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Die Universität der Informationsgesellschaft

“TEACHING SPACES” CONFERENCE:

Abstracts

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9⁰⁰ am – 18⁰⁰ pm

Teaching the North. An Interdisciplinary Approach

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Focusing on the example of Northern England, my paper demonstrates the potential of investigations into geographical space for contributing to a cultural-materialist British Studies approach. This interdisciplinary approach tries to combine investigations of social change with those of cultural representation of such changes. Hence, it formulates a programme that is easily proclaimed but difficult to translate into practice. I suggest that university-course projects on geographical space and its representation in a variety of discourses and contexts might serve as starting points for achieving the goals of this programme. In other words, the didactic purpose of these projects is to familiarize students of Cultural Studies with the links between economic, political, social, and cultural change. Suggesting that project groups try to analyse different ideas of North, as they existed in different times, the paper also hints at the diachronic dimension of constructions and representations of space. For demonstrating how all this could work in practice, the paper outlines four specific versions of ideas of Northern England which would be investigated in the context of a university *Seminar*: the alien North, the industrial North, the neglected North, and the postmodern North. The merits of this approach to teaching space and ideas about space – as I will try to show – are that it sensitises students to the discursive dimension of constructions of space, makes them familiar with historical developments that influence changes in these discourses, allows them to reflect on the question what happens to older discourses and ideas once they are replaced by new ones, and identifies the different collective actors involved in changing ideas about spatial identities.

From “terra nullius” to “contested spaces”: The concept of space in colonial and postcolonial Australia.

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The subject of space in the Australian imaginary allows students to examine the ways in which Australian space has been represented in a variety of cultural forms. In this context spaces are conceived in a visual, literary and physical sense. A teaching project can explore how discursive and imaginary spaces have developed, and how they have been represented and promoted in various contexts. The paper will consist of a series of case studies of the spaces that 'haunt' the Australian imagination along a historical trajectory involving issues such as the construction of national space and its spaces of silence and emptiness. Key and recurring themes will be the legacies of colonial inscription on landscape, badlands and 'trauma-scapes', the controversy over spatial entitlement and exclusion, anxieties about spaces and places of belonging and the imagining of home, community space, power and the built environment. These issues will be presented in three subsequent case studies:

The first is “terra nullius”, a concept of space which preceded the colonization of the Australian continent and which grew out of a notion of the antipodes that existed before its “discovery”. This idea defined the continent as vacant space, an image taken from the white spaces left on maps to designate unconquered territory. The Australian colonies were settled on the basis of this concept which found confirmation in the horrifying records of the first settlers and explorers. The “lie of terra nullius”, as the Australian writer Peter Carey calls it (*Illywhacker* 456), dominated colonial discourses in the 19th century. It created a continuity in discourse from explorer narratives about the great void interior to nationalist endeavours to create an independent cultural imaginary of a heroic civilization clutching round the rim of the continent and somehow endangered by an alien nature all around. These efforts of the nationalist phase in Australian art and literature (particularly the Jindiworobak poets), however, redefined the bush interior of the continent as the “real” and authentic landscape, where white Australians appropriated an attitude of natural proximity from the indigenous population. The most recent idea of space to be discussed is the idea of proximity in terms of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations interacting. The recent movie “Jindabyne” will be used as an example for an attempt to present Australian debates of region and belonging in a wider view and to produce an international understanding of how Australia's spaces are shaped and affected by the cultural memories of the past and the cultural politics of the present.

The three brief discussions of key periods in Australia’s development provide an opportunity to demonstrate the cultural production of spaces with reference to cartography, poetry and painting as well as film.

Pilgrims and progression

Ben Knights

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The scope of this paper is speculative. It has more in common with critical theory (and the literary practice of close reading) than with empirical educational research. Nevertheless, it seeks to suggest instructive parallels between three levels or dimensions: the management of physical space in the classroom, the process of learning, and fictional narrative. All three exhibit topographies which are at once symbolic and embodied. The paper will draw on several short literary examples in exploring a commonality between metaphors for learning and those of movement (free or impeded, guided or spontaneous) through space.

Literary narratives frequently stage occasions of learning. These performances range from the representation of schools and classrooms through to the guided learning narratives of *The Divine Comedy*, *The Pilgrims' Progress*, or the classic *Bildungsroman*. In walking readers and students 'through the wilderness of this world', they offer for pedagogic reflection a repertoire of gesture, and forms of motion. In doing so they propose the legibility of space. This paper will sketch some of the spatial metaphors of learning, and then focus on ideas concerning liminality and the danger (and excitement) of in-between zones. In doing so, it will cross reference the contemporary educational literature of 'threshold concepts' (Meyer and Land).

A parting suggestion will be that given the origins of literary study in the (very broadly-defined) Romantic movement, the pedagogy of literary studies has frequently been subject to a tension between a recurrent Romantic critique - in which the spaces of learning have been seen as claustal ('shades of the prison-house') - and the evolving pedagogic traditions of the academy. There may be much to learn from a consideration of the ways in which teachers live with or seek to overcome that tension.

