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Nancy Easterlin*

“The new geography,” material science, and narratology’s space-time dichotomy: Notes toward a geographical narratology

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Abstract: This essay places narratology’s emphasis on space-time within the emergence of the discipline of geography and the rise of a materialist, hard science orientation in US institutions after WWII, ultimately arguing that a nascent geographical narratology should aspire to the broad intellectual scope of geography’s origins. “The new geography,” which emerged in 1887 and focused comprehensively on the relation of humans to the earth’s surface, subsequently contracted and fragmented with the post-war emphasis on material science. Likewise expanding in the rationalist post-war climate, classical narratology emphasized logical categories, especially the space-time dichotomy, divorced from human meanings. Today, cognitive research suggests that narratology’s enduring space-time paradigm occludes the constructive realities of both human relations to physical locations and reader processes. Drawing on discussions of space in narrative theory and in current cognitive research on navigation, Easterlin demonstrates that readers and viewers, rather than building spatialized story-worlds, construe space in a functional, piecemeal manner. Finally, maintaining that the area of *place studies* and an ecological approach to reading are two components of a broadly interdisciplinary geographical narratology providing a nuanced, psychologically contextualized approach to human-environment relations and narrative, Easterlin demonstrates their utility in readings of stories by Raymond Carver and Lydia Davis.

Keywords: geography, narratology, place, space, cognition

In a vigorous 2016 challenge to narrative theory, Liisa Steinby criticizes the field’s scientific pretensions, claiming that Gérard Genette’s seminal *Narrative Discourse* is especially indebted to Galileo’s space-time continuum, which informs Galileo’s understanding of time, focalization, and subjectivity. Sketching here some possibilities for geographical narratology, I will consider in what follows the limiting influence of material science on both narratology and the academic discipline of

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geography. Geography, as that discipline was initially understood, is dynamic and multi-faceted, and it thus provides the intellectual nuance and scope necessary to modify the oversimplifying dichotomy of time and space. But like humanists, geographers have been caught up in the larger trends affecting the academy that shrink the paradigms for and goals of university study. I will suggest that the rise of science has limited the purview of geography and narratology alike and that a redefinition of “geography” along the original lines of that discipline can open the door to a dynamic model for the study of narrative.

1 What is geography?

As a term that defines a discipline, “geography” has not been static or one-dimensional for the course of its history. A quick subject search in my university’s library catalogue resulted in a list of twenty-five topics, all pointing to the integration of space and place with history and culture: cosmography, earth sciences, world history, biogeography, economic geography, historical geography, human geography, medical geography, and so on. And yet this broad sweep across culture and physical environment probably no longer corresponds to our knee-jerk definition of the discipline, which I suspect is far more materialist in nature.

Although the term “geography” comes from the Greek meaning “earth’s description,” the components of the discipline and even its central figures are matters of ongoing debate: as David N. Livingstone put it in 1992, “the ‘nature’ of geography is always negotiated” (in Withers 2011: 39–50). Like many academic disciplines, geography is of relatively recent origin, dating to the late nineteenth century. Noel Castree pinpoints Halford Mackinder’s 1887 address to the Royal Geographic Society as the inception of the academic discipline of geography (Castree 2011: 287–289). With its first programs at Oxford and Cambridge, “the new geography” transformed the RGS, essentially a gentleman’s club that funded exploration, into a legitimate area of study (Powell 2012). The goal of the new geography, in Castree’s account, was to provide at once a corrective to scientific specialization and a deeply materialist study of humans, an ambition so comprehensive that it posed a problem for disciplinary coherence at the outset.

As its initial ambitions suggest, academic geography has focused on the dynamic interrelation of humans and earth’s surface, which coincides generally with my cursory catalogue search. This conception of the area of study is borne out by current specialists’ descriptions. Offering a typology of geography’s contribution to knowledge production, John A. Agnew and Livingstone identify five key areas: ethnography, coloniality, phenomenology, transformation (local to global), and epistemology (consumption and circulation of knowledge) (Agnew &

