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# Some Thoughts on the Spatial Forms and Practices of Storytelling

DOI 10.1515/zaa-2016-0003

**Abstract:** Our notions of space and place are deeply invested with narrative – to the degree that one can think of storytelling as a spatial form and practice. Critical engagements with space and place have bypassed these investments so far since narrative is firmly associated with matters of time whereas space, commonly perceived as the stable backdrop to history’s transformative operations, is yet to be emancipated from the dominance of time. Parallel to reconstructing space in ways that bring out its own productivity, narratologists have been reassessing narrative’s vastly neglected relation to space. This essay zooms in on two venues of this work: on general recalibrations of the relation of space and narrative, and on the spatial metaphors evoked and employed by it. Linking these reassessments of narrative spatiality to on-going revisions of representational narrativity, I hope to show how these parallel strands of critical rethinking can deepen our understanding of both space and narrative – if they are brought to converge.

## 1 For Space, with Narrative

This essay is written against the backdrop of my longstanding, phenomenologically committed engagement with the relation of space and narrative. It insists on the perceptive subject and its immediate life-world, on our dealing with the world as it appears to us, as it is mediated through our (embodied) perceptions, feelings, and judgments – and hence on an imperative need for interpretation. From such a perspective, storytelling can be seen as a fundamentally human response to an existential uncertainty about one’s place in the world. Indeed, being-in-the-world is always already mediated, embedded in stories, metaphors, myths, and images, just as our bodies and the experiences we make in them are molded from

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historical circumstance that cannot be superseded. Narrative thus matters both as a means of access to the world as it appears to us, and as a pre-given matrix for a necessary production of meanings and moorings that changes with spatio-historical circumstance. Yet while phenomenology is a main vessel of critical engagements with space (the other one being Marxism), the narrative component of our spatial experience has hardly been given thought so far, and neither has the spatial component of our narrative engagement with the world. The following reflections cannot close this gap. But venturing into it from either side, I hope to prospect and stimulate further exploration.

Doreen Massey draws together our two topics on the outset of her recent book *For Space* (2005), a passionate manifesto for a new way of thinking (about) space: space as inherently inter-relational, heterogeneous, and dynamic. It embarks on this project by presenting its readers with three “ruminations” (Massey 2005, 1) about Cortés conquering the Aztec Empire, about the alleged inevitability of globalization, and about the conservative inklings of ‘place.’ Massey tells us these miniature tales to make tangible how substantially our ways of thinking, imagining, and narrativizing space shape the object they are engaged with. Pondering over her rumination of the Spanish conquest in Latin America, she writes:

The way, today, we often tell that story, or any of the tales of ‘voyages of discovery,’ is in terms of crossing and conquering space. Cortés voyaged across space, found Tenochtitlàn [today’s Mexico City, then also a major urban center and capital], and took it. ‘Space,’ in this way of telling things, is an expanse we travel across [...] [inviting us] to conceive of other places, peoples, and cultures as phenomena ‘on’ this surface. This is not an innocent manoeuvre, for by this means they are deprived of histories. Immobilized, they await Cortés’ (or our, global capital’s) arrival. (Massey 2005, 4)

Likewise, the “story of the inevitability of globalization” told by many governments, corporations and scholars today is imbued with a neoliberal logic of late capitalism that levels local differences by converting them to a temporal scale, as earlier stages of “the one and only possible narrative there is to tell” (Massey 2005, 5); and that turns ‘place,’ the concrete and presumably indigenous antidote to this process of economic cooptation, into a sphere of retreat with ill-guided promises of closure, coherence, authenticity, security, at-home-ness. “The imagination of space as a surface on which we are placed, the turning of space into time, the sharp separation of the local place from the space out there; these are all ways of taming the challenge that the inherent spatiality of the world presents” (Massey 2005, 7).

