Spatialization Processes: Towards a New Language of Space in Literary and Cultural Studies

Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography,
none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. E. Said[1]

Having access to this cornucopia of methods and theories then becomes vital for unravelling the dynamics that play out between space and literature. At the same time, it does not justify an anything-goes-approach that would warrant doubts regarding the theoretical soundness of the subsequent examinations. An independent and critical reading of primary sources should not be overtaken by a constructivist tour de force with the goal to arrive at a definite catalogue of spatiality in nineteenth-century western literature.[2] While some trends, for instance archipelagic or transhemispheric approaches, are discernible, current space-centric research can appear isolated and cavalier in their usage of spatial terminologies. A common point of reference seems to be Doreen Massey's *For Space* (2005) that influenced cultural geography by approaching space as an inherently political and relational concept, rather than a vessel for action that either contains or is constructed by society. To be sure, Massey's deliberations are profound and indeed read like a manifesto for the significance of space by maintaining:

> *First*, [...] we recognise space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny. [...] *Second*, [...] we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity [and] the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore coexisting heterogeneity. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. [...] *Third*, [...] we recognise space as always under construction. Precisely because space on this reading

1 In *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 7.

2 Donald Pizer cautions against an inflation of constructivist impulses, noting that "[t]he critic brings to a reading of the text a set of assumptions about a specific area of late nineteenth-century ideas, economics, class, social life, or gender. The critic then either openly or (more often) silently ignores the plain meaning of the text as a whole and instead constructs by means of forced readings of specific narrow elements of the text a cultural or ideological meaning related to his or her cultural or ideological preoccupation" (D. Pizer, "Jack London's 'To Build a Fire': How Not to Read Naturalist Fiction", *Philosophy and Literature* 34 (2010) 1, pp. 218–227, at 226). This warning aligns with Said's and Lefebvre's inference that space can be found everywhere if looked for hard enough, which at its core is also an effect of the spatial turn's proclivity for the social constructedness of space.

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> [sic] is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed.[3]

While this and other conceptualizations of space proved fruitful for previous scholarship, the present book reflects an underlying need for a more accessible and transparent typology. Answering this need is a heuristic triangle consisting of spatial imaginations (*Raumvorstellungen*), spatial formats (*Raumformate*), and spatial orders (*Raumordnungen*), subsumed under the hypernym spatialization processes (*Verräumlichungsprozesse*). This conceptualization proceeds from the basic assumptions of the spatial turn, namely that space is a central dimension of social interaction and is constantly (re)produced by human activity. Studying the outcomes of these activities, spatialization processes examine their workings under global conditions, which are here understood not as unidirectional (e.g. America or Eurocentric) or hierarchical (e.g. northern versus southern hemisphere) but as assembled discourses that unfold on different scales. The goal then is to explore and visualize spatialization processes and the actors (i.e. spatial entrepreneurs) that are engaged in or affected by them. Spatial formats represent the results of these processes on different scales such as regions, nations, empires, enclaves, corridors, or transnational networks. Spatial orders in turn are the metaproducts of spatialization processes that suggest a more stable and meaningful aggregation of certain formats.

Spatialization processes describe the base mechanism underlying the production of spatial formats and orders. They produce stability by reducing complexity, for instance through the aestheticized containment and essentialization of complex discourses that revolve around certain spaces, as seen above in Berkeley's imperial and Leutze's different figurations of "Westward the course of empire takes its way". They moreover rationalize, categorize, and thus make space less abstract and more readily graspable and performable. In praxis, this means that spatialization processes identify certain actors as belonging to certain spaces, construct and perform accepted practices of space-related thinking, and establish categories and binaries such as here/there, near/far, central/peripheral, or regional/national. For the purposes of this book, their central interest lies in the question of what happens if differential practices and epistemologies (e.g. French, Creole, Indian, and American in the Louisiana Territory) interact, collide, or blend together. To make sense of these interactions, the mechanisms of spatialization processes must not only be understood but also retraced and "reverse-

3 D. Massey, *For Space*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008, p. 9.

engineered", in this manner unearthing the discursive layers produced by historical and literary spatialization processes and reconnecting them with concepts like Campbell's "rhizomatic West" or Edwards' *décalage*. The typology of spatialization can therefore be understood as a non-exclusive analytical metalanguage whose clear advantage lies in its ability to address aspects of spatiality that resist their easy incorporation into oftentimes opaque typologies such as nation-state, region, empire, or globalization.

