

American Spaces — Editor's Note

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What does *space* as an analytical concept add to our understandings of the American experience? This thematic issue of *American Studies in Scandinavia* aims to sound out the scope and possibilities of space in its broadest possible sense, in order to explore its analytical thrust within American Studies. American spaces are typically conceived as large in a physical, social as well as symbolic sense and they are peculiarly 'natural' while at the same time hyper-technologized (Nye 2004). In addition, American spaces throughout history have always been interlaced with their virtual, idealist, mythological and in the twentieth century increasingly mediated and commercialized inflections, both internally and globally (see Giles 2002, Lagerkvist 2008). This issue traces the conjunctions of materiality and myth since space here refers to, following Henri Lefebvre, an intersection of the territorial and physical landscapes (spatial practices), the represented spaces of abstraction and planning (representations of space), and the mythical, mediated and lived spaces of representation and symbolism (representational spaces) (Lefebvre 1974/1991). The social production of space is a highly ideological and often violent process that has a particular history in the United States and within its transnational and sometimes imperialist reaches.

America in this reading emerges as a polyvalent spatial configuration, envisaged as covering the 'wilderness' as well as spaces of expansion and progress; the conceived, planned and materialized landscapes and cityscapes as well as the unplanned and decaying fly-over-countries, that is, spaces of scarcity, interruption and ecological ruin. American spaces also cover those strange, unruly and elusive aspects of spatial experience that defy any ultimate definition. They include borderlands and hybrid spaces, one example of which is the heterotopian 'intervals' of the frontiers of the

West in the 19th century. In “Lawless Intervals: Washington Irving’s *Astoria* and the Procession of Empire,” David Watson investigates the amorphous but interferential relationship between two forms of imperialism in U.S. history: one connected to the expansion of the nation state and the other extending transnationally through trade, both however defining the frontier spaces and cultures—the lawless intervals—West of the Mississippi. His argument points to the tensions within U.S. imperial history between commercial and national interests but also between the U.S., grasped as a coherent whole, and American spaces constituting a “deterritorialized aggregate of imperial agents, Native inhabitants, and loosely incorporated [...] territories.” In Watson’s view both forms of imperialism underwrite how American spaces must be conceptualized and represented. His argument also stresses the fundamental interdependency of the order of the settlements and the lawless wildernesses surrounding them.

In “The ‘Feral’ Wilderness: American Studies, Ecoliterature and the Disclosures of American Space” Mark Luccarelli launches the notion of the *feral wilderness* in order to describe places in the U.S. that have been used and then abandoned, crossed over and then simply forgotten about. While there has been a valorization of wilderness in American nature writing, Luccarelli argues that wilderness has functioned as a stand-in for pastoral themes (linked to the sublime or the ‘virgin forest’), and has rarely been examined in its own right. Emerging as an environmental utopia in pastoral writing and landscape art, these idealizations of marginal spaces of the West came under attack by new historicist revisionism for ignoring the slaughter of the Native inhabitants, and the ravaging of the land. In revisiting the structure and premises of this debate—in canonical works by key agents of the discourse, for example Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Leo Marx, and Lewis Mumford—Luccarelli asks what pastoral writing can teach us about wilderness as a socially defined space, and also what the critique possibly omits. His goal is to trace important environmental questions retained in the pastoral but also to identify “the deep structures underlying the way space has been conceived and disposed of in the last 500 years,” concluding on a note of the feral wilderness as a space of value in opposition to the artificial city.

Artificiality arguably reigned as the United States developed, in the course of the twentieth century, into a mass consumer society in which the logic of capitalism infiltrated society, culture, the life world, and in consequence space itself. Place marketing evolved, and in the process places

came under the rule of the economy of the sign. In "The Jack Daniel's Experience: Communal Performances and the Marketing of Place" Torben Huus Larsen discusses the sense of authenticity, slowness, and anti-modernity that Lynchburg, Tennessee, established as its key signifier. Through the whisky associated with Lynchburg, the city thrives on offering the 'Jack Daniel's experience' to visitors in advertising. Black and white photographs portray the simple and rural life of people in Wrangler clothes with all the time in the world. The paradox is of course not only that Lynchburg becomes, in this venture, an artificial sign of the authenticity of the pastoral, but also that the town as an international tourist attraction becomes heavily affected by the hundreds of thousands of tourists who go there every year looking for a realization of a romantic, simple life.

Of utmost importance in American history and culture, in both the 'civilized' and commercialized city, in both the settlements and the wildernesses of nature, was lodging and shelter. The needs and deeds of settlers, immigrants and national subjects produced with time an ideologically heavily burdened spatial formation in the United States: the Home. Ellen Avitts explores this domestic ideology and its current spatial imaginaries in "Home Staging in Twenty-First Century America: Doesn't It Look Like a Happy Place to Live?" Moving through home staging narratives from exterior to interior, followed by an excavation room by room, she seeks out the cultural values concerning family, self and identity inscribed within them. Avitts analyzes the creation and communication of specific family mythologies embedded in home staging literature and in the staged home, thereby illuminating the meanings of this form of house merchandising. How do these spaces shape, and how are they shaped by communally held values and myths? In search for everyday fantasies about the ideal, if not archetypical, American space she revisits Baudrillardian theory of 'simulations' and 'simulacra' to show its continued relevance for understanding American consumer culture and in particular the staged home of 21st-century America.

Not only U.S. citizens on U.S. territory, but also U.S. corporate transfer migrants of today's global economy need to nestle somewhere. In "A Virtual America: Americans and 'American' Spaces in New Shanghai," Amanda Lagerkvist probes parts of the U.S. expatriate community in New Shanghai, and analyzes the virtuality of the spaces of the Chinese-built villa compounds in the Western suburbs of the city, where many of them live—spaces commonly referred to as an 'extended America.' Pitting these against some of the most important theorizations of the virtual bearing on

them, she furthermore asks how 'Americanness' is defined and redefined in the context of a city that aspires to world centrality and futurity. These compound spaces, filled with virtualities of everyday Americana, seem to signal that the West is, in opposition with the U.S. foundational mythology of movement and dynamism, in effect, a fixed space of the past. Moving beyond the notion of the simulacrum, however, she discusses these virtual Americas in terms of lived virtualities, describing the rhythms of these spaces, but also how they become negotiated by the American female expatriates inhabiting them.

Spanning series of tensions—between transnational capital and nationhood; authenticity and commodification/simulation; the wild and the civilized; nature and the domestic; place and non-place—the contributions testify to the fact that spatial imaginaries in American history and culture carry multiple and contradictory meanings (Foucault 1967/1998), meanings that this issue deliberates and sheds new light on.

Works cited

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