Livingstone 2011: 1–17). Framing the dimensions of the discipline somewhat differently, Charles W. J. Withers itemizes five key themes, phrased as human activities: writing and reading; mapping and depicting; exploring and trusting; experimenting; and gesturing and conversing. Notably, though the defining concepts and terms identified by Agnew and Livingstone and by Withers differ, they all invoke human physical or mental operations upon concrete environments or human-nonhuman relations, and they all imply highly dynamic processes. Presumably, the activities thematized by Withers produce the knowledge in the areas identified by Agnew. Given the broad sweep of this discipline studying the interrelations of humans and the earth's surface, then, it is also not surprising that philosophical and methodological debates circulate around the core concepts of geography, which include space, place, nature, landscape, race, and ethnicity (Agnew & Livingstone 2011: 1–17). Nonetheless, what stands out in these overlapping dimensions of the field is not only the prominence of human concerns in its inquiries but a recognition that, to varying degrees, the nature and approach of the investigation will structure and perhaps partially constitute the resulting knowledge. In other words, since its inception in the late nineteenth century, geography has not been principally concerned with a quasi-objective characterization of "earth's surface," nor has it accepted a strong realist epistemology – a view from nowhere.¹

On the account of contemporary geographers, the discipline itself is currently in a state of crisis, and the history and the nature of that crisis has direct relevance to humanists. In post-WWII United States, for example, under the aegis of James Bryant Conant at Harvard, geography "did not fit [the] new interdisciplinary model of scientism that was being pushed, in a concerted way, across the *human* sciences at Harvard and, latterly, across the American academy" (Powell 2015: 490). Castree attributes this post-war abandonment of human-environment relations and an attendant increase in specialization to the rationalism of militarily trained men who later joined university faculties. Ironically, by driving a wedge between nature and society, these new faculty augmented the status of geography just as the evidence of man's damage to the planet was coming to the fore. Today, in light of the ascendance of the hard sciences, epistemic priority is awarded to them alongside a practical emphasis on student choice, in line with the US business model of higher education (Ginn in Keighren et al. 2017: 248–250). Given the current orientation of the contemporary American university to STEM fields in

1 On the whole, then, most geographers likely accepted a modified realist epistemology, which is compatible with bioepistemology, the notion that species priorities govern the forms and content of knowledge. See Easterlin (1999b).

general and to the correlated natural science orientation of geography in particular, students in geography departments typically find the study of the history and philosophy of geography irrelevant to their perceived goals (Naylor in Keighren et al. 2017: 250–252).

All of this is likely to sound painfully familiar. With the growth of areas like earth and environmental science, geography departments at many universities in the US have been eliminated, entailing the migration of some faculty to the natural sciences and others to sociology, environmental psychology, and the like. If geography as a discipline is conceived of as a meeting ground and defined, according to one past president of the American Association of Geographers, by its “radical intra-disciplinarity,” the discipline’s shrinkage and its self-described state of crisis limn larger trends in the contemporary academy (Keighren et al. 2017: 254–256). As the discipline contracts, so does, inevitably, knowledge-sharing across key areas and themes, and it is hardly a wonder that students interested in earth science or geographical information systems mapping, focused on physical impacts and technical achievements, feel impatient at human-oriented content that new disciplinary configurations deem irrelevant.

2 Narrative theory and space-time

This brief historical account reveals a discipline in a state of flux and highlights the ongoing devaluation of qualitative knowledge in the humanities and social sciences. Has the ascendance of the hard sciences – which has undoubtedly gained force in the past seventy years but actually dates back to the eighteenth century – likewise constrained narratology since its inception? In “Time, Space, and Subjectivity in Gérard Genette’s *Narrative Discourse*,” Steinby asserts that the scientific ambition of narratology, influenced by Genette’s debt to Galileo, limits the progress of the field. Steinby concludes that

... Genette’s structuralist approach follows the mode of thinking of the natural sciences not only in its striving for accurate and exhaustively defined concepts and a logically irrefutable system of knowledge but also in its construction of the observed objects along (quasi-) spatiotemporal and quantitative coordinates. ...

... Genette has bequeathed to succeeding generations of narratologists ... the idea that the formal aspects of a literary text can be theorized separately from questions of content, context, and history and that the concepts concerning these aspects can be defined objectively and exhaustively. ... [Genette’s concepts] are purified of any “subjective” connotations, anything that could assign them human significance, but how reasonable is this, when the object of study is literature? ...

