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Sofie VERRAEST and Bart KEUNEN

Introduction to *New Work on Landscape and Its Narration*

By the time Fredric Jameson stated that our "daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time" (*Postmodernism* 47), he could already rely on a whole tradition in the humanities to back his bold claim. From the 1980s onwards, scholars in the humanities recognized increasingly the arbitrary nature of their former, predominantly temporal, explanatory models of "progress," "evolution," or "history" and reached the conclusion that cultural phenomena are just as well, or perhaps better, explained by analyzing their material, spatial context. This shift of emphasis was first referred to explicitly as the "spatial turn" by Edward Soja in his *Postmodern Geographies* (see also Lungu). Following Michel Foucault's *Of Other Spaces*, Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, and US-American cultural theoreticians who propagated the work of French thought (e.g., Edward Soja, David Harvey, and Fredric Jameson) the production of modern culture in concrete living conditions became a systematic object of study. As a phenomenon that is fundamentally "produced" space was understood to mirror daily cultural praxis, social hierarchies, collective mentalities, and personal experiences. Thus the study of "lived space" came to occupy center stage in this line of research allowing for the examination of otherwise hard-to-detect phenomena such as collective identities or social power relations. Such phenomena could now be studied in a situated manner, as part of the experience of individuals' contextualized places and quotidian practices. Once the inhabited and built environment was thus considered indispensable for trying to grasp the modern (or, for some, "postmodern" or "late modern") condition, inquiry into the experience and production of landscapes, cities, and architectures came to boom, along with the field of "urban studies." It is within the framework of these developments that the Ghent Urban Studies Team <http://www.gust.ugent.be/> took the initiative of compiling the articles in *New Work on Landscape and Its Narration*.

Contemporaneous with the spatial turn, the humanities also came to be marked by the so-called "narrative turn," which puts forward the idea that the situated production of human culture is to a great extent indebted to (often culturally determined) narrative ways of making sense of the world. Alasdair MacIntyre, for instance, argued that "man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (216; see also Taylor). In a similar vein, Yuri Lotman advanced that our cultural information often passes through the gates of narrative: "The more people acquire freedom from the automatism of genetic planning, the more important it is for them to construct plots of events and behavior" (170). Increasingly, an idea took root that is perhaps most explicitly rendered in Jerome Bruner's *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*: the notion that we do not only see the world from a rational, logico-scientific viewpoint, but also from a spontaneously narrative one, and that "the two (though complementary) are irreducible to one another" since each provides "distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality" (11).

If the formation of cultural and personal identities is often a matter of narrative construction, then, it is hardly surprising that the spatial turn found a natural ally in the narrative turn. Both enable us to delve into the situatedness and experientiality of modern culture, and show how cultural and personal identities are embodied in narrative and spatial constructions. More than one research institute was called into existence in order to explore this common ground of the narrative and the spatial. In addition to individual contributors, represented in *New Work on Landscape and Its Narration* are the research teams of "Littérature et architecture" (Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense), "Narrascape" (University of Cambridge), "Space in Ancient Greek Literature" (University of Amsterdam), and the Ghent Urban Studies Team (Ghent University). However divergent the narrative media addressed in the contributions to this journal, all are imbued with the notion that our spatial surroundings and built environment are not so much empty containers or inert background décors as they are thoroughly informed by active perceptions, temporal developments, emotions, memories, and ideological values — all of which tend to be constructed through and by narration. Against this backdrop, contributors to *New Work on Landscape and Its Narration* concentrate on the phenomena of space and landscape understood as constructed narratively. As culturally relevant spaces connected closely with matters of identity and experience, landscapes are particularly suitable for demonstrating the relevance of the

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spatial and narrative turns for urban studies and (comparative) culture studies. The narrative constructions of landscapes analyzed in *New Work on Landscape and Its Narration* pivot on three key concerns. While the three often occur together, the articles nonetheless tend to emphasize one of the following elementary aspects of narration: 1) its value-laden, ideological character, 2) its narrative coherence or mode of representation, in which temporal structures play a major part, and 3) its experiential quality.

We begin by introducing the contributions whose authors focus on ethical and ideological values encrypted in narratives, which are thus endowed with "ideological identity." In *The Architecture of Happiness* Alain de Botton takes note of this evaluative aspect of the built environment and proposes to shift "the focus of discussion away from the strictly visual towards the values promoted by buildings" so that "we become able to handle talk about the appearance of works of architecture rather as we do wider debates about people, ideas and political agendas" (73). To the human eye, space is indeed not only constituted by its material facticity, but also, and perhaps primarily, by the evaluation of this material reality by a specific observer. If perceiving means evaluating, the form that a landscape takes on depends on the ideological values associated with it.