Spatial Formats and Spatial Orders

Spatial formats are perhaps the most dynamic components of this spatial semantics. They function as the methodological interface between spatialization processes, which produce them and spatial orders, which they produce. Spatial formats themselves are not readily observable in "objective" reality and cannot readily be extracted and described with the help of empirical tools, although their sociocultural, political, or economic outcomes can certainly be observed. In turn, spatial formats denote patterns, templates, models, memories, or ideal types which actors (consciously or unconsciously) use to make sense of their surrounding spaces. They often reference already existing spatial formats and include recommendations for ways of thinking and acting "spatially". In other words, "in both production and transformation of spaces, processes of transformation and thus distinct patterns are recognizable, which can be described as spatial formats resulting from stable practices and interactions [that] have left a footprint in the space-making processes of a society or across the borders of more than one society".[4]

Spatial formats work as lenses that assist in the visualization and communication of spaces that exist only subconsciously or metaphorically. As shown above, all sociocultural (inter)actions contain a spatial dimension, even though only a fraction of these inherently commencing spatialization processes result in discursively stable formats and orders.[5] Spatial formats come into being through their discursive institutionalization, stabilization, and multiplication as they assume meaning and condense into codified routines, patterns, narratives, and performances. This book is particularly interested in yet another functional dimension of spatial formats, namely their performativity in cultural

4 M. Middell and U. Wardenga, "Spatial Formats: Introduction", in: M. Middell (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Transregional Studies*, London: Routledge, 2019, pp. 147–150, at 148.
5 M. Middell, "Raumformate – Bausteine in Prozessen der Neuverräumlichung", SFB Working Paper 14, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2019, p. 5.

and literary discourse. The task then becomes ascertaining how these formats were produced, affirmed, subverted, and performed. This includes the question of how and why they diverged, agreed or blended together on a representational pane and for what reasons some formats turned out to be more visible or "successful" than others.[6]

Spatial orders represent the more stable and formalized outcomes of spatialization processes. They are the structural aggregates of spatialization processes on multiple scales from local to global orders.[7] They may be understood as the meta-products that emerge from the competition and selection of spatial formats, whose combined interactions together facilitate the discursive scope of a spatial order, which in turn may intersect, interact, or collide with other spatial orders on different scales. Their examination highlights the fracture points of seemingly linear meta-orders, today most notably those subsumed under the term globalization. Spatial ordering moreover involves the integration of spatial formats into more socially sanctioned superstructures. This includes practices of recognition, interpretation, as well as cultural reproduction, negotiation, representation, and narration. In this way, spatial ordering becomes analogous to signifying practices that assign heightened significance to one or more spatial formats. Prolific spatial orders are able to engender new spatial formats and imaginations. One example of this is the US itself, which some today perceive as ordered by the emergence of the neoconservative nation-state with tightening border regimes and trade tariffs. Others (sometimes even the same commentators) identify empire and colonialism as dominant spatial formats. Whereas in the absence of spatial literacy these positions appear exclusive and contradictory, the language of spatialization processes explains their dynamic juxtaposition and thus enables their discussion within a more unified and transparent heuristic framework.

Embedded in competitive power structures, spatial entrepreneurs intentionally or unwittingly seek to promote or resist the institutionalization of certain spatial formats or orders.[8] These actors include policymakers and economic

6 Engel, *Regionalismen*, p. 4.

7 A cursory example of an unstoried or hidden spatial order involves the Neutral Ground of Texarkana that touched on parts of today's Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana. The US government, Spain, and Caddo tribes all claimed this region for themselves and established the Neutral Ground as a unique construct to avoid open warfare. Another example is the colonially contested Pacific Northwest with its profitable trade connections to Asian markets and regional independence movements, whose visions continue to inform contemporary political organizations such as CascadiaNow and Yes California.