The postclassical narratologists have welcomed efforts to integrate historical and contextual approaches to the work of narratologists. However, for making this union

possible the conceptual basis of narratology must obviously be broadened so as to fold into itself the great historical variety in the human experience of time and place and the variable forms of human subjectivity. (2016: 599–600)

Steinby's challenge is a productive starting point for a proto-geographical, cognitive narratology. Does the dichotomy of space and time act as an epistemic constraint? Thus far, most steps toward geographical narratology revive and seek to reinvigorate the category of space, and in so doing aim to rectify a perceived imbalance in the analysis of Bakhtin's key narratological concept, the *chronotope*. Notably, therefore, they accept as a starting point the binary paradigm of classical narratology. David Herman identifies the emergence of spatial analysis in narrative theory with the work of A.-J. Greimas and colleagues in the late sixties. In 1984, Gabriel Zoran also took up spatial analysis, and he strikingly pointed to an imbalance between time and space in narrative: "literature is basically an art of time," and "the existence of space is pushed into a corner, so to speak" (Zoran 1984: 310).² Since about 2000, David Herman and Marie-Laure Ryan have contributed greatly to the analysis of space in narrative, and Ryan has especially done so in exploring the potential of narrative mapping. In their recent book, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative*, Ryan and her co-authors, geographers Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu, pursue the goal of "[building] a more encompassing theory of space, place, geography, and narrative" (2016: 2, 3).

So what is *space*? Seemingly a simple notion admitting to objective definition – in Zoran's words, "total space is a kind of no man's land bridging different ontological areas" (1984: 332) – its varied significations give credence to Steinby's claim that rational dichotomies provide a crude grasp of human artifacts, and they also echo Agnew and Livingstone's point that core geographical concepts are enduringly contentious in their own discipline. Zoran distinguishes between "three possible scopes of spatial units: the *total space* which encompasses the world of the text; the *spatial complex* which the text represents; and the *spatial units* which compose this complex" (1984: 322). Moreover, Zoran astutely and repeatedly acknowledges the asymmetry between time and space in narrative, and he likewise concedes that filling in "gaps in space" is not essential, in contrast to filling in gaps on the narrative plane. Thus, Zoran's description appears to cohere with the scientific ambitions of classical narratology, in that it

² Other important developments include Ruth Ronen's application of the spatial concept of the frame to fiction, suggesting that setting is constituted by multiple frames that make up the topological focus of the story (1986), and the work of postmodern (Marxist) social theorists including Foucault and Certeau, who inaugurated the "spatial turn," which then fed a political dimension back into narrative studies of space. For a comprehensive overview, see Parker.

implies a grid-like analytical spatial construct of varying levels of granularity – except that he is ever conscious of the limited importance of space in narrative.

More recent efforts suggest that space is not so easily isolated from other narrative components. Ryan and colleagues use the term “to denote certain key characteristics of the environments or settings within which characters live and act: location, position, arrangement, distance, direction, orientation, and movement,” and they itemize five different layers of narrative space: spatial frames, setting, story space, storyworld, and narrative universe. Similarly, scholars including Herman and Erin James invoke such concepts as position and arrangement as well as broader metaphorical or conceptual aspects, including storyworld and story space, thus departing from the more strictly materialist notion indicated by the units and frames of Zoran and Ronen. For example, drawing on Herman, James defines “storyworld” as “A mental model of context and environment within which a narrative’s characters function and to which readers transport themselves as they read narratives... As Herman explains, the storyworld better captures readers’ attempts to reconstruct not only what happens in a narrative, but also the surrounding environment or context of a narrative’s characters/existents” (James 2015: 253).

Narratological spatial analysis, then, has emphasized material locations and practices within them, although psychological and other elements clearly infuse the categories, and do so more notably with the emergence of cognitive narratology in recent decades, which comes closer to acknowledging that the issue is, strictly speaking, spatial conceptualization rather than objective space in narrative. Furthermore, Ryan and colleagues confirm the secondary status of space in literary narrative based on their informal experiments in reader text mapping. In their maps of *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, students not only emphasized plot and character by placing salient elements in the center, using space to depict narrative priority rather than objective physical location, but also typically drew pictures rather than maps; in short, “Mental models of narrative space are centered on the characters, and they grow out of them” (Ryan et al. 2016: 99). As this and other studies suggest, readers vary greatly in the extent to which they consciously conceptualize the physical world of a text. Perhaps even more significantly, the complexity of text processing and the attendant use of long- and short-term memory in comprehension raise serious doubts about the likelihood of spatialized storyworld construction: “It is on [the] sketch pad [of short-term memory] ... that readers form their most detailed visualizations.... [But] the visualizations generated by the visual scenes merely replace one another” (2016: 97–98). Since spatial imagination proceeds piecemeal, updating locations on short-term memory’s sketchpad, global cognitive construction of the spatial dimension of the storyworld is unlikely (2016: 98, 99). These findings cast serious

doubt Herman’s claim that “narratives can be thought of as systems of verbal or visual cues prompting their readers to *spatialize* into evolving configurations of participants, objects, and places” (Herman 2002: 263).³

