kamboureli’s poetry, which becomes “an affective sort of map of a particular landscape in a particular time” (Yeung 2015, p. 3), many aspects of her individuality are at stake simultaneously: the poetic voice, the affective aspect, and above all the visual use of the page. Referring to the use that Jacques Derrida makes of the concept of spacing, “a concept which [ . . . ] carries the meaning of a productive, positive, generative force [and] a genetic motif” (ibid.), Heather Yeung notes that

unlike many forms of writing, the poem not only represents a certain space and time, but, due to formal principles, is also in itself a space. The spaces between and beside words may signify as much, if not more, than the words themselves. (Yeung 2015, p. 15)

Kamboureli shows a great confidence in using the poem *as* space: in many cases, the written words are arranged on the page in order to convey a certain degree of confusion, displacement, detachment; a feeling evoked in the words themselves, carefully chosen for their connotative power: the poem dated “January 19, 1981” looks like a Symbolist composition:

i trace the deviance of us  
 a matter of feeling the pulse  
 the flow in the common veins  
 subject singular contraction  
 of the (other) labial incision (Kamboureli [1985] 2019, p. 20)

Punctuation is inexistent; so are capital letters. A selfish, obsessive adjective “My” runs instead in “6 February 1981”:

My language.  
 My Greek rusty.  
 My awareness of making mistakes when I use English.  
 My language that tortures me every time I dare use it.  
 My language that refuses to flow from the pen onto the page.  
 My language locked within my body.  
 My astonishment when I realized I was dreaming in English.  
 [ . . . ] (p. 26)

A complete awareness of the poem *as* space raises from two other poems: “13 February 1981” and “bauff/5 August 1981”. The former uses Greek language to convey the idea of a linguistic reference to the old space, while in the latter writing is partially brushed to the right side of the page—it is like Kamboureli would evoke the idea of falling off from the blank sheet. In both cases, words are used to raise knowledge of her inner division (“I will swallow light and spit out drops of darkness. You will stumble on them. Your pen will crack and your words will drip blood”, p. 36), and to confront with a past that Kamboureli has never totally abandoned even if she has “made a bonfire out of [her] greek alphabet” (p. 106). Kamboureli’s uncontrolled and uncontrollable identity is continuously crossed by this undefined “you” who recurs and permeates her journey back to Greece. She is lost “on that littoral line that holds together my reality and my dreams” (p. 14), between those zones of human spatial experience Bill Richardson interestingly calls “Abstract-Collective.” This is a world within which “we can observe and savor places and record and appreciate movements.” Here the key notion is that of *plasticity*, understood as “both the *plastic qualities of the imagined world* and the *plastic qualities of the work itself*” (Richardson 2015, p. 11)—and “Concrete-Individual”—focused on the psychological dimension of spatial expression, the “webs of significance” that relate us as individuals to the world around us.

Kamboureli’s fifth and last negotiation derives from the nature of this relationship: modeled and shaped by the Canadian concrete and abstract space, her Greek encounter with the you/other is a unique as well as disturbing experience. If, on one side, it is evident that the sense of *displacement* denies the narrator the feeling of being part of a space, a place, a home, on the other side, it is equally true that Kamboureli rather than searching for a particular physical place is trying to plunge into “you’s” space. In fact, she declares: “the here is there, in the past, where you are now” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 112). The wish of the lyrical “I” is to fill the empty space of “our imaginary geography” through the desire of the Other: “I need you here, not in the dim space of memories, not in the spaces between words” (p. 150). Writing is not a clean gateway anymore, a safe prison of security and reflection. As the places of memory gradually unfold, a “repetition backwards” rises between ambivalent feelings of resentment and anger against, as well as necessity for, “you”: “are you going to be there, too? How far does your geography extend?” (p. 72).

The poem *as* space needs to turn into a poem *of* space, of the (non-)places she has to go back to in order to discard elsewhere. The link with Greece becomes even stronger than it was before departure: the places she visits, full of memories and intrinsically symbolic, are described as human-like entities Kamboureli enters in contact with: “[ . . . ] Slowing down that five-minute distance, slowly ascending the wide stone steps, was like mating with the road” (p. 88). A long poem, “18 May 1981”, is devoted to Thessaloniki, where the stream-of-consciousness technique helps Kamboureli to depict the multitudinous thoughts and feelings which come to her mind when she meets again her beloved city:

and the city is  
 being of rhythm of memory or sound cutting  
 through shapely figures hearth beating can

you get lost in the city that has loved  
 you born out of now my own body pregnant  
 with it heavy limbs sustaining this stream  
 of life walking cell of the organism polis  
 agías sofías tsimiskí through metropóleos  
 to the promenade the sea angry whitecaps  
 wink at me feel their spitting on my face  
 through aristotelous square to vasiléos  
 erakleiou ermou a stream of people under  
 the covered market the fish market

