

“Space Exploration: Examining How Physical and Theoretical Spaces Shape Us”

Margaret True &
Dr. Kathryn Ludwig
Ball State University

The spatial turn in literary studies draws attention to space as more than a backdrop to our lives and stories. It treats space as an active force that shapes individual identity¹ and plays a key role in the construction of social orders.² Spatial literary analysis, or what we are calling “Space Exploration,” considers how these impacts are represented in literature and other creative texts. A spatial reading focused on how space influences characters’ identities and behaviors might consider, for example, how the maze-like “severed floor” in Apple TV’s 2022 series *Severance* actively manufactures identity for characters through isolation, routine, and surveillance. An analysis focused, instead, on the production of social space through political and economic relations, might read the fence in August Wilson’s 1983 play *Fences* as a boundary by which the protagonist aims to protect what he believes is his and exert control in a segregated world that oppresses and limits him. Spatial analysis also often attends

1 See Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated from the French by Maria Jolas. Beacon Press, 1994 and Mikhail M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics.” *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. U Texas P, 1990., 84-258.

2 See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Blackwell, 1991; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*. U Minneapolis P, 1994; and bell hooks. “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness.” *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36, 1989, pp. 15–23. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44111660>.

to the relationship between a literary work's form and its meaning. As Bill Richardson argues, "the formal features we identify as qualities of works of literary art are spatial realities" (69). The structure of Elizabeth Bishop's 1946 poem "The Map," for instance, consists of rhymed first and third stanzas and a longer free-verse second stanza. Just as the poem's language invokes geographical elements, its structure creates a topography in which formal borders frame a fluid center. In each of these trajectories within spatial studies, space is a fundamental part of narrative, and studying it allows us to deepen our understanding of both the text itself and the world it depicts.

As with any "turn" in a scholarly field, multiple forces have converged to set the spatial turn in motion. Postmodern thought is one such force, with its emphasis on multiplicity and "new spatiality": Frederic Jameson observed the fragmentation of space, and Jean Baudrillard coined the term "simulacra" to describe spaces that bear no relation to reality. In examining the lasting impacts of colonialism, postcolonial thinkers such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak also shape discourse surrounding spatiality. Their writings on injustices connected to place and displacement draw attention to links between space and power. Structuralist and poststructuralist theorists, in shifting intellectual focus away from time (e.g., a linear development across time), further solidified the influence of spatial relations in contemporary thought, prompting Michel Foucault to describe ours as an "epoch of space" (22).

Spatial studies are inherently interdisciplinary, as spatial analysis draws on insights from fields such as geography, ecology, and history. Spatiality is also applied as an interpretive lens in many fields beyond literary studies. Spatial analysis in the study of linguistics examines how speakers' embeddedness in physical and social environments shapes their language patterns. In geography and urban planning, spatial mapping through GIS and other data-driven practices can help researchers understand land use and make recommendations for resource allocation. In both museum studies and education, spatial awareness involves careful design of physical environments to support visitors' or learners' attention and cognitive engagement. In these and other fields, scholars must engage

with both physical factors and theoretical frameworks.

As the Internet and other structures of globalization change how we experience place, spatial studies matters more than ever. Places in a digital age are at once real and unstable. We can see the impact of digital spaces when social media discourse contributes to the gentrification of a historic neighborhood, wielding real impacts on the physical place and the people who live there. Similarly, digital spaces overlay physical spaces, making social interactions and community networks reliant on shifting and even fragile technologies. As technology evolves, so does our sense of identity. We work to curate our digital personas and, at times, we find the self located in and shaped by the digital world as much as it is by the physical spaces we inhabit.

This year's *Digital Literature Review* explores how real and imagined spaces structure identity, society, and narrative. The essays collected here model spatial awareness across a variety of topics, offering interpretations of creative works—including literature, film and television, and theatre—as well as explorations of the spatial dimensions of language and commercial media. We hope that these attempts to map cultural texts will illuminate the intersections of place, power, and imagination.

The first articles in this issue consider individual identity in connection with spatiality, focusing on how personal identity shapes and is shaped by space. In “Under the Mask: Homi Bhabha and Identity in *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse*,” Riley Schwarzkopf examines the fictional character Miles Morales and his navigation of his multi-faceted identity. Schwarzkopf reads the character's development through Homi K. Bhabha's ideas about what lies inside and beyond our identity. In the next article, “Commodifying the Subaltern: Literary Space of the Orient in Noor Naga's *If an Egyptian Cannot Speak English*,” Leah Turner examines identity across cultures. Applying insights from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Turner reflects on the violence of translation as a spatial issue in Naga's novel. The third article in this group, “Sounds of Identity: How Does English Pronunciation Reflect Identity, Space and Linguistic Background?,” shows how language is spatially constructed. In a comparison of native speakers and second-language speakers, authors Lida Zarearsanjani, Emad Elbana, and Ivan Aparicio Sausedo present English

as a diverse language that is dependent on context.

