

Introduction

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Introduction

This volume presents a selection of papers presented at the international conference on *The Space of English* held at the University of Neuchâtel in May, 2003 under the auspices of the Swiss Association of University Teachers of English (SAUTE) and the Troisième Cycle programme of the Conférence des Universités de la Suisse Occidentale (CUSO). The result is a work of collaboration between Swiss scholars and certain of their distinguished colleagues from Great Britain and North America. The nature of this project has called not only for international collaboration, but also for an interdisciplinary approach to the problem of space in language and literature: one which ranges beyond the traditional boundaries of English studies into such fields as architectural theory, cartography, city planning, and the history of printing. Despite this diversity, an attempt has been made to limit the notion of space itself to a fairly literal definition as a concrete dimension of the perceptible, physical world, whether the space in question be that of the city or of the printed page. The simple definition of space as “denoting area or extension” (*Oxford English Dictionary*) has thus served, somewhat paradoxically, both as a working definition and as a notion subject to resistance, contestation, and transformation – i.e. to all the movements that constitute the very vitality of language and literature.

The idea for the conference, and thus for this volume, arose out of the idea that the study of the spatial dimensions of language and literature has the potential to define a common ground for several of the most important critical movements in the contemporary study of English. Foucault’s writing on power and knowledge, for example, often takes the form of the history of space – how it has been commanded, distributed, and occupied, “from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat.”¹ In like manner, anthropological studies of literature and language privilege such notions as *habitus* and proxim-

¹ Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias.” In Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*. London: Routledge, 1997.

ity. Phenomenology proposes a “poetics of space.” Deconstruction introduces a discourse of borders, boundaries, and limits, of margins and decenteredness. Gender studies call attention to the spatial dynamics of the gaze, and to the distribution of space in the home. Postcolonial studies describe the cultural effects of a worldwide struggle for territory. Interdisciplinary studies establish connections between literature and more obviously spatial forms of art: painting, sculpture, and architecture. Linguists are tracing the transformations and uses of English as it moves across temporal and social space as well as international borders, on its way to becoming an increasingly global language. Cognitivists explore the link between linguistic forms, metaphors of space and thought patterns.

Each of these movements has contributed to the collective project represented by this volume. Several of these essays are concerned specifically with the representation of architectural and urban space, the role of mapping and landscape description, and the function of the “bibliographic” space of the printed text on the page. Notably at issue here are the social construction of space according to class and gender, the ideologies of representation, and the relations between literature and technology. In the essays in linguistics, space is interpreted both geographically, in terms of regional variation, and as a fundamental dimension of referentiality that bears on the structure, forms, and functions of language. Among the most compelling issues here are the globalization of English, from its American, Irish, and South African variants to its central role in a non-Anglophone but multilingual country such as Switzerland.

The volume opens with two essays, of wide-ranging historical dimensions, designed to introduce some of the fundamental questions at stake in the study of space: David Spurr on literature and Alberto Pérez-Gómez on architecture. The pairing of literature and architecture reflects a long tradition of analogy between these two art forms: both are experienced by moving inside the work, and through a sequence of connecting units. Pérez-Gómez’s essay reinforces this analogy in its study of early modern architectural writing as culminating with Claude-Nicolas Ledoux’s “discourse as fiction.” These two essays are followed by a series of literary studies arranged by historical order of subject matter. Fabienne Michelet’s essay on Anglo-Saxon cartography addresses the earliest period of English with the widest possible geographical scope, by tracing the changing cartographic position of Britain

in relation to the rest of the known world. With Denis Renevey, we move both forward to the middle ages and inward to the devotional space of the religious household, which exists both as a reflection of the secular world and as a figure for the inner self. The early modern period is represented here in terms of the modern phenomena of urban space and print technology. Manuela Rossini explores Thomas Middleton's London as a space divided along the intersecting fault lines of gender and property. Citing examples from editions of Shakespeare's works, Lukas Erne demonstrates the importance of printing and material production to the meaning of the text. Textual space is again the subject of Karen Junod's essay on the eighteenth century, which shows the close connection between pictorial space and the printed space of the anecdote in biographies of William Hogarth. In his essay on the revolutionary period of the early nineteenth century, Patrick Vincent shows how the English representation of Switzerland, as a landscape and a people, is conditioned by a shifting Romantic ideology. With Corinne Fournier's essay we return to the subject of urban space with a study of the "disciplinary" city of the nineteenth century, whose planning reflects modern forms of power. Alan Robinson analyzes the social and architectural space of Henry James' early fiction by relating it to James' personal and professional situation as a writer in London. In an essay that complements Rossini's, Myriam Perregaux brings us forward to the city space of late twentieth-century fiction as understood by feminist geography.

In the organization of this volume, Gisela Zingg's essay on the dialect of Hiberno-English in the Dublin of Joyce's *Ulysses* forms a bridge between literary and linguistic studies. The geographic dimension of English is further explored in Martina Häcker's essay on the h-sound in South African English speech. Iris Schaller-Schwaner and Cornelia Tschichold take the geographical study of English to the non-Anglophone but multilingual public space of advertising in Switzerland. Pius ten Hacken, on the other hand, documents the disappearance of precisely this geographical dimension in the American study of linguistics. In a more cognitively oriented perspective, David Wilson's essay combines the idea of mental space with that of mapping. The volume concludes with a wide-ranging essay by Laura Wright, which shows how the encoding of social rank in speech moves both geographically, from city and country to overseas colony, and historically, from the eighteenth century to the present.

As this brief summary shows, these essays range historically from the earliest period of the English language to the present moment, as well as conceptually across an extraordinary range of disciplines. As the product of Swiss English studies, they testify to the liveliness of research and discussion that the English language and its literature can generate even in a country where other languages historically predominate. Finally, these essays together show how scholars working in very different fields – from architectural theory to dialectology – can come together to help define an exciting new subject of study.

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