[ ... ]

this endless song  
 of merchandise lofty tones sweaty bodies  
 the beauty and freshness of produce and the  
 whole thing including the passing women  
 old and young pretty or ugly from ermou  
 to venizélou to egnatía under galérios  
 arch and around the corner of vasilísis  
 sofías the university campus the oldest  
 building department of philosophy and  
 languages closed down after the '79  
 earthquake graffiti and posters politics (p. 56)

However, meeting an abstract entity in a real space is only partially possible: “is it speech that betrays/our otherness the other cannot sign/the signature lies in the phoné speaks/the distance/s/the awkwardness of my pen/hovering over the page (my cradle rocks/me) things concepts without greek names/a little death unnamings the presence in/want of signifiers and fear of/a dream/this memory of mother tongue” (ibid., p. 58). If it is true that every element of the surrounding space can have a symbolic meaning with the past, it is also evident that an encounter of this sort can happen only in a similar abstract space—“outside its self, at the threshold of a room of mirrors” (p. 14). This last issue, related to Kamboureli’s inner space and its projection on the outer space, links to the image the essay opened with: the threshold, the living in-between boundaries, on the edge of open, expanding frontiers. The Other is an image of contemporary world, it is the foreigner, it is Kamboureli herself looking in a mirror. According to Foucault, the contemporaneous nature of the present is perfectly exemplified by the heterotopic function of the mirror, an argument that the French philosopher popularized in his text *The Order of Things* (1966), where he describes heterotopias as sites that undermine stable relationships, disrupt conventions of order, and negate straightforward categorization. Foucault’s interest in the breakdown of order characterizing heterotopias was inspired by his response to Jorge Luis Borges’ passage from a Chinese encyclopedia, where the use of an alphabetical ordering system narrows the distinction between fantastic creatures of the imagination and those that exist in reality. Thus, the effect of this passage is to “disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other” (Foucault 2002, p. xvi). Similarly, when Sigmund Freud discusses the doubling effect as a source of the ‘uncanny’, he also explores the dissolution of the ideological bounds separating the Same and the Other, and such a phenomenon importantly ties to mirrors (and reflection as well). The parallels between Freud’s theory of the ‘uncanny’ and Foucault’s literary study of heterotopia culminate with this common interest in mirrors and reflection. Furthermore, they accentuate the underlying complexity of such visual devices due to their ability to destabilize the seemingly straightforward transcription of real space. In *in the second person*, therefore, the mirror surfaces again, to quote Foucault, like

a placeless place, [where] I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface, [ . . . ] that enables me to see myself there where I am absent. [ . . . ] A heterotopia [which] makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (Foucault 1986, p. 4)

A “prismatic mirror” is being at the same time inside and outside the reality of Kamboureli’s new and old country. It is the attempt to distance the Other, the different, the foreigner—to exclude communication, negotiation, reciprocal involvement. It is the preventive and predictable answer to the uncertainty produced by social relationships’ fragility and fluidity: “Elsewhere and the immigrant from elsewhere ruins our dwelling, re-activates our forgotten mobility, and thus opens up the space of our identity to its constitutive other term” (West-Pavlov 2009, p. 76), Russell West-Pavlov notes. The real space goes beyond everything Kamboureli lives and feels, is her bond to the present. She can meet the Other “you” in the geography of places; yet she can join him/her only in “A serial dream (April 10/11)”, in the unreal space of the mind and the unconscious: “you’ve become an *idea* that has possessed me. i’m lost in the labyrinth of my mind. i want you totally gone or totally here” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 150). Or he/she can be reached while—not surprisingly—reading Lacan at the airport waiting for a plane to a new extremely symbolic space, Paris:

the encounter with the real is an encounter based on lack. Like desire. The absence of the other. A pressing presence. (Kamboureli 2019, p. 160)

These final words echo Roland Barthes’ definition of *absence* in *A Lover’s Discourse. Fragments*, where the eminent French philosopher and semiotician writes: “Absence is the figure of privation; simultaneously, I desire and I need. Desire is squashed against need: that is the obsessive phenomenon of all amorous sentiment” (Barthes 1978, p. 16).