I am rehearsing Massey’s argument here not to weigh its validity (I am generally sympathetic to it) but to show how it is at once skeptical of narrative while also employing it. The prominence of storytelling vocabulary in her

opening paragraphs is hardly coincidental; spatial imaginaries are not only to a substantial degree forged and transmitted in storied form, they are also altered and overturned in this process. In fact, Massey's call for a pluralized, more dynamic way of thinking (about) space cannot *but* resort to a narrative scenario – the creation of an effective counternarrative – precisely because our spatial practices are guided by narratives that are rarely of our own making but at least potentially revisable. In this basic sense, then, our talk of social imaginaries and practices presupposes the reality-generating power of narrative, just as any desire to change them demands a change of available scripts and storylines. Social being, spatial or other, cannot do without narrative, and yet there is always the danger of unwanted or unwarranted cohesion and closure (hence the lurking fascination with the 'non-narrative' in radical forms of critique [cf. Meretoja 2014, 90–91]).

When it comes to changing spatial practices and imaginations, however, the situation is messier and more conflicted because *change* is commonly associated with *time* while changing our thinking about space seeks to emancipate its object from reductive assumptions of time being active and space being passive.

An essentially historical epistemology continues to pervade the critical consciousness of modern social theory. It comprehends the world primarily through the dynamics arising from the emplacement of social being and becoming in the interpretative contexts of time: in what Kant called *nacheinander* and Marx defined so transfiguratively as the contingently constrained 'making of history.' [...] Space still tends to be treated as fixed, dead, undialectical; time as richness, life, dialectic, the revealing context for social theorization. (Soja 1989, 10)

Soja elucidates his point by turning to C. Wright Mills's sociological imagination. For Mills, this imagination is imbued with the idea "that the individual can understand [her] own experience and gauge [her] own fate by locating [herself] within [her] period." On the basis of this emplacement, she "lives out a biography," which "contributes, however minutely, [...] to the course of history, even if [she] is made by society and by its historical push and shove" (qtd. in Soja 1989, 13). Place and space are not absent from this line of thought, but as Soja rightly points out, "it is always time and history that provide the primary 'variable containers' in these geographies. [...] An already-made geography sets the stage, while the willful making of history dictates the action and defines the story line" (Soja 1989, 14).

If one of the primary concerns in rethinking space and place is to contest notions of space as a mere backdrop for history's transformative operations to bring out its own productivity, narrative must be deemed an imperfect ally. Massey is fully aware of this problem and seeks to solve it by making a remarkable

double move: conceding that the choice of terms like ‘story’ and ‘trajectory,’ which are allegedly “temporal in their stress,” is meant to bring out “the process of change in a phenomenon,” she posits that they bear an intrinsic and “necessary spatiality.” She must distance herself from narrative as a tool of representation and interpretation to not reaffirm the limiting ‘time is active, space is passive’ dichotomy (both representation and interpretation are deemed secondary to a thing or an event, recreating or mediating it across time): “Story brings with it connotations of something old, of interpreted history; but what I intend is simply the history, change, movement of things themselves” (Massey 2005, 12). The phenomenological premises resonating from this claim (in the talk of phenomena and the Husserlian declaration to return to the things themselves) are both striking and appropriate. With its insistence on a perceptive body that is ‘intentionally’ directed toward the world, this school of thought takes as its premise not only this body’s concrete positioning in space but also its being the degree zero of emplacement (even if we lack a proper place we still ‘inhabit’ our body). For proponents of a phenomenological hermeneutics like me this same scenario is also inscribed with a narrative drive in the sense that language becomes referential (and gains its narrative capacity) in response to the perceptive body being directed toward the world in a fundamental, and fundamentally place-bound quest for meaning. Or, as Edward Casey has it: “No emplacement without implotment” (Casey 2006, 461).

I chose to open with Massey’s reflections on the interstices between space and narrative, because brief and preliminary as they are, they mark a notable exception in the critical engagement with space. Considering the now generally accepted assumption that space is produced in the constantly shifting interplay of social actions, this gap is surprising. In fact, narrative must be deemed indispensable in the activities generated by all three poles of Henri Lefebvre’s model of spatial production: his famous trialectics of *espace perçu*, *espace conçu* and *espace vécu*, which was to become the theoretical nucleus of the ‘spatial turn’ (cf. Lefebvre 1974). In the conceptual production of space, narrative is instrumental to architectural planning, legal discourse, building instructions, and so forth. It pervades the perceptual production of space in the manifold processes of cognitive mapping, especially the correlation of perceptions and memories. And it participates in the lived production of space in the habits, tales, and images that charge space with symbolic or ritualistic value: that are essential to making it meaningful and familiar. And yet, the narrative activity going on at the various levels of spatial production is never mentioned.