This is the focus of Geert Vandermeersche's and Ronald Soetaert's "Landscape, Culture, and Education in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/9>. In Vandermeersche's and Soetaert's reading, Defoe's island is not the exotic and untouched gem that Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, made it out to be, but, rather, a place where the conventional norms of Western culture are reproduced. Robinson's spatial organization of the island embodies the Western rationalist paradigm of an orderly culture needing to dominate "savage" nature in order to allow for the creation of individuality and identity. According to Vandermeersche and Soetaert, such ideological encryptions in fictional landscapes allow readers to learn from fiction, and provide them with strategies for describing and dealing with real-life phenomena, such as, in this case, education. As such, narrative spaces enter into a culture's ongoing ideological dialogue: they function as an enduring equipment for living (Burke), a company readers keep (Booth), and a cognitive tool in the modern western world.

Narrative spaces can, in addition, be instructive because they actively subvert tacitly accepted cultural norms. Instead of being confirmed, conventional identities are thus exposed and challenged. In "English Architectural Landscapes and Narratives of Metonymy in Hollinghurst's *The Stranger's Child*" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/8>, Bart Eeckhout shows how narrative literature is a locus for such subversion of normative spaces: narratives can play with conventional, motivic spaces, fall short of the expectations they create, and, in doing so, expose the arbitrariness of the values they are associated with typically. Such is the effect of a normative place — an aristocratic Victorian country house — subverted by Alan Hollinghurst in *The Stranger's Child* and analyzed by Eeckhout. Owing to the unconventional use of codes of genre through which the socialist realist novel, the family saga, and the country house novel are deconstructed and "queered," this space is stripped of its normative identity and requires a more nuanced view. Such ideological overtones are all the more pertinent because of the space's synecdochic value: Eeckhout claims that the novel seeks to "understand a century's transformations of the English landscape through the narrative staging of a range of individual life stories" (3).

Jo Heirman's "The Erotic Conception of Ancient Greek Landscapes and the Heterotopia of the Symposium" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/12> is also about non-normative spaces. In his discussion of natural landscape elements such as fields, gardens, and meadows in ancient Greek lyric poetry (from the seventh until the fifth century BC) and the non-(hetero)normative erotic values they symbolize, Heirman explains this symbolization by suggesting a connection with the performance context of the poems: that of the symposium. Interpreting the real-life space of the symposium as a Foucauldian "heterotopia" where erotic norms deviate from those of the city community, Heirman provides an explanation for the similarly deviant norms regulating the fictional landscapes in the poems.

The ideological dimension of urban landscapes is also the subject of Krzysztof Nawratek's article "Urban Landscape and the Postsocialist City" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/10>. Nawratek constructs a theoretical framework in order to conceptualize the interrelationship between social and spatial structures and the production of knowledge and innovations based on the example

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of post-Soviet Riga. Despite the fact that its social and spatial structures should allow it to fit the requirements of modern capitalism, Riga is a city in crisis. After the decline of the modernist narrative of the socialist industrial city, Riga's urban landscape came to be understood in terms of two new narratives: a local one which traced national identity back to the pre-Soviet era and a global one which sought to connect Riga with other cities and with global capital. Now that both have come to falter, Riga faces the challenge of constructing a new ideological narrative and translating its highly specific cultural and social structure into a spatial form.

The final contribution in which the ideological and symbolic values of landscape and the built environment occupy center stage is Emmanuel Rubio's "Jencks's 'Enigmatic Signifier' and the Cathartic Narrative" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/11>. Through a case study of the Selfridges department store in Birmingham, the author demonstrates how a cathartic effect may be induced by architecture's symbolic staging of past catastrophes, terrors, and collective traumas. Applying Charles Jencks's concept of "iconic buildings," Rubio regards these architectural designs as interspersed with metaphorical references which are not merely juxtaposed with each other, but make up a narrative sequence. This narrative, which can be called "cathartic," is essential since it is well-adapted to the troubled era of late modernity. Rubio argues that the Selfridges department store responds to past disaster by incorporating it into the architectural design, thus narratively enacting it in a renewed, but also a symbolic and therefore reduced manner. In that sense, cathartic architecture may provide solace in the face of deep-rooted collective traumas.