My own experience as a reader and viewer of narratives converges with the findings of Ryan et al. and, in fact, corresponds to Genette’s observation that “the temporal determinations of the narrating instance are manifestly more important than its spatial determinations” (Genette 1980: 215). This is true of predominantly visual as well as verbal media. I have, for instance, watched numerous seasons of the television series *Parks and Recreation* twice through, and though I have a fairly good grasp of the interior layout of the Pawnee Parks Department, I do not know exactly where in Pawnee this is located or its proximity to other key locations, such as Anne Perkins’ house and the Pit, and I “scarcely think of worrying about it” (Genette 1980: 216). Kelly Reichardt’s film *Wendy and Lucy*, the story of a young woman with limited resources traveling from Muncie, Indiana, to Alaska in search of employment, is intensely focused on the environment because of the challenges and potential threats Wendy faces. But in my assessment, this actually militates against the construction of a spatialized map or the incorporation of such a map into the storyworld of the viewer. Muncie and Alaska and the route between them are not relevant to Lucy’s predicament and the story’s events. Along the same lines, both travel and symbolically named places are central features of *Jane Eyre*, but although I’ve read the novel five or ten times and viewed numerous film versions of it, in the immersive experience itself, I have no interest in spatializing the travels that correspond to Jane’s development.

In other words, it is not just that spatializations of the global, material dimensions of a story are typically unnecessary: they are a distraction from narrative concerns for readers and viewers, because they have no bearing on those concerns and therefore clutter the mind with extraneous information. Perhaps this explains why, in narrative analysis, the concept of space accedes to

³ Herman’s more recent book on narrative and cognition across media and within both aesthetic texts and lived experience deals less with the complexities of spatial modeling than *Story Logic*, but he does iterate that “in worlding the story, spatialization entails exploring an evolving configuration of participants, objects, and places in the narrated domain” (Herman 2013: 283). Although I dispute this claim based on cognitive research, Herman stands out among narratologists in recognizing the importance of place (rather than space) construction as a meaning-making process. For a related critique of the limitations of Herman’s approach from the perspective of neuroscience and phenomenology, see Paul D. Armstrong (forthcoming 2019). In *The Experientiality of Narrative*, Marco Caracciolo draws on American pragmatism as well as ecological psychology and its outgrowth, enactivism, and thus, like Armstrong and me, he emphasizes environmentally engaged processes and evinces skepticism toward highly representationalist psychological perspectives in his 5E approach.

more holistic and flexible notions like storyworld, which prominently incorporates, and indeed prioritizes, agents and actions. Thus, though direct analysis of the discrepancy between the objectifiable spatial dimensions of a narrative on the one hand and the cognitive experience of storyworld construction on the other might be highly illuminating, as far as I know, this effort has not been undertaken, perhaps because, as Steinby claims, the scientific space-time paradigm holds undue sway in narrative studies.

3 Narrative space in cognitive perspective

Readers and viewers, then, do not appear to build comprehensively spatialized components of stories, a finding supported by current psychological research on real-world scene and space perception, navigation, and object recognition. In “Walking through doorways causes forgetting: environmental effects,” Kyle A. Pettijohn and Gabriel A. Radvansky studied how spatial location governs information available to memory. Changes in spatial location signaled by boundaries such as walls and doors appear strongly correlated with event boundaries. Of special significance to narrative studies, this effect holds whether subjects are viewing a film or reading a text that they have been asked to segment into events. A different study of goal-directed navigation using virtual environments supports neurological research suggesting that spatial orientation and context/place recognition are processed in different parts of the brain: when participants were asked to navigate to a particular place within one of a series of virtual museums, they frequently navigate to the right location within the wrong museum (Marchette et al. 2017). Apparently, subjects use a relative schema of the geometry of the environment – “a flexible reference frame.” Instructively, however, in one permutation of the experiment where the walls were removed from the museums, the frequent schema-producing errors did not occur, a finding that harmonizes with Pettijohn and Radvansky’s study of event boundaries, spatial segmentation, and memory.