The fact that Massey touches upon the topic in the opening pages of her recent book may thus be indicative of a new sensitivity in this regard (in her earlier work it was just as absent as in Lefebvre). Yet her opening moves also make clear that

the project of rethinking space must coincide with rethinking narrative as something that is both temporal and spatial. Theorizing narrativity has been so firmly conducted under the aegis of temporality, however, that matters of space have been vastly neglected. Only recently, scholars of narrativity have begun to reassess the relation of space and narrative from within their discipline. It is to some of this work that I want to turn now to map out a ground for a friendly encounter and possible confederation in the ongoing, yet so far curiously unrelated efforts of rethinking space and narrative. Massey's opening pages foreshadow a possible outcome. Her own assessment aptly sticks to the perspective of the geographer: stories and trajectories bear a "necessary spatiality" for being positioned "in relation to other trajectories and stories" (Massey 2005, 12). This is a productive and true observation: narratives exist and are meaningful only because they are situated in and across space, within networks of stories and trajectories, and with a distinct spatiality that is molded from the specific relations among all the actors (human, technological, and other) brought together in a particular network. And yet it is striking how entirely uncommented she leaves the spatiality of one of her terms, 'trajectory,' which evokes temporal progression distinctly as a movement across space; how readily she converts the spatiality of this concept into her own concern with temporality (the notorious time of Change). Massey's second term 'story' is not *per se* spatial, but one does not have to stray very far to make this connection, for every story has a 'plot.' In fact, Massey offers her three ruminations for the force of their plot, which the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines as: "1. (a) A small piece of land, generally used for a specific purpose. (b) A measured area of land; lot. 2. A ground plan, as for a building; chart, diagram. 3. The series of events consisting of the action of a narrative or a drama. 4. A secret plan to accomplish a hostile or illegal purpose" (qtd. in Brooks 1984, 11–12). Besides reminding us of the spatial origins of the term, this entry recites an etymological history in which ties to place preceded those to narrative, rooting the term's career as a narrative concept in its earlier, topographical meanings.

Plots, trajectories, situations, expositions, arrivals, departures – much of our storytelling vocabulary evokes space in precisely this way. Yet what does this have to say about the neglected relation between space and narrative? Recent work on these spatial metaphors stresses narrative's functional ties to space, yet it tends to remain limited in elucidating narrative's spatial alignments for holding on to a representational model of narrativity. In assuming that narration is a secondary practice that mediates objects and events across time, it forecloses the possibility of direct interaction between space and narrative. This work is part of a more general narratological reassessment of space to which I want to turn first. Both strands are, I think, both immensely productive and in need of further modulation.

## 2 Narrative (and) Space

If one agrees that narration is in a most general sense a discursive, embodied component of human experience, space and place should, indeed, play a pertinent role in it – as motor, motif, and as structuring agents. Due to its roots in structuralism, narratology is inclined to be most interested in the latter, but as Marie-Laure Ryan writes in her comprehensive entry on “Space” for *The Living Handbook of Narratology*: “The importance of the concept of space for narratology is not limited to a representation of a world [...] serving as container for existents and as location for events” (Ryan 2014, n. pag.). *The Living Handbook* is a perfect gauge for assessing narratology’s on-going revaluation of space: Based on De Gruyter’s *Handbook of Narratology*, published in 2009 to map the state of ‘post-classical’ narratology, it continually expands and revises its data in entries that are written by participants involved in the ongoing redefinition of narratology. Ryan’s entry on “Space” sets ‘narrative space’ apart from other spatial phenomena such as a text’s spatial form and extension, and the space containing a text. ‘Narrative space’ is defined as “the physically existing environment in which characters live and move” (physical for the characters, one should note, not for the readers), and thus as a diegetic product and property of narrative: “We may call it ‘setting,’ but this intuitive notion needs to be further refined” (Ryan 2014, n. pag.).