A second group of articles is with focus on the representational and structural aspects of narration rather than its symbolic values. These contributions bring narrative patterns into the limelight and expose them as representations that do not only have a spatial, but also a temporal facet to them. According to theorists such as Charles Landry and Klaske Havik, who try to give shape to the concept of "urban literacy," we "read" the built environment much like we read literature, and this reading activity is a thoroughly structuring one: it turns outward reality into a coherent and meaningful representation. In other words, it operates what Hans-Georg Gadamer called a "hermeneutic circle" (268-78): out of the disparate elements of outward reality, the mind creates a provisional unity, which is then further fed and informed by other elements. As such, the perceiver or "reader" of a specific space continuously moves back and forth between the isolated parts of reality and the structured whole that unites them in the mind's eye. It has, moreover, oft been noted that this whole is not only structured in space, but also in time: what we perceive is a dynamic complex rather than an immobile setting. It is, of course, in this temporal facet of our spatial representations that narrativity sets in. In Paul Ricoeur's view, temporality and narrative are indeed intrinsically related. He observes that there is no "living time" or "temporal being" without narrative: they are "as closely linked as a 'language-game' in Wittgenstein's terms is to a 'form of life' … Narrativity is the mode of discourse through which the mode of being which we call temporality or temporal being, is brought to language" (Ricoeur, "The Human" 91). If the human world is an essentially temporal and narrative one, the spaces we inhabit must bear marks of this. A decisive step in the investigation into the temporal facets of the (urban) landscape was taken by de Certeau in his aforementioned *The Practice of Everyday Life*. According to de Certeau, we can only refer to the space that we perceive and experience on a daily basis as a space "put into practice." The dynamism of these spaces-in-praxis is a narrative one: "a theory of narration is indissociable from a theory of practices, as its condition as well as its production" (*The Practice* 78).

A similar reasoning is behind Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "chronotope," which is central to Bart Keunen's and Sofie Verraest's article. In "Tell-tale Landscapes and Mythical Chronotopes in Urban Designs for Twenty-first Century Paris" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/4> Keunen and Verraest outline a methodology for the examination of the narrative structures that are spontaneously projected onto landscapes and exemplify it by analyzing four urbanist projects submitted for the international workshop for Greater Paris, which was launched by President of France Nicholas Sarkozy in 2009. Their focus is on phantasmagorical urban spaces, which are considered to be profane remnants of what Ernst Cassirer has referred to as "mythical thought." Since the spatiotemporal structure of these phantasmagorical places is understood as fundamental to their affective appeal and seductiveness, they are treated as Bakhtinian "chronotopes." Four chronotopes — the oasis, the capsule, the hub, and the bazaar — are thus exposed as the cornerstones of urbanists' rhetoric strategies.

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Next, contributions on narrative representation strategies include Bruno Notteboom's and David Peleman's article "Narratives of Loss and Order and Imaging the Belgian Landscape 1900-1945" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/11>. Notteboom and Peleman discuss the way in which the modernization of the Flemish landscape was perceived during the first half of the twentieth century. Rather than on the analysis of landscape transformations as such, they focus on how these were dealt with and narratively represented in popularizing publications (in the domain of botany, agricultural education, and tourism) as well as in contemporary urban design. Rather than merely documenting the changes of modernization, the selected texts and images appear to tell a regretful or hopeful story about it. These respective narratives of loss and of order are analyzed on the three levels of story, context/intertext, and discourse as well as in terms of their narrative representation techniques of framing, sequencing, and juxtaposing.

Shifting focus to the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century, Steven Jacobs discusses in his article "Blurring the Boundaries between City and Countryside in Photography" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/6> the new representations that today's complex urban landscapes require. Once the clearly defined and delineated city has given way to the hybrid and dispersed urban landscape combining characteristics of the former city, suburb, periphery, and countryside, new landscape narratives for grasping this whimsical environment prove necessary. According to Jacobs, a renewed version of picturesque imaging alleviates this need for a suitable representation strategy. First, this is noticeable in the field of architecture and urban studies, where the discipline of landscape architecture has been gaining ground because of its capacity for detecting unity and order — be it of the capricious kind, in a typically picturesque mode — in fragmented post-urban spaces. Second, it is discernable in the work of present-day photographers.

A similar inquiry into narrative strategies representing present-day fragmented urbanity is the subject of François Penz's article "Towards an Urban Narrative Layers Approach to Decipher the Language of City Films" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/7>. Departing from the idea that we "read" or represent urban space spontaneously through narrative images much like cinema does, Penz regards both as "major narrative forms" (2) and takes a specific interest in their point of convergence *par excellence*: city films. He argues that the cinematic image structures the urban surroundings through four superimposed narrative layers that make up a single image: the layer of the story and history of the buildings, that of the narratives and points of view of the city planning process, the tales and personal stories embodied by the passers-by, and, finally, the narrative intentions of the film itself. According to Penz, this four-layered and dynamic narrative capturing of the environment is particularly apt for grasping our complex urbanity.

