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"Space, Place, and Narrative": A Short Introduction

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Today, space and place are no longer seen as the stable backdrop for the dynamic operations of time but as active participants of social change. As Edward Soja wrote more than 30 years ago to contest the firmly established assumption of "time as richness, life, dialectic, the revealing context for critical social theorization" (Soja 1989, 137), and of history and biography as their privileged modes of discourse, "'life-stories' have a geography too; they have milieu, immediate locales, provocative emplacements that affect thought and action. The historical imagination is never completely spaceless […]" (Soja 1989, 10). Since the publication of Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* – seminal alone for creating an international audience for Henri Lefebvre's *La Production d'Espace* (1974), harbinger of the 'spatial turn,' yet to this date known to only a small group of French (speaking) Marxists – concerns about the social production of space and place have gained an agenda-setting role in the fields of British and American Studies.

With this Special Issue on "Space, Place, and Narrative," we want to pay tribute to this development at a moment when much of our research and teaching has become deeply invested with the paradigmatic force of these concerns. While postcolonial studies, for instance, have always been concerned with space and place because of the colony's concrete location elsewhere on the globe, the 'spatial turn' has helped to reflect upon and complicate the theoretical premises about matters of (re)location – ranging from notions of home or exile to migrations and border-crossings. Indeed, the renewed focus on spatial matters has helped to instigate a dialogue between those who are concerned with (fictional) representations of postcolonial spaces and those interested in the 'lived' spaces of postcolonial experiences (cf. e.g. Teverson and Upstone 2011). Another case in point is the newly emerging field of transnational American studies. Here, putting the perspective of space into the foreground has not only led to an expansion of the 'subject

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matter' beyond the borders of (US) America, highlighting global connections to 'other' spaces and trajectories, but also to an opening of the discipline to the work done 'elsewhere,' both outside the US and outside the usual disciplinary boundaries (Fisher Fishkin 2015). More fundamentally even, the burgeoning field of ecocriticism, which started out as an inquiry into the ideological underpinnings of (literary) representations of nature, engages with matters of space and place in ways that highlight our ontological emplacement, the inescapability of space for our existence and everything we do (cf. e.g. Buell 2003; Gersdorf and Mayer 2005; Heise 2008; Zapf 2008). The intensified focus on spatial matters has, indeed, substantially changed both the topics and the methods of our work.

Yet more than simply acknowledging the growing importance of space and place in our scholarly practice, we also want to use this Special Issue to think about possible ways in which we can go even further in elucidating the critical productivity of space and place – the former being commonly understood as abstract and mathematical, the latter as concrete and lived. It has often been pointed out that things are not quite as simple; we say that a person takes up too much space or that we feel out of place.[1] Both of these sayings are embedded in larger efforts to make sense of our being-in-the-world, and all our uses of space and place somehow hark back to this state and the interpretative – and thus inevitably narrative – activity that springs from it. Yet, while it may be tempting to read the appearance of the term "life-stories" in Soja's remark as pointing toward an awareness of the stakes that narrative has in the social production of space and place, this is decidedly *not* the case. Hence this volume sets out to ask a question that may be obvious for scholars of literature and culture but has not really been asked so far: If current work on space and place departs from the assumption that they have been released from their passive role as a mere backdrop for the dynamic operations of time, that they have themselves become productive in the wake of the 'spatial turn,' how does this new productivity of space and place intersect with that of narrative? And what can scholars with a special expertise in dealing with questions of narrativity and/or the narrative production of social reality bring to our understanding of this powerful conjunction?

We are asking this question at a time when narrativity itself is being recalibrated from two different angles. On the one hand, social scientists have engaged notions of narrative to argue that identities and lives are 'storied' in a fundamental, ontological sense; where narrating, as a practice, is an a priori enabling mode of action and agency (cf. Bruner 1991; Somers 1994; MacIntyre 2007; Meretoja 2014). Rethinking narrativity along these lines contests the notion of

1 The distinction between space and place is, indeed, far from clear but rather quite fuzzy. For an overview see Hubbard (2005); for more extended definitions see, e.g. Casey (1996); Tuan (1977).

narrative as a stable backdrop to the messiness of life that still prevails in literary and cultural scholarship today – and that strikingly parallels the critical rethinking of space and place. On the other hand, narratology has undergone a profound shift toward the analysis of culture and the extension beyond the confines of literary texts onto other media and discursive phenomena (cf. Herman 1999; Nünning 2003; Alber and Fludernik 2010; Birke and Christ 2013). Part and parcel of this development are explorations of narrative's relation to space, partly because some of the new genres (comics, graphic narrative, hypertext fiction) are organized spatially, partly because narratologists have also become attuned to spatial matters (cf. Ryan 2006; Mikkonen 2007; Hallet and Neumann 2009a; Horstkotte 2013). Considering the interstices of space, place, and narrative that surface here asks us to rethink the ways in which basic cultural practices such as the telling, re-telling, and revising of stories lend themselves to producing the very contexts in which we observe and study them.

This Special Issue sets out, then, to explore the intersecting productivities of space, place, and narrative along two main trajectories. First, we assume that literary and cultural representations of space and place have the effect of (fictionally) reenacting the conceptual and perceptual mechanisms and processes of spatial production; and that, in doing so, they create depragmatized realms (Ernst Cassirer would call them "aesthetic spaces") in which available and emerging modes of spatial production can be envisioned, explicated and tested (Cassirer, qtd. in Hallet und Neumann 2009b, 17). Beyond the borders of these fictional spaces, and this is the second trajectory, these representations become effective as social practices that partake in the production of space and place in a quite different way. In fact, narratives create imaginary maps and itineraries of and for the social relations that constitute space and place, and thus define – and possibly challenge and change – the very frames in which the spaces and places stemming from this production are *used* and *lived* (Lefebvre 1991). Whatever practices, forms, and media are employed to this end – only through narrative do they become socially effective. Which means, in turn, that narrative provides more than mere representations of space; that it is not limited to the realm of mediated, secondary, imagined reality. Rather, in shaping the patterns and plots by which we live, it is quintessential to the creation of those places and spaces in which we dwell.