These and other studies indicate that in-time environmental processing is piecemeal, immediate rather than cumulative, and distributed across distinct brain areas. Furthermore, the studies above find that the multiple scales required for spatial navigation are not cognized in a top-down process. Indeed, although local schemas may be incorporated into global representations, they often are not, particularly when boundaries are in place. A further study suggests that the perception and recognition of scenes appears to be a separate operation from that of objects, again processed in a distinct part of the brain. Confirming yet modifying research since the late sixties which finds that people rapidly interpret

complex scenes, Russell A. Epstein and Sean P. MacEvoy propose “the layout hypothesis,” surmising that people encode whole-scene layout rather than scenes containing specific objects.

Together, these studies converge with an ecological, embodied approach to human cognition in several respects, both in the case of imaginative and real-world cognition. First, the objective features of space are always subordinated to human concerns. In essence, space is really *space as* or *space for*, a finding in accord with environmental psychologist Stephen Kaplan’s studies of environmental preference, which concluded that test subjects, rather than identifying desired objects in scenes, assesses pictures primarily with an eye toward how they would function within the visualized environment (Kaplan 1992). Second, these studies support what Andy Clark calls the principle of ecological assembly: human problem solvers recruit the least effortful resources for the acceptable result of a problem. In evolutionary terms, constructing complex and detailed representations of physical locales (such as maps and spatial layouts containing an inventory of the scene’s items) would be extremely expensive, placing a huge load on human cognition (Clark 2008). From an evolutionary point of view, expensive adaptations (bipedalism and large brains, for instance) only emerge when they confer distinct survival advantages. On the whole, then, perceptually bounded environments likely signal a new set of localized risks and opportunities to which larger spatial scales and their object contents are, on average, predictably irrelevant. Instead of global mapping, which did not confer such an advantage in the environment of evolutionary adaptation, people follow species priority in physical world perception and navigation and in narrative world building: attending especially to the immediately bounded locale, they focus on other people (as we would expect of a highly social species), other creatures, and objects of interest (affordances).

The insight that construction of space is always functional/opportunistic helps explain the difficulty of defining the term, because although “total space is a kind of no man’s land bridging different ontological areas,” no one lives in an ontological no man’s land and, consequently, no one typically cognizes according to such a model. Generating this abstraction violates Clark’s PEA, and we are left instead with spatial conceptualization – or, more precisely, space as and space for. Furthermore, these findings provide a cognitive explanation for the difficulty of imposing firm boundaries around the most elementary of narrative categories, like setting and character. As James Phelan and Peter Rabinowitz note:

Setting has a tendency to spread out from geographical space to the objects within it until it becomes synonymous with background in the broadest sense, even including the socio-logical or theological characteristics of the world of the work. In this broader sense, setting

begins to merge with character – among other things – because “environment” and psychology begin to intertwine, both causally and symbolically. No surprise, really: interpretive analyses of setting tend to spill over into commentary on character precisely because so many narratives ... establish links between these elements. (85)

An embodied, cognitive narratology incorporating geography’s emphasis on material locale offers a causal explanation for the prevalence of links between character and setting. Even allowing for a wide range of cultural, generic, and individual variations, the linkage is premised on the evolved inextricability of organism and environment, which promotes a functional attitude toward the physical surround. In a sense, humans, like other organisms, both are and are not separate from environments; identifiable as distinct entities, they nonetheless are only viable in concrete locales – not in the “ontological no man’s land” of total space.

4 Geographical narratology: Place

As Jan Alber and Monika Fludernik pointed out in 2010, citing Herman’s remark that narratology has expanded into narrative studies, the interrelation of all of these projects and approaches to one another still requires some sorting out. In particular, forthright exploration of the tension between the scientific, empirical approach inaugurated by classical narratology and cognitive approaches can be a productive one. Classical narratology provides the clarifying heuristics of logical categories as well as a reminder that artifacts are discrete entities (human products, not humans themselves); cognitive approaches influenced by ecological and embodiment psychology serves as a constant reminder that categories are tools of analysis, not features of actuality (either internal or external) or of the reading and viewing processes of persons.⁴ A geographical narratology operating in the spirit of “the new geography” will explore dynamic dimensions of culture, cognition, and material reality as they are manifested in texts and/or reading processes.