Ryan’s refined model of ‘setting as narrative space’ is one of concentric circles. *Spatial frames* are its smallest units. Their function is to delineate “the immediate surroundings of actual events,” and to a degree they can shift with the action (for instance, from one room to another). *Setting* (the only sub-concept at odds with the topography of the concentric circles) encompasses the entire text in terms of “the general social-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place.”<sup>1</sup> And while the *story space* (or ‘space of the plot’) is made up of all the spatial frames and all of the locations mentioned, the *narrative (story) world* completes this space in the reader’s imagination by drawing on her personal knowledge and experience. Finally, there is the *narrative universe*, which designates “the world [...] presented as actual by the text, plus all the counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams, and fantasies” (Ryan 2014, n. pag.). Such organization of narrative space as a story’s imagined, existing environment is always symbolically laden. There may be conflicts between city and country,

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<sup>1</sup> Once space becomes a more refined concern of narrative theory, the notion of ‘setting’ may become either oblivious or mutate into an entirely new concept. Casey raises some interesting questions in this regard when pleading to differentiate between temporal and ‘placial’ setting, and, respectively, between temporal and ‘placial’ point of view (Casey 2006, 450–452).

areas of accumulated power or restricted access, journeys from the familiar to the foreign, etc. For Juri Lotman, whose narrative theory is thoroughly engaged with notions of space, narrative action is born from movements across symbolically charged boundaries: “A plot can always be reduced to a basic episode – the crossing of the basic topological border in the plot’s spatial structure” (Lotman 1970, 238, qtd. in Ryan 2014, n. pag.). Hence, space both organizes narrative and actively drives and directs it (which is, I think, not just true in fictional worlds but also beyond them).

As noted above, the narrative space of this definition is physical for the characters in the narrative, but not necessarily for its recipients. How physical it is depends on the medium. In oral, textual, or graphic storytelling it is entirely imaginary; drawing from the experience of physical space, it exists only in the minds of the teller and the listener. In film and in theater, the physicality of narrative space is material and real (there are walls, furnished rooms, doors that can be opened and closed) but removed from the grasp of the audience. This narrative space differs substantially from that of the aforementioned narrative forms – not structurally (all of Ryan’s aspects can still be found) but pragmatically and practically. Film, for instance, built sets and developed techniques of cut and montage once the stories it wanted to tell had reached a certain complexity. I am dwelling on this issue because, just like time, space assumes a peculiar double-life in narrative, existing both in the world that is created by the act of storytelling and in the world from and out of which this creative act draws. With regard to time, this doubling has led to the well-known distinction between ‘narrated time’ (or ‘story time’; the time covered by the events in the narrative) and the ‘time of narrating’ (or ‘discourse time’; the time that the act of reading takes). When it comes to space, there is a similar need to distinguish between its manifestations in the story world and those in the world of the reader. But because space manifests itself in ways that are always somehow physical, its double-life in and through narrative cannot be seamlessly mapped onto the temporal model. Ryan names and responds to this problem by talking about “the spatial extension of the text” rather than “discourse space” to designate the textual spatiality that is physically part of the reader’s world while reserving ‘narrative space’ to aspects concerning the world of the text.<sup>2</sup> Yet if we move to other narrative media such as film, theater, installation art, theme architecture (many of which Ryan discusses in her second entry on “Narrative in Various Media”), and on to the scripted spaces of churches, museums, vacation resorts, shopping malls, videogames, etc., storied content and form are less refined and more erratic than in the story worlds that

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<sup>2</sup> Ryan draws on Chatman’s use of the terms ‘story space’ and ‘discourse space’ as equivalents to ‘story time’ and ‘discourse time’ (Chatman 1978, 96–107, qtd. in Ryan 2014, n. pag.).

Ryan has in mind – but they are indisputably there, flourishing in the specific spatiality provided by these narrative media.