8 The nation-state, for instance, is regularly and with confidence categorized as the format that dominated most of the twentieth century's spatial orders. It "rules" over regions and

stakeholders, but also cultural (f)actors such as authors, texts, readers, discourses, themes, tropes, symbols, metaphors, and spatial allegories. Evidently, "text" here refers not just to the written word, instead encompassing all human performances and cultural products that carry meaning. This means understanding spatial textuality and literacy, like other semiotic systems, as defined by continual processes of signification. With regards to the United States during the formative period of the nineteenth century, the workings of this spatial semiosis are most readily observable in literature and other written texts as the dominant mediums of that period. This does not imply, however, that this timeframe should be treated as a closed-off archive that can simply be isolated and perused to determine how long-dead people envisioned certain aspects of spatiality. Conversely, as demonstrated by the fusion of horizons and other previously discussed methodologies, accessing these imaginations necessitates an interactive and dialogical line of action.

Looking through a discursive lens, the following scrutinizes which spatial formats and imaginations consolidated into spatial orders and examines their relation to related or opposing imaginations of the western peripheries. Of course, these discourses regularly do not respect neatly delimited categories and instead have fuzzy edges and ambiguous boundaries that overlap and intermingle.[9] In accounting for this issue, the concept of assemblages becomes particularly useful by recognizing spatial orders as the "product[s] of multiple determinations that are not reducible to a single logic".[10] Consequently, every act of spatial ordering (e.g. of a city, landscape, region, nation, or global system) may be an assemblage of various formats and/or competing spatial orders

municipalities as the constituents of a national framework that controls policies, trade, and taxation. In earlier centuries, however, these powers were the privileges of autonomous urban centres that acted as nodes in transnational or transurban economic and diplomatic networks. Negotiating coherent criteria for the nation-state and other spatial formats could in the future succeed via the typology of spatialization processes.

9 In an essay about spatial dynamics at the Mexican-American borderlands, Jesús Martínez-Saldaña describes overlapping and seemingly contradictory spatial orders that "may co-exist and reinforce each other under the proper circumstances. For example, a child belonging to a family with a long history of international migration might learn about the 'lost territory' in school textbooks, fantasize about the 'Old West' while reading *vaquero* comic books or watching reruns of *Bonanza* on Mexican television, and imagine other features of the foreign land while hearing accounts of life in California from migrant relatives, friends, or neighbors" (Martínez-Saldaña, "La Frontera", p. 376).

10 S. J. Collier and A. Ong, "Global Assemblages, Anthropological Problems", in: S. J. Collier and A. Ong (eds.), *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, Hoboken: Blackwell, 2005, pp. 3–21, at 12.

that appear smooth on the surface but on closer inspection reveal heterogenous spatial discourses that can be unravelled by means of *décalage*.

A particularly powerful example of the categorical fuzziness and subsequent usefulness of assemblages can be found in the biography of Joe Medicine Crow (1913–2016). A chief of the eponymous tribe, Crow was a historian, author, and the last human link to the Battle of Little Big Horn in which his stepgrandfather served as a scout for general Custer. To become a chief, Crow had to perform certain difficult tasks, namely "command a war party successfully, enter an enemy camp at night and steal a horse, wrestle a weapon away from his enemy and touch the first enemy fallen, without killing him".[11] After joining the US Army in 1943 and becoming a scout in the 103rd Infantry Division, he completed these tasks, although not on the western prairies but during the Allied invasion of Nazi-occupied France. Wearing "his war paint beneath his uniform and a sacred eagle feather beneath his helmet", he succeeded in stealing 50 horses from a mounted SS-battalion, reportedly intoning a Native American war song as he rode off.[12] After the war, he received the Bronze Star and in 2009 the Medal of Freedom from president Obama.[13] Biographies like Crow's expose the delicacy of top-down histories that present straightforward narratives and often neglect the assembled nature of seemingly unconnected human geographies such as Little Bighorn and D-Day.

Spatialization processes enable the approximation to such stories and characters from a less historically sedimented perspective by integrating spatial discourse into the traditional analytical trifecta of race, class, and gender. Within the network of space-affine theories in the humanities, the present study thus occupies a position located between ecocritical emphasis on the enmeshment of identity and place and phenomenological assumptions of human geography that emphasize the organic potential of spatial performances as generators of meaning.[14] In the following, the spatial themes, tropes,

11 S. Kaplan, "Joe Medicine Crow, a War Chief, Historian and the Last Link to the Battle of Little Big Horn, Dies at 102", *The Washington Post*, 4 April 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/04/04/joe-medicine-crow-a-war-chief-historian-and-the-last-link-to-the-battle-of-little-big-horn-dies-at-102/.