One important means of superseding the intellectual constraints of the space-time paradigm is through greater attention to the study of landscape and place and the relevance of these to narrative texts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the contraction of geography in the post-war period, *place studies* began developing

⁴ Pragmatic philosophers, including John Dewey, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead, criticized the conjoined tendencies to concretize the abstract and to conflate heuristic constructs with psychological realities.

in the early 1970s in North America, inaugurated by the Canadian geographer Edward Relph's seminal book *Place and Placelessness*. The area has since become a broadly interdisciplinary field that includes all of the social sciences, enjoying rapid growth especially within the last few decades (Lewicka 2011b). Scholars in place studies generally accept Irwin Altman and Setha Low's definition: "Place ... refers to space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes ... [Places] may vary in several ways – scale or size and scope, tangible versus symbolic, known and experienced versus not known and not experienced" (Altman & Low 1992: 8). Because feelings for (and thus conceptualizations of) places are dynamically related to self-identity, community, culture, and other factors, and because they change with experience, the phrase "place-in-process" more accurately describes human relations to locales rather than "place" itself (Cristoforetti et al. 2011). Feelings for places both vary greatly and change over time; generally speaking, positive affect is associated with strong human attachments and a sense of community, whereas alienation or indifference often result from one or a combination of factors: poor or dysfunctional social/familial ties; adverse cultural impacts; natural disasters; and the like.⁵ Research in place studies adopts a range of methodologies, qualitative and quantitative, and thus acknowledges, like geography overall, that empirical methodology and strong realist epistemology alone are insufficient for the study of human relationships with locales. It therefore includes rather than reduces to the sociocultural and political control of bodies that is the chief concern of postmodernist spatial theory and British Marxist geography.⁶

5 For the original typology of place attachment, see Hummon. For a slightly modified typology, see Lewicka (2011b). For fuller summaries of place studies, see Easterlin (2016) or Easterlin (2017).

6 Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and Certeau focus on the control of human bodies within social institutions, employing terms like "space," "place," and "site." For Certeau, "place" is an instantaneous configuration of positions, whereas "space" includes velocities and time variables (130). Likewise, Marxist geographer Doreen Massey defines "space" as a product of inherently political interrelations and "place" as "a collection of trajectories" (2005: 10, 130). For his part, Foucault defines "place" (or space, site, and location) as geometrical imposition. Thus, postmodern cultural theory affirms its lineage in Enlightenment rationalism; as philosopher Edward Casey recounts, the birth of modern science propelled the conceptual ascendance of space over place, which, over the centuries, was generally lumped in with space and viewed as a lesser category: as relative position to Descartes; as point to Kant; as "punctiform positions" in Bentham's functionalist, utilitarian equivalence with "site" (Casey 186). Adhering to this rationalist, antihumanist position defining place within the framework of spatiotemporal coordinates and attentantly focusing on space-time compressions and disparaging place attachment, some postmodernist geographical analyses unwittingly discriminate against dislocated persons (Massey 1997): the Benthamite "triumph of site" in Foucauldian theory "[maintains that under disciplinary power] ... bodies ... exist only in sites and as a function of sites" (Casey 183, 184). In sum, in its

A thumbnail analysis of Raymond Carver's story "Gazebo" demonstrates that place studies can foreground how physical environment functions as an integral element of self-identity, interpersonal/social relationships, nonhuman nature, and culture within narrative, thus illuminating the experiential underpinning of setting's tendency to merge with character. In this story, a young married couple, Holly and Duane, have taken over the management of a motel in an unidentified part of the American West, but probably Washington state. After a smooth, one-year period, Duane, who narrates, had an affair with the motel maid, and the story commences as he and Holly, neglecting their duties and prospective customers, occupy one suite or another to argue about their relationship, drink, have sex, and sleep.