While writing this article I frequently went to a gym that provides me with a perfect example: the ‘epic rides’ sub-genre of ‘virtual spinning classes.’ Exercising on a stationary bicycle you watch on a close-by wide-angle screen and with a soundtrack transmitted on headphones (that is, with great immediacy) a film of an actual bicycle ride in a scenic environment: “A real ride. With real riders.” There is a choice between different rides and levels, but the story is always the same – the adventurous journey. The basic plotline is visualized by a topographic profile at the bottom of the screen, but the story itself is only loosely narrated. Both route and riders are introduced with minimal descriptions that warrant completion. Deprived of alternative distractions and stimulated by physical exercise, closely eyeing one’s fellow riders and inventing life stories for them is a likely thing for one to do. Two of them wear jerseys of what seems to be a local cycling club. Are they amateur racers? How much do they train? What kind of place do they go home to? Viewing the route and the scenery has a similar effect, which is in my case shaped by the fact that the film most often on view is set in North Carolina’s Blue Ridge Mountains, a setting familiar and dear to me from my time as a professional triathlete and graduate student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Yet familiarity with the scenery is not essential to becoming immersed in this story world; it creates a particular spatiotemporal assemblage of associations and memories with which the narrative world is completed. So while I ride, the screened images of moving down the road and up the mountain in a virtual pack of riders merge with memories of this place and the related episode of my life: of bike rides that I have done in the past, here and elsewhere with aspirations of future bike rides, journeys, research stays; and with the familiar imagery of Tour de France coverage, which is clearly the heroic aesthetics evoked here. The combination of a forceful, linear plotline and a scarcely developed narrative around it actively invites such rambling completion on behalf of the viewer.

But how to delineate the narrative space in this scenario? Is it confined to the story world of the film, or does it extend into the space in front of the screen? Where does the physical extension of the narrative medium give way to the space surrounding it? Of course, immersive spaces are special. They thrive on blurring the line between the world of the reader and the story world, and while their form may be clearly discernible (we can take exact measure of the space in which the bikes and the screen are located, describe how they are arranged, how we enter this space, etc.), all other spatial properties are mobilized in the act of reception. If I am fully immersed, the bicycle becomes literally part of the story world, but if I am not, it turns into an unenhanced object in front of a screen again. The film’s narrative technique actively toys with moving its viewer back and forth across

this threshold by alternating between shots in which one follows the pack, and is thus literally pulled into the narrative space, and counter-shots that give us a frontal view of the pack that remind us that we are in the audience – only to be pulled in again by the next counter-shot. And yet, something similar happens in less immersive story worlds, except that the act of crossing from actual into virtual space is not as explicitly staged and enhanced with the physical participation of the recipient; which is why we need to give up some of the systematic rigor of Ryan's narratological model that so neatly discerns different types of narrative spatiality – and instead trace the ways in which the various spatial forms and features of a narrative interact and seep into each other. Certain features like the activation of ordinary space by storytelling are doomed to escape us otherwise.

This also means that narrative space cannot be limited to diegetic properties and products; even more so since the actualization of narrative space is individual and singular, and depends very much on the (physical) spatial experiences of the recipient. In fact, only when the concept is equally applicable to products and properties of narrative and space (the unstable site in front of the screen, the suggestive chatter of Baroque ornamentation, the tales of tasteful relaxation murmuring from vacation architecture), can it help us elucidate how thoroughly space is shaped by and laden with narrative (cf. also Bieger 2007, 2011; Psarra 2009; Kossmann et al. 2012). For this reason I disagree with Ryan that space is a *medium* of storytelling (cf. Ryan 2012). Space is always and inevitably present in storytelling – as representation, as part and parcel of narrative's form and structure, as a property of the medium in which it is represented, as the space surrounding the medium in which the process of narrative exchange takes place; and some narratives are more expressive about their engagement with space than others (Ryan names Mark Danielewski's *House of Leaves* as an example, virtual spinning classes would be another). Furthermore, space and media share certain distinctive characteristics: both are dynamic, socially produced, and interrelational. In fact, we may say that media are by definition spatial (as agents of transference, transportation, and transmission), while space is in and of itself a mediating practice (as it is an enabler of modes of transference, transportation, and transmission). We may even go so far as to claim that space (in a Lefebvrian understanding of space as a result of social *praxis*) is a product of such mediating practices.