In addition to ideological values and coherent representations, narrative is, a privileged vehicle for the emotional and experiential facets of space. This constitutes the third key concern of articles in *New Work on Landscape and its Narration*. In *The Poetics of Space* (1957), Gaston Bachelard approached this aspect from a phenomenological angle, uncovering the aesthetic or "poetic" affects instilled by architectural entities such as the cellar, the attic, the corner, and the house. He thus touched upon the frequently overlooked fact that space does not need to be reproduced in an artistic image to have an aesthetic effect. The aesthetic is indeed intrinsically connected with the experiential: etymologically, the Greek *aisthetikos* simply refers to "sensitive" or "perceptive," and is derived from *aisthanesthai*, meaning "to perceive" by the senses or by the mind, "to feel." In sum, our daily experience of space is not only marked by such basic representational contrasts as inside and outside, high and low (see, e.g., Matoré; Weisgerber) or a repetitive and a dynamic time rhythm, for instance (see above), but these contrasts are also intimately experienced as aesthetic impressions. The spatial turn should, therefore, not only shed light on the practical aspects of our spatial experience (allowing us to make sense of our environment by turning it into a coherent whole), but also on its inherent *aisthesis* or poetic qualities. And like the practical "reading" of space, its poetic "reading," too, testifies to a clear affinity with the reading of narratives. Like narratives, our surroundings are not only "read" as coherent wholes, but also as affective, aesthetic experiences. That is why, in *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur points to the aptitude of narrative for rendering aesthetically lived experiences. More accurately than any other form of thought, Ricoeur argues, poetic imagination manages to capture the highly personal, experiential, and affective side of experience (see also Herman 137-60). As such,

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narrative's coherent representations of space are often colored by aesthetic qualities; the objective and the subjective merge into one and the same image.

In his article "The Instrumentality of Gibson's Medium as an Alternative to Space" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/5> Raymond Lucas argues for a rejection of the term "space" claiming — following James J. Gibson — that the notion suggests an empty vessel rather than a living experience involving all of our senses. In order to capture the experiential facet of our surroundings, Lucas proposes to replace the concept of space by Gibson's notion of "medium." He then goes on to develop a notational system for mapping out the full scope of sensory impressions involved in our on-the-spot experience of places — a system that takes into account the effects of weather, temporality, and even technological modalities such as surveillance, safety, or connectivity. For Lucas, too, narration is particularly "equipped to deal with this highly experiential version of events" (8) which is why the notational system should be complemented by a narrative account of the place. As a whole, this model for recording the *particularia* of individual and embodied spatial experience is to provide architects and urban planners with a tool for understanding architecture as a contextualized, conditional, and fluctuating phenomenon, and help them to design accordingly.

Similarly, Kris Pint develops in his article "The Avatar as a Methodological Tool for the Embodied Exploration of Virtual Environments" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/3> a methodology for accessing the embodied experience of spaces. However, in Pint's contribution "spaces" are not actual, perceived spaces, but the non-existent, virtual spaces that take shape in our imagination. Like Marie-Laure Ryan, Pint understands this embodied, aesthetic imagination of places as "immersive," and expands on the immersed subject experiencing them via the notion of the avatar. A concept borrowed from game design, the avatar allows us to delve into the embodied experience of virtual spaces. Pint aims to make the avatar operational as a research tool by combining Roland Barthes's use of "fantasy" in his theory of reading with a reinterpretation of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notions of the "conceptual persona" and the "aesthetic figure."

While Lucas and Pint seek to develop a methodology for inquiring into any actual or virtual space, Bart Verschaffel focuses in his article "The World of the Landscape" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/2> on one particular aesthetic experience: one that landscape painting from the sixteenth century onwards has often sought to convey. Verschaffel argues that the singular visual logic of the landscape genre evokes a highly specific poetic experience. While the image always implies a certain distance from the surroundings, which makes it inherently calm and meditative, it nevertheless entails an intimate involvement with the landscape as well. The vagueness that often rests on the horizon in the romantic landscape indeed creates a specific aesthetic "atmosphere" that engages a lonely soul in an intimate encounter — not just with the situational space that is depicted, but primarily with the World that is guessed beyond the horizon.

New Work on Landscape and Its Narration includes a thematic bibliography entitled "Bibliography of Work on Landscape and Its Narration" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol14/iss3/13> compiled by Sofie Verraest and Bart Keunen. Last but not least, we thank Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek — editor of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* — for his interest in our work and the opportunity to publish *New Work on Landscape and Its Narration*, as well as the anonymous readers for the evaluation of the papers and for their comments. We also thank Katrien Bollen who assisted with work on style and grammar in the articles, thus her co-editorship of the thematic issue at hand.

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