

# SPACES OF AFFECTIVITY

## Innovating Interdisciplinary Discourse in Open, “Free” Space

Mary Mills

University of Manchester

millsm@hope.ac.uk

Janet Speake

Liverpool Hope University

speakej@hope.ac.uk / ORCID iD: 0000-0001 9666 9996

### Abstract

This essay presents a reflective narrative on an innovative approach taken to create an open, “free” space in which to share ideas and discuss the theme “Spaces of Affectivity” across the disciplines of arts, humanities, and geography with a focus on the exploration and negotiation of socio-spatial cultural productions of identity. These reflections are based on the planning of two symposia held in 2014 and 2015 under the title Spaces of Affectivity at Liverpool Hope University with the remit of encouraging scholars to stand in their own space and engage with cross-disciplinary discourse. What emerged was a deepening awareness of cross-disciplinary commonalities of spatial discourse that can lead to interfaces between material experience and the human imagination. At its heart is a truly spatial matter which shows the importance of paying careful attention to the mutually influencing forces of human embodiment and the contextualizing environment of nature and cosmos.

### Keywords

cross-disciplinarity, dialectics, geohumanities, identity, spatiality, third space

**About the Authors**

Mary Mills is currently a Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Manchester and a Research Supervisor at Maryvale Institute UK. She is a biblical studies theorist whose recent work has concentrated on the use of interdisciplinary studies for interpretive readings of biblical texts. Her work utilizes narrative criticism and spatiality as a resource for studying the iconography of cities in the Christian Bible.

Janet Speake is a Honorary Research Fellow at Liverpool Hope University and a Visiting Scholar at Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests include the contemporary transformation of urban areas, spaces of affectivity, and the impacts of location-based technologies. Much of her research explores the synergistic interfaces that operate when working within an interdisciplinary context.

We present here a reflective narrative on an innovative approach taken to create an open, “free” space in which to share ideas and discuss the theme “Spaces of Affectivity” across the disciplines with a focus on the exploration and negotiation of socio-spatial cultural productions of identity. Our reflections are based on two one-day symposia on Spaces of Affectivity held at Liverpool Hope University, UK, in July 2014 and September 2015. The theme was chosen because we perceive that research across the disciplines (particularly in the arts and humanities) is often deeply connected to spatiality, even though it is not necessarily in contact with scholars in the geography subject area. This awareness was gained through our own research in textual studies utilizing a cross-disciplinary reading lens (Mary Mills) and the application of critical theory to exploration of human-artefact relationships (Janet Speake).

Our narrative is arranged in three phases. Each phase presents a key facet of the development of open, free space, the exploration of spaces of affectivity and our subsequent reflections. In phase one, we outline the rationale and structure of the symposia and report on the contributions of the presenters. We complete phase one with reflections on what had been learned during the two events. In phase two, we reflect in more depth on the interfaces between the ideas presented and commonalities of the spatial and affective theoretical lens(es) used. Finally, in phase three, we present our philosophical reflections and responses, concluding with our overall insights and evaluations.

We start phase one by presenting the context and rationale for the symposia. The title Spaces of Affectivity was chosen deliberately in order to underline the validity of cross-disciplinary discourse with regard to the role of affective, emotive, and rhetorical forces in creating dynamic human spaces and events, and with acknowledgement of the agency of non-animate subjects. It was open to scholars who thought their own work fits this profile, to nominate papers for the symposia and the range of subjects witnessed, toward a result of free peer choice to interact across discipline borders. We hoped that the diversity of topics, all gathered under a spatial and affective umbrella, would encourage participants to interrogate the apparent division between empirical scientific knowledge and the subjective imagination often explored in arts and humanities. This accords with Ingibjorg Sigurdardottir and Anna-Maija Puroila’s assertions, within an educational setting, that third space<sup>1</sup> is created when seemingly oppositional categories work towards the creation of new knowledge. Constructions of spatiality are themselves colored by social perspectives and as we have reported, objects can acquire an active profile as part of humanity’s attempts to give content to the idea of social value.

In reporting on the Spaces of Affectivity symposia, we encourage readers to reflect further on the interface between material experience and the human imagination and the ways in which physical features gain deep meaning within the symbolic world of human discourse. Our context is that the “affective turn” towards the study of affect and affectivity in cultural geography and geo/humanities has been an important trigger for research at the interface between science, arts, and humanities. Pioneering work on affect by Gilles Deleuze in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Nigel Thrift in *Intensities of Feeling: Towards a Spatial Politics of Affect* and *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*, has had substantial influence on research about encounter and engagement between people and human and non-human objects. At this nexus, the body responds (as affect) to the situation or object. Diverse studies across the disciplines, including our own, have shown that there are valuable insights to be gained from examining people’s affective engagements in everyday life at the interface between people and the objects that they encounter. It was within this framing that our ideas for a symposium in which researchers in affect and space could showcase their work to others in a cross-disciplinary setting emerged.

The first symposium was set up as a stand-alone event on 17 July 2014. As a result of enthusiastic and encouraging feedback from participants and delegates on the first symposium, the second (with the same title) was held on 15 September 2015. The second symposium set out to provide another opportunity to explore and discuss emerging issues relating to spatiality. Each event sought to connect scholars from across a wide spectrum of disciplines in a dialogue about how spatiality acts as a tool through which to study identity, relationship, and difference.