Yet, space is not a medium. It is constitutive of and constituted by media and mediating practices, but assuming that space *is* a medium blurs the line between means and ends of production. Books, paintings, photographs, film, television, computers, bodies, dress have a tangible impact (and hence are means) in the ever-changing productions of space, and many of these media have explicit and exquisite storytelling capacities. Whenever narrative or space assumes mediating

qualities, which they frequently do, this happens by means of a material carrier. Space, for instance, can do so by drawing on a particular place and being rendered as landscape; and yet in this scenario, landscape is the medium, not space (cf. Mitchell 2002). One can make similar claims for transportation devices and buildings. Lynne Kirby, for example, treats the train as a precursor of cinema (cf. Kirby 1997), and Kai Horstmannshoff treats architecture as a narrative medium in his contribution to this special issue. Thinking of narrative space as a mutual property and product of space and narrative, accessible from either side, allows us to better understand their intersecting media-dependency. Treating space as a medium, however, complicates this important task, for it turns a thoroughly dynamic relation into an encompassing, yet essentially blurry conceptual entity.

### 3 Spatial Metaphors and Practices

“There is no such thing as narrative space,” Simon Kemp concludes his reflections on the metaphors that we use when talking about narrative, “but the concept infuses our understanding. We cannot do without it, and we cannot reach beyond it to encounter narrative as a pure construct” – what is even perhaps narratology’s secret dream. But “[t]he study of narrative has never given us the thing in itself, and those of us who engage in it should recognize that the metaphor stands between us and the object of our inquiry” (Kemp 2012, 402). And hence we need to take into account our use of ‘implicit metaphors’ – which are, in our talk about narrative, “inescapably spatial” (as in plotline, narrative thread, twists and turns, pacing, circularity). “In such metaphors the two essential elements of narrative, *time* and *meaning*, are consistently replaced by *distance* and *direction*” (Kemp 2012, 391, his emphasis). Kemp substantiates his claims by drawing on Henri Bergson’s ideas about narrative’s inclination to represent time spatially (and its resulting ‘failure’ to truly convey duration, time’s essential property); and by drawing on Lera Boroditsky’s cognitive research on the use of spatial metaphors in abstract thought: “our minds use metaphors to structure our understanding of abstract domains by importing structures from more concrete, and hence more graspable domains” (Kemp 2012, 396–398; 398–400; here: 398).

There is a notable valence here and throughout the essay: Time and meaning are “the two essential elements” of narrative, “which, after all, ha[ve] no existence in space” (Kemp 2012, 391; 393). (Really, Mr. Kemp?) Space comes in as a surprising surrogate: not quite as complex as time and of lesser importance to narrative’s *raison d’être* it provides the tangible, concrete experience on which we can draw to make sense of the world and our narrativization of it. I do not want to

dispute the comparatively more tangible and concrete nature of our spatial experience, but I cannot help to notice how much this space has in common with the tamed, undercomplex space (unilateral, homogeneous, and stable) that Massey targets in her plea for a new spatial imaginary. Kemp does, however, take the persistence of spatial metaphors seriously. At one point, his argument even veers toward questioning his own premise of space not belonging to the essentials of narrative. “Perhaps the timeline is the basic metaphor in our understanding of narrative, and the wandering of the digressive narrative arose as an embellishment to the original straight-line trajectory of time’s arrow.” As the spatial axis unto which time is mapped in our search for meaning, the timeline is, indeed, the star of Kemp’s argument. “Alternatively, the root concept may be literal wandering: what underlies our understanding of narrative may not be a pair of spatial metaphors for time and meaning, but their combined origin in the single metaphor, *STORIES ARE JOURNEYS*” (Kemp 2012, 400, his emphasis).

It may have been a similar thought that led Michel De Certeau to positing that “every story is a travel story – a spatial practice” (De Certeau 1984, 115, qtd. in Mikkonen 2007, 287). But what *kind* of spatial practice is storytelling? Could ‘wandering’ not be the root concept of narrative because it is an essential component of our spatial experience? An experience that is at least in the modern world often less stable and clear than in those assuring moments when we intuitively know what is up and what is down?<sup>3</sup> And that hence, just like time, space seeks to become moored and meaningful in and through narrative?