Postmodern Spaces in Jeanette Winterson's Fiction

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Space becomes fascinating in terms of literary analysis when it is conceptually embedded in a context of the construction of meaning, particularly as an example of the epistemophilic (Brooks) impulse and the incumbent power politics. At the centre of the proposed study are investigations into questions concerning the compatibility of a category such as "space" with ideas of postmodernism, particularly with reference to what might be considered the classic space of the city and the interface between space and identity (especially with regard to genders and bodies).

These concerns figure prominently in Jeanette Winterson's fiction where the construction of space is a constitutive component of the negotiation of identity. In her novel *The Passion* (1987) the two main protagonists stage their passionate experiments in desire in Venice. Both the city that transcends the simple definition of locale and becomes an organic space and the female (?) protagonist play with their definitive spaces – the city and the body respectively. These spaces cannot be grasped visually and elude any attempt at rational subjection. In a later novel, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989), Winterson elaborates on her postmodern experiment with narrative. This story's characters are catapulted through spaces in a space-time-continuum that again questions linearity and categorization.

The proposed texts are ideally suited to examine a number of questions related to space in the context of a literature classroom since spaces are protagonists in their own right in Winterson's narratives. Bent on deconstructing normative space, the novels require an understanding of conventional spaces. Winterson involves her characters in processes of exploding perspective and re-inventing spaces, her narratives are concerned with deconstructing Cartesian perception and the contingent power politics and thus offer a confrontation with a number of theoretical concepts that are crucial for literary and cultural studies. Winterson's texts tend to be accessible to and popular with students exactly because of the foregrounding of postmodern strategies and are both rewarding introductory theoretical debates as well as engaging novels.

“Discipline and Punish: Spatial Repression and Coercive Proxemics in the Elementary School in D. H. Lawrence’s *The Rainbow* (1915)”

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In this paper we argue that recognisable spatial discourses of Lawrence’s novel, *The Rainbow* arise not only from key nineteenth-century ideologies and *topoi* identifiable throughout the text, but from distinct coercive moments or ‘micro-settings’ where the powers of personal space are played out at close quarters in the representation of teaching encounters. Drawing on the early work of Edward Hall and Robert Sommer (proxemics and personal space) and the later work of Michel Foucault and Fredric Jameson (*Of Other Spaces* and *The Prison House of Language*), we posit a model for reading the text which attends at the level of narrative both to pedagogical and spatial expectations. In addition we relate Lawrence’s proto-Modernist text to recent theorization of space by cultural geographers wherein ordinary everyday space becomes a material participant in meaning creation rather than invisible backdrop to action and event.

The paper takes as its case study Chapter 13 of the novel and proceeds to indicate reading strategies appropriate to students of literature in Higher Education. Covering important themes such as institutional normalisation, spatial regulation, territoriality and status/distance relations (and making the necessary distinctions between ‘fixed and semi-fixed feature space’), we interrogate Hall’s claim ‘that literature is, in addition to everything else, a source of data on man’s use of his senses.’ Finally we go beyond false claims that representations of space are simply heuristic or mimetic tools for the formal analysis of a text’s locative structure and indicate their fundamental function as aesthetic component and content creators.

Approaching Theories of Space through Popular Culture: The James Bond Series as a Didactic Treasure Trove

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Subtract the representation of spectacular space from the James Bond formula, and you will be left with, well, nothing much. 007's world is made up of the most exotic locales, terribly horrid non-places, and impossibly out-of-the-way counter-spaces; it is peopled with unspeakable ethnic stereotypes, while its hero – global policeman and super tourist rolled into one – is continually crossing, conquering, and consuming all sorts of space. This paper examines the potential of the James Bond series for the teaching of space in the cultural studies classroom, arguing that both its great popularity and perceived structural simplicity as well as its, in fact, rather complex and ambiguous spatial politics underlying the surface binaries make it ideally suited for such a project.

While Bond is, for instance, frequently seen as the archetypal Englishman, a closer look reveals that it is only as he moves within 'spaces of alterity' that his own – surprisingly hybrid and decentred – identity comes into its own. Can his restless and homeless existence be read as a form of latter-day 'nomadism' or are his spatial pursuits nothing more than conventional practices of 'territorialisation'? Has the construction of gendered space in the Bond series been affected by changing social relations or has it largely remained the same? While the Fleming texts and the early films may be read as nostalgic imperial fantasies compensating for the actual loss of Britain's world power status after World War II, it could be argued that the more recent movies, with their widely-oriented production and marketing and more progressive representational work, have become transnational texts that embody and celebrate a new globalised world order (or modern form of Empire, as it were).

With the help of the famous double-o agent, students may thus be introduced to and encouraged to discuss critically issues of space and identity, old and new forms of Empire, as well as more specific concepts such as Massey's notions of gendered space and power-geometry or Deleuze and Guattari's categories of smooth and striated spaces. Drawing on previous teaching experience and taking into account student responses, the paper will suggest a number of concrete teaching units and didactic approaches and will link them to examples from the Bond novels and films.