

CALL FOR PAPERS

NARRATING SPACES – READING URBANITY

UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG, SEPTEMBER 6-8, 2012

“Glasgow is a magnificent city,” said McAlpin. “Why do we hardly ever notice that?” “Because nobody imagines living here,” said Thaw. [...] “Think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he’s already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn’t been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively”¹

It is a truth almost universally acknowledged that a city does not consist of buildings and inhabitants alone, but also of representations: of the stories that are told about it, in literature and art as well as in everyday life – or, as the architect Kevin Andrew Lynch has observed, that “Dickens helped to create the London we experience as surely as its actual builders did.”² After all, narrative representations of the city constitute an appropriation of space: they assign meanings and ascribe certain uses to certain spaces.

This implies that there may not just be one version of a city, but several different narratives that constitute different cities: not *one* Florence, Paris, London, New York, or Berlin – or Hamburg for that matter –, but many. However, that does not necessarily mean that there is a happy pluralism of different narratives existing side by side. Thus, some stories are endowed with more cultural authority than others, depending, among other things, on who does the telling. The different stories that are told about a city are, therefore, in conflict with each other, creating conflicting spaces even in the same place.

Thus, formation and reception of said stories constitute space as a network formed by various relations, which has to be read and thus interpreted. In literary texts, it is therefore not to be regarded as a mere backdrop for the plot. Instead, its cultural formation as a relational network can be described and analysed. However, it is not only in the arts that space is produced relationally, through a system of meanings which can be read and decoded like a text. The performative production of space is always also narrative, and can be studied as such.

It is this nexus of city and narrative that we want to explore, both concerning literature and everyday life. Thus contributions from a wide range of disciplines are invited (including, but not limited to literary studies, geography, history, urban planning, urban development, and sociology), which focus on aspects of urbanity and narrative.

Proposals are invited for 20-minute papers which consider the connection of narration and (literary) space, reading of space, discursive formation and struggle for position within specific discourses, among many other possible topics.

The deadline for proposals is May 31, 2012. Please send abstracts of about 300 words to: [rebekka.rohleder\[at\]uni-hamburg.de](mailto:rebekka.rohleder[at]uni-hamburg.de) and [martin-kindermann\[at\]gmx.de](mailto:martin-kindermann[at]gmx.de).

¹ Alasdair Gray: *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (London: Panther, 1984), p. 243.

² Quoted in: James Donald: *Imagining the Modern City* (London: Athlone, 1999), p. 2.

Abstracts should include your name, institutional affiliation, and the title of your paper.

Furthermore, we would like to announce that we are planning to publish accepted presentations in a collection of essays.

For further information please consult the conference webpage:

http://www.uni-hamburg.de/iaa/Tagung_2012_narrating_spaces_e.html.