## 6. Possibilities of Place in Space

The relationship with both Greek and Canadian landscape, the spatiality of language, the concrete and at once abstract feeling of elsewhere-ness, the poem *as* space, the “you”/“other” as a continuation of the lyrical “I”: these five issues represent suggestive negotiations of the intricate bond between real and imagined spaces that Kamboureli performs in this text. At a surface level, her frequent movements do not allow to identify herself with a clearly defined space and to feel in some sense “at home”. A diasporic identity Avtar Brah has defined by recourse to a kind of “negative dialectics” between “the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ [ . . . ], *inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins*” (Brah 1996, pp. 192–93, emphasis in the original). On the other hand, Kamboureli realizes a sort of second “I” from the condition of displacement and foreignness in an unreal, oneiric, mental space—which represents the imaginary place where the unconscious, unresolved, *uncanny* events of the past can be resolved. This space is modified in order to become the image of the “Other’s” loss and absence, but also models Kamboureli’s mind and experience to answer her apparently meaningless question: “how do you make love to a polis—a polis you were/once a member of?/how do you feel its skin again?/how do you speak to its concrete, its parks, its sea, its history,/your history?” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 60). The answer might be found in the erotics of spaces, which become in her case “the erotics of language, played out in the dynamics of desire and distance, or difference and deferral” (Karpinski 2012, p. 167). When Kamboureli returns to Greece, time seems to have stopped, everything is the same it was before she left, nothing has changed: “in the apartment a crack on the kitchen wall from the 1979 earthquake” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 52). The boat to reach her holiday destination “is the St. Giórgios. It has taken me before to Tínos and one easter to Sifnos. And it was anchored at the same dock right across from the underground station”; once on board, “the boat rituals remain the same” (p. 74). Space–time compression is now clear. Once in Sifnos,

the place of memory acknowledges that “the beauty of the place is less soft, [ . . . ] the earth colors and the green of the trees and the bushes, the white of the houses and of the whitewashed stone roads, the emerald sea and the blue sky, all compose together the forms of the strangest pairs of life, presence and absence” (p. 76). Here Kamboureli meets only the trace of the Other, the “you” of the past associated to memory as well as to the act of remembering itself, and through poetry makes the past happen again: “when i get closer to you i tremble with confusion. i’m not sure whether i want to know where you live so that i can run away from you, or whether i want to meet you, to blend with your historic present” (p. 92). On one hand, the historic present is the last stage of a finished story; on the other hand, the “present” is (or at least can become) the force that inaugurates to story-to-be-done. In order for the past to survive, time had to stop. In doing so, it has left a “trace” Kamboureli inherits. As Derrida proposes,

[T]he trace in the text is itself the very condition of no-presence of the present. In order to access the present as such, there must be an experience of the trace. A rapport to something else, to the Other. Sometimes to something other than Being, to the Other past, the Other future, or to Others in general, but to an Other that does not appear as the present or presence. [ . . . ] In everything there is the trace, the experience of a return to something else, of being returned to another past, present, future, a different type of temporality that is even older than the past and that is beyond the future. I want to try to think of a past or coming to be that is not just a modified present, not future presents or past presents, but a different experience with regard to the past or the future and this takes place via a rapport with the Other or Others. (Derrida 1997)

The trace, then, acquires meaning only when its past is left behind, erased by the (untemporal) act of rethinking the event in its interior thought, in the present. Kamboureli’s lyric I recognizes the violent pre-existent conflicted feelings and knowledge she has to negotiate with only through the sudden, strong, menacing, terrifying impact with “you”, who is now “inscribed in the field/of the city” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 60). In “the living room [ . . . ] almost empty” (p. 96), the narrator cannot do anything but displace between past-bound interpretations and future-oriented longings in the middle of what Reinhart Koselleck in *Futures Past* defined as “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation” (Koselleck 2004). The emptiness of “I”’s and “you”’s distance is filled by Kamboureli through the repeated use of the *present perfect* tense, a retrospective present that links a past frequency to the present, as it continues in the present moments and has effects or consequences which extend to the present moment (Jespersen 1933). Dreams “have ceased visiting me. [ . . . ] and i have long forgotten/to turn the clepsydra upside-down” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 68), where the use of “have + past participle” establishes an explicit relationship between a previous event or state-of-being with the current situation, and indicates a substantial presence of results, a continued value of truth, a valid relevance of past effects on the present.

In cutting across origins, countries, languages, accents, and forms, *in the second person* offers no resolution other than writing itself. Structured as a poetic journal, it becomes an “adjournal”, a dissolution of any one form, as poetry plays against prose and prose plays against theory, blurring lines between emotion and intellect, cresting tensions of contradiction, multiplicity, and heteronomy. With emphasis on *difference* rather than sameness, *in the second person* describes a life in translation between identity and creativity, with each journey being a repeated metamorphosis. It tells about nomadic wanderings between one language and another, between one culture and another. It is in some sense a warning against returns, dislocations, confusions, and disorientations. In her book, Smaro Kamboureli definitely intersects the present’s immanent and contiguous necessities with a remembered past, so that, paradoxically, she can let time–space flow by delaying it. Kamboureli’s consciousness is therefore continuously polarized between the vivid present looking forward to a future to come, and a variety of half-presents “‘constituted and given meaning’ through human and nonhuman practices and interactions” (Hones 2014, p. 76). Where is “place” for the emigrant, the traveler, the exile? To which extent can they give meaning and attachment to a space different from the one they were

born in? And is the return temporary or permanent, a joyful moment or rather a painful one? “Place is where you find it” (Kamboureli 2019, p. 18), Kamboureli suggests. It is a labyrinthic path through space and time, the coming together of multiple trajectories on the borderlines of the ‘present’; it is the space where belonging, however problematic, is actually possible.

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