12 Public Broadcasting Service, "Joe Medicine Crow", September 2007, http://www.pbs.org/thewar/detail_5177.htm (accessed 21 April 2020).

13 K. Brandon, "Presidential Medal of Freedom Recipients", *The White House: President Barack Obama*, 30 July 2009, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/07/30/presidential-medal-freedom-recipients.

14 L. Buell, U. K. Heise, and K. Thornber, "Literature and Environment", *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36 (2011), pp. 417–440, at 420; see D. Morris, *The Sense of Space*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013, p. 33.

and subjects in literature are therefore understood as literary formatting processes, whereas more ideologically stabilized metanarratives and policy-driven structures represent processes of spatial ordering. Both of which may either be firmly based in reality or result entirely from the human faculties of imagination. Often, as will become clear, western literature operates alongside the intersections of these categories, locating the site of literary spatialization processes at the liminal zones between reality and fiction.

Spatial Imaginations

The debt we owe to the play of imagination is incalculable. C. G. Jung[15]

The constructivist influences of cultural and literary geography have put a strong emphasis on the notion that spaces are not just containers of objective realities but representations of socially constructed visions, concepts, dreams, or fears.[16] In literature and elsewhere, imagining as the act of giving form to ideas then becomes the creative and aesthetic force behind spatialization processes that create, perform, negotiate, subvert, affirm, disseminate, or assemble new spatial formats and orders. Spatial entrepreneurs regularly develop or refer to mental representations of spatial formats or orders and argue how to assess, classify, organize, or delimit them. Cultural discourses provide toolsets that enable actors to give more experiential shapes to abstract ideas of space – regularly by using themes, tropes, metaphors, or allegories. Texts make offers to their audiences to affectively appropriate spatial imaginations, thereby furthering the spatial literacy and agency of actors by providing "mental scripts" or "lenses".[17] For the theoretical work of this book, this means ideating the productive location of spatial imaginations on the (imagined) flipside of the hermeneutic triangle. This covert positionality stresses the workings of spatial imaginations as background mechanisms that elude

15 C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, London: Routledge, 2016 [1921], p. 88.

16 See S. Pietsch, "Raumbezogene Imaginationen der Arktis im Kontext und Nachleben der dritten Franklin-Expedition 1845–1848", *Historische Geographien: Ein Forum für historische Perspektiven in der Geographie*, 8 November 2018, http://historische-geographien.de/raumbezogene-imaginationen-der-arktis-im-kontext-und-nachleben-der-dritten-franklin-expedition-1845-1848/.

17 M. Möhring, G. Pisarz-Ramirez, and U. Wardenga, *Imaginationen* (= Dialektik des Globalen. Kernbegriffe, 5), Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019, p. 22.

recognition and thus necessitate a heightened awareness. But this lack of visibility also metaphorically means understanding

> "imagination" not just as mental images or representations of the world – and [especially] not as the opposite to reality – but as a creative human faculty to react to the world, to put oneself into a relation to it, to define one's position. [...] imaginations are powerful instruments to produce spaces as a way to react to a world which is characterized by multiple connections across longer and shorter distances, but certainly beyond the frameworks we can physically experience in our everyday lives. [...] Spatial imaginations are key dimensions of processes of spatialization, because they activate actors, provide "scripts" for their actions, mobilize them to challenge existing spatial formats and fight for the establishment of new ones, and question the dominant spatial order or legitimate it.[18]

Spatial imaginations thus are mental or narrative strategies that discursively connect human identities and histories to physical environments. All outcomes of human creativity bear witness to the interfacing that commences via textual signification practices between individual, social, and cultural units. David Harvey summarizes this in *Social Justice and the City*, proposing that

> "spatial consciousness" or the "geographical imagination" enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in his own biography, to relate the spaces he sees around him, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the space that separates them. [...] It allows him also to fashion and use space creatively and to appreciate the meaning of the spatial forms created by others.[19]

