Book Review

Tönnies, Merle & Buschmann, Heike (eds.)
*Spatial Representations of British Identities.*

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The “spatial turn” of the 1990s within studies of space has brought to the limelight such concepts as the real, material side of space and a whole range of cultural meanings closely connected with social and personal constructions of identity. The most prominent theorists of space studies, Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre have drawn attention to the necessity to distinguish between tangible geographical “place” and its constructed counterpart, the “space” perceived and used by different people in different ways. Later a more specific, so-called “topographical turn” (propagated by Sigrid Weigel) occurred, shifting the focus to the mutual interaction between “real spaces” and their representations. A new interpretation of the spatial turn has also been called for as a “rhetoric turn”, i.e. focus on the role of space in communicative processes.

There is a very close connection between space and identity formation. One possible and legitimate area where these two are tightly related is literature. In literary texts spaces provide an insight into the characters’ identity. This is true the other way round as well: the characters also allow the reader to share their experience of space. Characters are not only static elements in a space, they also move within and out of these spaces. These transitions from different kinds of spaces also highlight the importance of spatial boundaries and their reading in terms of Self and Other, which often form a central topic in studies of space.

In 2009, the Annual General Conference of the German Association for the Study of British Cultures was held at Paderborn, aimed at comparing the strategies
of spatial representation and self-representation in literature but also in the media. Two volumes resulted from this conference: the first published in 2010 is the volume of the *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*, and was entitled *Reading British Space*. It collected some of the conference papers dealing with space in non-literary “texts”.

The present volume, *Spatial Representations of British Identities*, is a collection of 14 studies edited by Merle Tönnies and Heike Buschmann, two well-known German scholars of this domain, and it offers its readers an interdisciplinary approach to spaces. The methods of literary studies are combined with those of cultural studies, analysing a wide range of cultural products. The book focuses on the comparative aspect of the conference, discussing spatial issues from the point of view of representation and identity. The role of space is not only addressed in literary texts, but visual representations of space are also analysed. The papers included in this collection focus on the period from the 19th to the 21st century and they are grouped in such a way that the representation of space and its implications for identity concepts can be compared both from the perspective of different aspects of identity and with regard to the similarities and differences between literature, visual “texts” (photos and films) and non-artistic material representing spaces. As the editors of the volume claim, “the present volume (...) considers itself one step in the direction of analysing the media-specific representational strategies that can be used in making space signify in identity construction” (Tönnies and Buschmann 2012: 11).

The studies included in this volume show the diversity of possibilities in representations of space, the authors of the studies ranging from artists, photographers, writers, filmmakers and scholars alike, mainly from Germany, but also based in Britain and in Jordan. The book is edited in such a way that the studies collected in it are centred on main topics of discussion strongly related to each other. The first three studies written by the novelist Patricia Duncker and the photographer Mark Hall combine the writer’s/artist’s point of view with the perception by the readers and scholars to illustrate how the diversity of possibilities mentioned above can be translated into concrete representations and readings. These two studies lay the foundation for the case studies to follow. Duncker offers an insight into the workings of fiction writing, addressing two overlapping spaces which contribute to the creation of a literary text: the spaces of reading and writing created within the encounters between readers and writers and texts, and the spaces formed in the writing process itself. The photographer Mark Hall investigates the potential of light and darkness in constructing identities and spaces in different media formats, ranging from photography to fiction.

The following studies focus on national, regional and local identities expressed and formed in a variety of spaces. They explore the construction of different versions of national identity in and through space, discussing such
intriguing topics as the relation between the pub, as a stereotypical space of Englishness and the contemporary condition-of-England novel; or the presence of another national icon, the Thames as a specific English space and its relation to the members of the English nation, as an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006). Another case study focuses on London, as a space defining local identities, and late 19th-century poetry, having an opportunity to offer gendered readings of Londoners and those of the city. In the second section of the volume, the perspective of the essays opens to regional spaces as well. In this way in one study the North East of England, and more specifically, its changing land- and cityscapes are examined, tracing the formation of new “patchwork place identities” in Liverpool. Another study focuses on the Scottish city of Glasgow from the viewpoint of contemporary Scottish autobiographies.

However, not only real, physical spaces are considered in the articles of this volume, but also fictional and mental ones. The following section of the book concentrates mostly on mental spaces, integrating essays that present the fusion of material and mental landscapes in Virginia Woolf’s *Night and Day*, or the discussion of conceptual metaphors in the space construction of 19th-century railway poetry.

The final articles of the volume explore literary and filmic representations of identities in two contested spaces of belonging. Various perspectives on interethnic and gay identities are discussed, focusing on 21st-century literary texts, which concentrate on the experiences of Arab women immigrants to Britain, on gay melancholy but also on queer and ethnic spaces in film. All three articles are basically centred on conflicts over inclusion and exclusion within real or mental spaces.

Summing up, the articles in this volume offer a wide variety of approaches towards representing space in various media formats and modes of identity construction. It gives a state-of-the-art overview of a very fast developing field of research and its readers can get a much broader perspective on identity formation than they might have ever expected.

**References**