Kai Mikkonen makes such a claim with regard to the experience of travel in an essay that is entirely dedicated to the ‘narrative is travel’ metaphor. Like Kemp he grounds his discussion of the spatial metaphoric at work here in cognitive linguistics, and like Kemp he is interested in its relation to a narrative practice that translates temporal progress into spatial sequence: “The different stages of travel – departure, voyage, encounters on the road, and return – provide any story with a temporal structure that raises certain expectations for things to happen. Perhaps because of this pervasiveness of the travel narrative we have come to understand personal life and mental development as a voyage” (Mikkonen 2007, 286). For Mikkonen, the ‘narrative is travel’ metaphor is so immensely attractive for its use of a model of temporal causality that is linked to the consecution of particular, concrete places in which events happen, one after another; and because it ‘humanizes’ time and space by rendering the experience of a world from a particular perspective (Mikkonen 2007, 287). And hence, the ‘narrative is travel’ metaphor works both to the end of giving identity to a series of places and

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3 Cf. Lakoff and Johnson (1980); Lakoff and Turner (1989); Boroditsky (2000).

events (by narrativizing one after the other) and to the end of increasing narrativity (because the act of travel demands narrativization).

Mikkonen delves deep into the conjunction of space and narrative that cognitive linguists have located in our everyday use of metaphors to substantiate his claims, arguing that:

The ‘narrative is travel’ metaphor is basically a structural metaphor and a form of conceptual blending [...] In inventing a scenario where the input of narrative and travel meet, this concept draws from the analogues, thus making possible ‘a set of “matches” that seem obvious to us,’ but that also ‘ends up containing more’ (Fauconnier and Turner 20). The experiential frame of journey and travel is marked, for instance, by the subjective, human scale of space and time. This marking includes the way that events and movements impose structure on space, the orientation provided by the traveling individual and his or her experiencing point of view, the structuring of time as a spatial surface that is covered and created by a path through it. (Mikkonen 2007, 289)

Travel and narrative are imagined, then, as interacting chiasmically (‘narrative is travel’ and ‘travel is narrative’). Drawing from either realm, the ‘narrative is travel’ metaphor both structures (‘humanizes’) space and time, and triggers a narrative activity that constantly rewrites these structures. This creative capacity draws from a basic feature of metaphor: as a rhetoric device that replaces literal meaning to speak in analogues, it is inherently narrative. In metaphor, this inherent narrativity is inclined to provide closure (through the evocative force of the perfect image). In the case of compound metaphors, however, this inherent narrativity operates metonymically, leading to a deferral, a slippage of meaning rather than its stabilization – with the effect of mobilizing the process of narrativization rather than arresting or closing it (cf. Jakobson 1956). Writing thus “resists the notion of space as a static entity” (Mikkonen 207, 301).

## 4 For Narrative, with Space

As the touchstone of those cognitive concepts or metaphors that we use to make sense of the world, space becomes practical in this line of work. For Kemp the spatial metaphors that we use to make sense of narrative (and thus also of abstract domains such as time) exist in a narrative world of their own, while Mikkonen’s compound metaphor creates a viable site of encounter between space-time and narrative, mobilizing actual space under the impact of reading and writing it. We have come a long way! And yet, even Mikkonen’s permeable boundary between space and narrative is a boundary between two different, temporally separated worlds – a primary world of perceptive data, and a secondary world of narrative

mediation, interpretation, and retrospectively projected order. Once again, our understanding of the relation of space and narrative would benefit from further modulation – a modulation of precisely this two-world model.

Separating the world of experience from the world of narrative corresponds with a representational notion of narrativity that treats narration as a retrospective practice of meaning production and narrative as a stabilizing backdrop to the messy flux of life.<sup>4</sup> Recently, however, scholars from a variety of different fields have come to claim something “much more substantive about narrative: namely that [...] [it] is an ontological condition of social life.” Leveling strict divisions of life and narrative, they assert “that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that ‘experience’ is constituted through narratives; [...] and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available [...] narratives” (Somers 1994, 613–614). Hence studies of action and agency are urged to engage with the thought that “everything we know from the making of families, to coping with illness, to carrying out strikes and revolutions is at least in part a result of numerous cross-cutting story-lines in which social actors locate themselves” (Somers 1994, 607).