The impersonality of physical space – the unidentified geographical location, the presumably monotonous, commercial motel building, and the interchangeable suites and bedrooms – are not simply symbolic of Duane and Holly's relationship and identities but part of them. Whereas place studies affirms that home is the "major fixed reference point for the structuring of reality" that completes identity and self-image, in this story, the rooms where Holly and Duane relocate to sort their personal problems reflect placelessness – that is, uprootedness and indifference toward the material locale (Relph 1976; Hummon 1992; Lewicka 2011b).⁷ As Duane says, "There were any number of vacancies to choose from. But we needed a suite, a place to move around in and be able to talk. So we'd locked up the motel office that morning and gone upstairs to a suite" (Carver 1974: 21). Notably, if they have been living in the motel for a year, Duane and Holly have had ample time to personalize their living space, thus bringing in objects that reinforce memories, likes and dislikes, and so on, and thus enhancing other dimensions of identity, relationship, and human community, but they instead choose the anonymity of serial room occupation to define themselves and, ostensibly, sort their problems.

The superficiality of the characters, then, comes as no surprise, cut off from memory, community, and meaningful locales as they are. In the past, Holly used to tell Duane that her green eyes marked her for something special, and he comments, "And didn't I know it! I feel so awful from one thing and another" (Carver 1974: 22). Duane's clichéd language fits seamlessly with the inauthenticity of the physical environment and highlights his incapacity for personal growth through self-reflection and meaningful environmental engagement. Holly is no

objectification of human beings and its materialist conception of place/space/site, postmodern theory is the handmaiden of the empiricism it deplors.

⁷ The centrality of home as a basis of a identity and a point of departure is widely acknowledged in place studies.

better; for instance, in one of her many moments of passive aggression, she reminds him, "You weren't my first, you know. My first was Wyatt. Imagine. ... Wyatt and Duane. ... You were my everything, just like the song" (1974: 27–28). Duane announces, "Holly was my own true love," his trite locution circling in continuous positive feedback with a socially and physically impoverished surround. Thus insulated, the stasis of self-identity, relationship, and place is preserved, and only heavy drinking benefits from true commitment: "Well, the truth is we were both hitting it pretty hard. Booze takes a lot of time and effort if you're going to do a good job with it" (1974: 26).

New experiences or memories of other places can dynamically change an existing place construction, in turn altering self and relationships, a point illustrated by negative example in "Gazebo." At the end of the story, Holly remembers a time when, during a day driving around "outside of Yakima," they stopped at a farm for water and were invited in for cake by an old couple and given the history of the overgrown gazebo, where music was played on Sundays decades before. When Holly says, "I thought we'd be like that too when we got old enough. Dignified. And in a place" (1974: 28), Duane replies, after a pause: "Holly, these things, we'll look back on them too. We'll go, 'Remember the motel with the crud in the pool?'" Holly's positive memory is fragile because it is contingent not only upon the relationship of the old couple but on their place attachment formed long ago, preserved by memory, on a thriving version of the rundown farm Holly and Duane visit. The poignancy of her tenuous attempt to apply place understanding and its attendant network of human feelings to their relational problems is comically undercut by Duane's lame implication that place-based memories are one-of-a-kind, all inherently positive. Their memories of this time will indeed be dominated by the anonymity of the motel suites and "the crud in the pool," which is an extension of what they have become as individuals and the sum total of their relationship. Finally, Carver's colloquial use of "go" for "say" in all Duane's speech tags comically reinforces the stagnation of identity and relationship and its interrelation with environment upon which the story reflects for, insulated against influences, they are, at best, spinning their wheels.

This story demonstrates how place rather than space serves a role in narrative development, and analyses of longer stories illustrate "place-in-process," the dynamic interrelation of places and self, community, culture, and natural environment that results in narrative progression. As a tool for narrative analysis, place studies are in the spirit of "the new geography." Recognizing that meaning-making processes entail a functional, species-specific approach to physical environments, such analyses not only explore the relation of humans to the earth's surface but also have a two-way value. On one hand, they provide a model for narrative studies that does not neglect either interiority or exteriority; on the other

hand, they offer illustrations valuable to place studies, highlighting, for example, how lack of community and meaningful connection to physical surroundings constrains self and place construction simultaneously.⁸

5 Geographical narratology: Cognitive ecological reading processes

However, as so-called unnatural narratologists would be keen to point out, place studies applies best to mimetic texts (broadly construed), and much written literature especially minimizes both space and place. Most of Lydia Davis's stories, for instance, have little reference to the physical environment, even those whose locations can be easily inferred. For instance, "Old Mother and the Grouch," about a couple whose relationship is based on disagreement and opposition, appears mainly to take place in the couple's house over an undetermined period of time. The home features as an arena within which to manifest disagreement, and this is true, to the extent it is represented, yet a place studies approach seems distinctly ill-suited for the analysis of this story and other experimental or postmodern works.