For literary studies, viewing spatial imaginations as products of individual creativity seems to prompt an analytical focus on the person of the author. It might also raise questions regarding his or her conscious or unconscious motives to imagine certain spaces in certain ways as being human means "to be fixed, embedded and immersed in the physical, literal, tangible day to day world: the relations of human experiences rely on the construction of a coherent spatiotemporal frame in which that experience is embedded".[20] Acknowledging this embeddedness of the author might herald a return to a modernist penchant of literary criticism that sees an author's taste and biography as key factors. It also would imply

18 S. Marung, "Imaginations and Processes of Spatialization under the Global Condition", *TRAFO: Blog for Transregional Research*, 22 May 2018, https://trafo.hypotheses.org/9655.

19 D. Harvey, *Social Justice and the City*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973, pp. 23–24.

20 J. Hanebeck, *Understanding Metalepsis: The Hermeneutics of Narrative Transgression*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017, p. 33.

resurrecting the very authorial intentionalism that Roland Barthes "murdered" in his 1967 essay "*La Mort de l'auteur*" that stated:

> The author is a modern figure, a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, of, as it is more nobly put, the 'human person'. It is thus, logical that in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the 'person' of the author. The *author* still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions, while criticism still consists for the most part in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of Baudelaire the man, Van Gogh's his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice.[21]

Barthes' critique of the capitalized Author's authority led him to assert "that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the AuthorGod) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture".[22] Dethroning and de-capitalizing the author concomitantly reveals the fundamentally spatial inclination of (inter)textuality as a "multi-dimensional space" that exceeds its interpretation as "an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction'" and "designates exactly what linguists [...] call a performative".[23] This performative function of textuality becomes pivotal in the ordering of space in literature since imaginations cannot be controlled or policed by a "proper" interpretation based on an author's alleged intent. Instead, they perpetually exceed their (seemingly) intended frameworks to attach themselves to other discourses.

Writing as a place-making act thus detaches itself from its confinement in time and artistic periodization. In other words, it becomes divorced from its chronocentric existence as a sole matter of historical and aesthetic interest. Tracing literary spatialization processes consequently exceeds its purview as a backwards-oriented, intrinsically regressive operation. In Foucauldian terms, this means "liberating writing from narrative, from its linear order, from the

21 R. Barthes, "*La Mort de l'auteur*" ["The Death of the Author"], S. Heath (trans.), *Image, Music, Text*, London: Fontana, 1977, pp. 142–148, at 142–143.
22 Ibid., p. 146.
23 Ibid., p. 145.

great syntactical game of the concordance of times [and] its old obedience to time".[24] Texts no longer remain static, intentional products but turn into an assemblage of discursive performances. The fact that textual spatiality has become a matter of growing interest further underlines its discursive impacts through thematic or analytical (re)production and repetition. As dominant spatial imaginations are incessantly repeated, a dynamic tension between affirmation and subversion is set in motion, which according to Judith Butler – who discusses this notion in the context of gender performances – results in a

> constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.[25]

Irrespective of the social construction and performative acting-out of spatial imaginations, the importance of these insights does not negate authorial biographies as complementary analytical parameters. Conversely, it merely confers the negation of their gravitas as the prerequisites of literary spatialization processes. Viewing the author not at the centre but as one of many actors in literary spatialization processes then means consciously disregarding Foucault's warnings against the "valorization of the author" as well as Derrida's sweeping assessment "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (there is no outside-text).[26] Despite their theoretical interest, these principles must here yield to the benefits provided by "thick descriptions" that take heed of biographical aspects as indicators of the author's embeddedness in a sociocultural milieu at a particular point in time and space.

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24 "Le langage de l'espace" ["The Language of Space"], G. Moore (trans.), in: J. W. Crampton and S. Elden (eds.), *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2007 [1964], pp. 163–167, at 163.

25 J. Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal* 40 (1988) 4, pp. 519–531, at 520.

26 M. Foucault, "*Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?*" ["What Is an Author?"], J. V. Harari (trans.), in: P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984 [1969], pp. 101–120, at 101; J. Derrida, *De la Grammatologie* [*Of Grammatology*], G. C. Spivak (trans.), Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976 [1967], p. 159.