Margaret Somers, whom I am quoting here, is among the leading proponents and most lucid commentators on what has often been called the narrative turn in the social sciences – a development toward an ontological understanding of narrativity that has not yet received the attention that it deserves from scholars of literature and culture. But I am also turning to Somers for another, more practical reason: the “cross-cutting story-lines” that orchestrate social relations for her are strikingly spatial, as is her entire ‘relational and network approach.’ Doreen Massey assesses these same relations from the perspective of human geography, claiming that they “always have spatial form and content: they exist, necessarily, both *in* space (i.e. in a locational relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space.” Defining social space as “the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations,” she holds that “a ‘place’ is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location” while “the singularity of any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location [...] and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location [...] will in turn produce new social effects” (Massey 1994, 168). Reading this passage in tandem with Somers

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<sup>4</sup> The following paragraphs rehearse an argument that I have made elsewhere at greater length (cf. Bieger 2015, 20–21).

turns these effects into products of the available repertoire of storylines in which social actors locate themselves – which would also mean that narrative assumes the role of a primary agent in the production of space and place.

Yet, how helpful is it to rethink narrativity along such a sharp divide? I agree with Hanna Meretoja that foregrounding the connections between its epistemological and ontological dimension is, indeed, far more productive, as proponents of epistemological (or representational) narrativity tend to have “strong ontological assumptions about the nature of reality” in the sense of there being “a deeper level at which human, lived experience is immediately given, and human existence in general – as part of the flux of the real – is non-narrative in character” (Meretoja 2014, 91). And likewise, these thinkers (i.e. Arthur Danto, Louis Mink, Hayden White, and Galen Strawson) tend to assume that meaning making is secondary and unreal, a distortion of raw experience. But such attempts “to draw sharp distinctions between ontological and epistemological approaches to the narrative dimension of human existence” are “particularly problematic from a phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective,” for it categorically rejects the idea of an unmediated, uninterpreted realm of being. “[T]he process of interpreting experiences is ‘not an additional procedure of knowing, but constitutes the original structure of ‘being-in-the-world’” (Meretoja 2014, 95–96, quoting Gadamer 1986, 332 in her own translation). From this vantage point, however, “the debate as to whether we live or tell narratives is based on a questionable opposition.” Neither is life *per se* structured like a narrative, nor do we first live and then tell it – but living and telling our lives are thoroughly interwoven.

Again, the leading figures of this school of thought (Paul Ricoeur, David Carr, Jerome Bruner, Charles Taylor) privilege narrative’s ties to human temporality, not least because of their shared assumption that “the fundamental temporality of experience entails that the horizon of the past and the future always already impregnate the present” (Meretoja 2014, 96). But as the spatial (and traditionally hermeneutic) metaphor of the horizon indicates, the underlying conception of narrativity at work here is also and inevitably space-bound – because life itself is. Engaging the spatial moorings and investments of narrative must be a future concern in our efforts to rethink both space and narrative. Insisting on this dimension does not dismiss narrative’s function as a basic mode of understanding human temporality. But it reminds us that human existence is equally tied up in time *and* space, forced to wrestle with “the unutterable contingency of space-time” (Massey 1994, 6) – a task for which it turns to narrative.

There is an ethical dimension at stake here with which I want to end my thoughts. Those who condemn the narrativization of experience tend to base their ‘good’ on the “empiricist-positivist myth” of “‘pure experience,’ immediately given here and now” to conclude that “narrative interpretations necessarily

falsify the real,” while those who think of narrative mediation as a basic constituent of human existence tend to ground theirs in the premise that “narrative self-interpretation is the condition of possibility for being able to make sense of one’s life as a meaningful continuum for which one can be responsible” (Meretoja 2014, 102). I could not agree more with this lucid assessment, and the stakes are, indeed substantial, for they determine not only who we are and what kind of world we live in, but also how we can get along with each other. Yet again, there are spatial forms and practices to this “meaningful continuum” – modes of emplacement, spaces of enunciation, regulation of access, forces of migration, etc. – that narrative ethics cannot afford to leave aside.

**Acknowledgments:** This essay was written during a research stay at the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaft (IFK) in Vienna. I want to thank Nicole Maruo-Schröder, Dustin Breitenwischer, Helmut Lethen, and Penelope Deutscher for being immensely helpful and productive interlocutors.

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