In conjoining theoretical and historical concerns about spatial and narrative productivity, this Special Issue seeks to highlight the narrative dimension of space and the spatial dimension of narrative in different genres and traditions, and across several centuries. Laura Bieger's essay "Some Thoughts on the Spatial Forms and Practices of Storytelling" opens this volume by examining some of the theoretical implications at stake in conjoining space and narrative. Arguing that

our notions of space and place are so deeply invested with narrative that one may think of storytelling as a spatial form and practice, she quarrels with the striking absence of interest – resulting from narrative's close ties to human temporality – surrounding these investments to this day. Yet, recent reassessments of narrative's vastly neglected relation to space allow for a new approximation of the relation of space and narrative that could deepen our understanding of both.

The next two essays exemplify the idea of storytelling as a spatial practice. David Nye's "Narrating the Contested Space of Detroit's River Rouge, 1600–2015" turns to the site of the River Rouge Factory near Dearborn, Michigan, to trace its narrativization across several centuries: from its pre-history in colonial times, when French explorers and trappers named the river and used it as a pathway and modest channel of economic exchange with Native Americans, to Henry Ford purchasing the site and the capitalist transformations that followed. The different narratives at work in producing this site – exploration and settlement, industrial progress, worker exploitation, de-industrialization, and 'green' industry – capitalize upon a shifting balance of economic and ecological aspects of spatial production, and in doing so, they read as a viable blueprint of the changing attitudes toward manufacturing and their impact on place-making.

Nicole Maruo-Schröder's essay "A(t) Home on the Frontier: Place, Narrative, and Material Culture in Caroline Kirkland and Eliza Farnham" stays with the theme of narrative place-making but modulates it by foregrounding the significance of material objects in two antebellum frontier writings. From such a perspective, narrative space ceases to be a mere property of the text and becomes extended into the object world. In fact, Kirkland and Farnham exploit material culture to narrate a frontier space that domesticates natural and social wilderness in ways that are steeped in gender- and class-based ideologies of taste and refinement. Drawing on their experience of life in the east – and that is essentially on their urbanized middle-class backgrounds – they made the unknown frontier meaningful and familiar to turn it from a mere place to live into something like a new home.

In "The Cathedral of Nature: Sullivan's and Adler's Auditorium Building and the Narrative Function of Architecture," Kai Horstmannshoff takes us to the end of the nineteenth century to explore a medium often overlooked in the context of narrative. Using the famous Sullivan's and Adler's Auditorium Building in Chicago as his example, he posits that its architectural arrangement can, indeed, be read as a 'spatial story.' Carefully guiding the visitor along a certain path, the building functions as a "proto-cinematic apparatus": It connects different scenes, impressions, objects, experiences, and views into a meaningful narrative that is, in turn, deeply embedded within the larger social structures of late nineteenth-century Chicago.

Georgiana Lolea's essay "'The Americans are Rumored to be Eccentrics': On Los Angeles through the Romanian Cultural Lens" remains in urban space to discuss travel writing as an exemplary mode of spatial production. Her reading of the travel journal by the Romanian intellectual Petru Comarnescu explores how traveled space becomes imaginary as the foreign is encountered in the terms of the familiar. Travel writing bestows the new place with meaning in a process of 'translation' that is likely to engender substantial misreadings. In Comarnescu's tale about the otherness and foreignness of 1930s Los Angeles, the familiar and well-known European 'home' resurfaces distinctly throughout the text, merging with the new place in ways that make palpable how cultural and spatial boundaries are permanently redrawn and redefined by the conjoint activities of travel and writing.

While these last two contributions have taken us to urban spaces and places that are privileged sites in the history of Western modernity, the final contribution by Klaus Benesch engages reluctant responses to the mobilizing forces of modernization. His essay "Space, Place, Narrative: Critical Regionalism and the Idea of Home in a Global Age" moves from a discussion of regionalist celebrations of the local and the place-bound to the opposing notions of 'home' set forth by Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas to contemplate a major dilemma of modernity: how to be both modern and resourceful, both progressive and preserving? Contrasting Heidegger's concept of dwelling with Levinas' emphasis on movement and interconnection, Benesch wonders whether in our global age home may, indeed, be more about communities and relationships than about actual geographical places. In such a thoroughly mobilized and technology-saturated age, narrative's inescapable role in sustaining a sense of place, of being-in-the-world proliferates.

Ending on notions of home and mobility seems especially fitting for a collection whose intense editing period coincided with the daily realities and stories of staggering numbers of refugees leaving their homes in the fall of 2015 in search for a more livable future – mobilized by war, disadvantage, and electronic media. Today's world is one in which rumors, reports, images circulate in the blink of an eye to even the remotest corner of the globe, with vast impact on our sense of the near and the far, the neighbor and the foreigner. The geopolitical consequences of the recent upheaval are still unforeseeable, but from redrawing maps and charting itineraries to (de)regulating borders, restructuring places and communities on to mending life stories, narrative will play an essential part in the outcome. In fact, the world we will inhabit in the future vastly depends on the stories that we tell ourselves today.

In closing, we would like to thank the editors of *ZAA* for their interest in our topic and our contributors for their persistent investment in it. Moreover, we are

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