In many of these stories, "space is pushed into a corner," as Zoran puts it, and we "scarcely think of worrying about it." Why is this so? Human evolution has resulted in the capacity to manipulate physical environments to our own advantage, resulting in the ability to inhabit all known locales and in complex culture. Through the application of instrumental intelligence to environmental problems, humans have come to occupy "the cognitive niche," and are able to produce and enjoy, among other things, literary works that address culture largely divorced from our dependence on "the earth's surface."⁹ In this respect, if it is incumbent upon us to throw around ill-advised terminology, there is nothing more "natural" than the minimization of physical locations or the impulse to subvert narrativity, our primary mode of cognition, in literary texts.¹⁰

8 Landscape architect Robert Riley (1992) has argued for the value of literary depictions in place studies.

9 See Tooby and DeVore (1987) for the formulation of the concept of the cognitive niche.

10 Many astute objections have been raised to the designation "unnatural narratology"; like Porter Abbott, I consider the natural-unnatural dichotomy an evolutionarily and cognitively specious construct. See Alber et al. (2010) and Richardson (2016) for this debate. For discussions of subverted narrativity in literature, see, for instance, Easterlin (1999a) and Easterlin (2012), chapter 2.

Yet the basic sense-making strategies that facilitated human survival and propelled cultural evolution underpin processes of meaning-construal of all kinds, and a cognitive ecological model of reading and viewing along these lines constitutes a second feature of geographical narratology. Humans are a knowledge-seeking, meaning-making, wayfinding species, able to interpret environmental information and use novel affordances to their own advantage (Kaplan 1992). The capacity to draw inferences and infer causal relations between agents, actions, and environmental features is a baseline narrativizing process. Though contemporary viewing and reading are considerably different activities from the human migration out of Africa and into Asia a couple million years ago, narrative cognition is still a robust, relatively accurate component of a flexible intelligence.

According to the cognitive ecological model, readers seek a point of orientation, usually adopting a character or narrator as a guide, to their sense-making processes in cognitive environments. Interpreting affordances and events, readers assimilate them to a progressive model of basic narrativity (narrative mentation). But though narrativizing is ubiquitous, it is often difficult; as in real life, readers must often adjust their strategies, including the point of orientation, as they attempt to build coherence. Additionally, some affordances will vary depending on the reader's knowledge and experience; for instance, a reader familiar with postmodern writers like Barthelme or Coover, French theory, and/or Lydia Davis's fiction in general will bring to bear a level of affordances (contexts) unavailable to less informed readers.

Davis's story "The Meeting" signals by its title a social-professional event and quickly establishes attempted construal via the first-person narrator's nervous obsessiveness: "I tried so hard, the clothes I wore, new look I had, I thought. Competent, I thought, casual. New raincoat. Brown. Things seemed all right at first, promising, in the waiting room. Top secretary offered me the comfortable chair, a cup of tea – top secretary or second secretary" (1976: 17). The narrator's extreme self-consciousness and her preoccupation with her appearance and the status of those attending to her establish that the person with whom she will meet has something to offer, perhaps a job, or as later appears to be the case, a publishing contract. Yet as the story devolves into a three-page, single paragraph interior monologue wherein the narrator becomes increasingly indignant and outrageous, finally imagining her elderly mother giving this man a piece of her mind, readers quickly adjust their sense-making model. Though some readers will better ascertain particular affordances (she is reading Addison as she waits), all will likely realize that at some indeterminate point fantasy has taken over. Did he rail against her? Why? Is this suspicious over-reaction the point at which some readers begin to reconstrue the story in one of a number of ways (a comment on the narrator's sanity, a self-reflexive tale, or both)?

In pursuing directions like those I've sketched here, geographical narratology promises to supersede the rationalist model of knowledge encouraged by the materialist, consumer-oriented approach to scholarship and education that has driven many university programs since 1950. Taking the best of classical narratology's rational inquiry and combining it with cognitive knowledge, narrative studies will operate in the spirit of "the new geography," having at its core the dynamic, inextricable relation of humans to the earth's surface – even in analyses of texts eschewing their ties to physical reality.

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