In the next group of essays, the focus shifts to how spaces are socially produced. The articles in this section draw attention to the power dynamics inherent in social structures, and they leverage spatial analysis of powerful stories as a “call to action” to readers. In a new reading of Daniel Defoe’s *The General History of Pyrates*, Volume II, Alex Costello analyzes the space of the pirate ship as a heterotopia where social ethics can be interrogated. His article, “The Pirate Ship in Context: A Vessel for Enlightenment Thought,” shows how Defoe distorts aspects of the pirate ship for the purpose of social critique. In “WALL-E: Consumerism and the Destruction of Physical Space,” Melody Miller examines how spatial awareness deepens viewers’ experience of environmental critique. Through her examination of the Disney-PIXAR film’s fictional landscapes, Miller shows how the film depicts the environmental threats of over-consumption and lack of empathy. In “Gender Roles and Domesticity through Advertisements in the 1950s,” Gia Valenzano shows how media contributes to the production of social inequality. By examining space in vintage ads promoting domestic items (kitchen and cleaning supplies), Valenzano shows how mid-century advertising not only perpetuated gender norms but also established them. Social injustice is also at the heart of “Unmasking the Uncanny: Making Colonial Injustices of Slow Violence Visible in Amitav Ghosh’s *Gun Island*” by Roman Hughes. Hughes illuminates issues of spatial injustice by connecting harmful neocolonial practices to the displacement of impoverished populations. “Humanity vs. Animality: Spatial Oppression in *Tender is the Flesh*” by Sage Waters examines Augustina Bazterrica’s gruesome dystopian world to show how society denies humanity for some in service of others. Waters looks at how spaces in the novel are used to produce and perpetuate oppressive structures, exposing through amplification the injustices in our own society.

The last group of articles model spatial reading of literary and other creative works, demonstrating the insights available when both writers and readers understand space as an active force. Through literary analysis, these articles consider the role of spaces in shaping plot, developing character arcs, and making abstract concepts vivid. In “Domestic vs. Wild Spaces: Determining Characterization in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering*

Heights and Andrea Arnold's Film Adaptation," Chloe Miller analyzes how natural and domestic spaces actively shape social and emotional expectations for main characters, Cathy and Heathcliff. In "Not An Angel, Just a Woman: Domestic Abuse and the Significance of Space in *Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Netflix's *Maid*," Alyson Baugh compares Bronte's classic novel with a contemporary TV series to show how domestic spaces can reflect the balance of power of their inhabitants. Aleaha Patton turns our attention to live theater, positing the stage as a Thirdspace in her article, "Purgatory as Explored in Live Theatre Spaces." Patton examines three plays representing the liminality of purgatory to show how space impacts an audience's engagement with difficult, abstract ideas. In "Spatiality in McCormick's *Sold*," Josie Pressnall uses Yi-Fu Tuan's writings on topophilia and topophobia, paired with close reading analysis, to show how the author of this YA novel creates empathy for victims of sex trafficking. Finally, "The Properties of Water in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*" by Margaret True highlights how Robinson uses water in her novel to create flexible and often unpredictable spaces, including domestic spaces, that challenge social norms for female characters.

This collection of articles aims to provide an introduction to spatiality in literary studies, and we hope it will inspire readers to launch their own explorations of this burgeoning field. Each of the spatial theorists mentioned in this issue provides a unique lens for understanding the discipline. When you immerse yourself with spatiality theory, you begin to see its influence on the identities and societies we construct. We hope that keen spatial awareness may inspire you to find ways to build new, more inclusive and connected communities, as well as a new understandings of those around you.

This is the 13th issue of the *Digital Literature Review*, a student-run online journal produced in Ball State University's English Department. DLR students participate in a two-semester course sequence, providing them with firsthand experience in writing, editing, and designing a scholarly issue. There are three teams that comprise the DLR: Editorial, Design, and Publicity. Each team has an appointed lead and 2-4 additional members. Editorial oversees the editing of submissions and corresponds with authors. Design is responsible for the layout and illustration of blogs and the journal. Publicity connects the work of the DLR with university

and public audiences. Each member of the DLR team plays an important role in the creation of a product that we can be proud of.

Thank you for joining us on a journey of discovery about space by reading this year's issue of the *Digital Literature Review*. Each article shows how, as we move through physical and metaphorical spaces, we embark on journeys of discovery. We hope that after reading this issue you begin to perceive the role of spatiality in the media that you consume and consider how the spaces we inhabit shape us.

Works Cited

- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated from the French by Sheila Faria Glaser. U Michigan P. 1994.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 2004.
- Bishop, Elizabeth. "The Map." *North & South*, Houghton Mifflin, 1946.
- Erickson, Dan, creator. *Severance*. Endeavor Content/Red Hour Productions, 2022. *Apple TV*, <https://tv.apple.com/us/show/severance/umc.cmc.1srk2goyh2q2zdxcx605w8vtx>
- Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." Translated by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22-27. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/464648>.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke U P, 1991.
- Richardson, Bill. "Mapping the Literary Text: Spatio-Cultural Theory and Practice." *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 42 no. 1, 2018, p. 67-80. Project MUSE, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/phl.2018.0003>.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Press, 1978.
- Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and Interpretation of Culture*, Edited by G. Nelson & L. Grossberg, U of Illinois, 1988, pp. 271-313.
- Wilson, August. *Fences*. Plume, 1986.