In both symposia, we sought to scope the range of possible interdisciplinary<sup>2</sup> interest in the topic of affective approaches to spatiality, location mapping, spaces and places, and to expand collaboration to a wider cross-disciplinary encounter between human, geographical, and religious sciences. We also wanted to create an environment in which scholars could present work on a topic about which they were passionate, while being energized by hearing about the work of scholars in different fields of knowledge. The overarching aims of both symposia were to: first, provide an appropriate space for researchers in arts, humanities, and geographical sciences to present their spatial projects; second, to encourage interdisciplinary dialogue in arts and humanities; and third, to explore the scope of affective geography within these parameters. The second symposium in 2015 additionally aimed to “expand collaboration to a wider cross-disciplinary encounter between human, geographical, and religious sciences, building on foundations laid down in the first symposium in July 2014.”

The invitation for research contributions for both symposia expressed this framing as follows, “The purpose of this one-day event is to explore the range of possible interdisciplinary interest in the topic of affective approaches to spatiality, location mapping, spaces and places. The day provides for contributions to these fields of study from players in the discussion of how spatiality generates cultural identity and underscores individual and communal explanations of territory and movement through the landscape. This symposium expands collaboration to a wider cross-disciplinary encounter between human, geographical, and religious sciences.” As such, the call for research contributions had an innovative open nature, which was our deliberate choice as convenors. We did not want to tie contributions down by focusing the event on a particular, narrow thematic or one with an overt “interdisciplinary” focus.

Our quest was to be as open as possible to different researchers’/disciplinary understandings and framings of spatiality, and to use these to explore elements of shared or distinctive approaches taken, in order to then reveal possible elements of interdisciplinarity. A serious element of the open character of the call was to “let’s see what happens” when you move away from closely-focused thematic lenses and get away from characteristic discipline-related boundaries and boundedness. It was anticipated that this open approach would encourage interested scholars at all levels of research and would provide an internal academic forum for researchers, teachers, and other staff from across Liverpool Hope University. The events were seen as a collegial venture adopting a supporting, facilitating approach for interested faculty members and others within the University and beyond. To ease access, both symposia were free of charge to delegates, with Liverpool Hope University meeting the costs.

Furthermore, there was no prescribed delivery format so that participants could feel free to present in a way that they felt most appropriate for their work. There was a 40-minutes presentation time-limit in the first symposium and 20-minutes in the second—the latter time allowing for more contributors to showcase their work. A timeslot was also provided for shorter (10 minutes) reporting on spatially-related work. The deliberate decision was also made to not run parallel sessions, so that different themes and approaches could be shared by all. Given our perspective of the importance of promoting dialogue, ample time was built in for more discussion after each presentation and for final plenary group discussion feedback at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions. For each symposium, there was a positive response to our call for contributions with proposed contributions/abstracts being submitted, the vast majority of which had clear relevance to the symposia theme and were subsequently included in the program schedule. These included presentations by interested scholars across all levels of research experience and

from a wide range of subject disciplines in the arts, humanities, and geographical sciences.

The first Spaces of Affectivity symposium in 2014 was attended by ca. 35 delegates from disciplines ranging across the arts, humanities, and also from sciences (including psychology and sports sciences). Seven presentations were given (three in the morning and four in the afternoon sessions). The symposium opened with contributions from the geography subject area because of its inherent spatial nature and its spanning of the human and physical world. David Chester (Geography and Environmental Sciences) started the session by presenting his research conducted with co-researcher Angus Duncan (Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, UK) on “Earthquakes, Volcanoes and God: Theological Perspectives on Natural Disasters.” The key focus was that during the past few decades, there has been a substantial change in both Christian attitudes toward disasters and in the ways in which losses are viewed by hazard researchers. From the perspective of the latter, an approach that envisions disasters as being primarily caused by extreme physical events has been largely replaced by one in which disasters are studied as social constructs, with emphasis being placed on human vulnerability.

This was followed by Janet Speake (Geography and Environmental Sciences) who discussed her work in the cross-disciplinary area of air travel experiences and affective experiences of flight in the presentation “Do You (Really) Want to Know Where You Are? Affectivity and Aerial Spatiality.” This paper addressed a growing cross-disciplinary area of research interest in the experiences of air travel and affective experiences of flight. It explored the theme of the use of new cartographies and place (re)presentations through the lens of moving-maps, which provide passenger information on a plane’s location and other associated data and how people engage and respond affectively to them.

The last presentation of this session was by Peter Siska (Geography and Environmental Sciences), addressing “Cultural ‘TIONS’ and Spaces of Potential Misunderstanding.” In this presentation, border regions (especially central Europe and the south-western USA) were presented as spaces of affectivity where hybrid cultural identities produce unique cultural socio-economic structures, with focus on two “ions”—acculturation and assimilation. The plenary round-table discussion of the morning focused principally on the way in which within the geographical sciences, the human and natural world intersect and thus create opportunities for innovative work, which can develop new strands of intra- and cross-disciplinary research.



The afternoon session started with two 40-minute presentations, the first was by Susan Forde (History and Politics) on “Everywhere and Nowhere: Identifying the Role of Nationalism in the Secularisation of ‘Placeless’ People.” Through the lens of Bosnia and Herzegovina, she explored the distinct role of rationalization in the securitization of perceived “placeless” people. Identifying the phraseology of “placeless” people, she analyzed the subsequent generated threat of “placeless” people to established places and “placed” people. The second was by Mary Mills (Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Manchester) on “Mountain and Valley as Sites of Ritualised Death.” It explored spatial mapping of four Hebrew Bible/Old Testament passages in which the death of humans is presented in a ritualized style—Genesis 22, Judges 11, Joshua 7, and Jeremiah 7:30. In each passage, the theme of sacrifice shapes the story-telling, a mode which touches on human desire for favorable relations with the deity. Interpretive reading tools for the study of narrative texts drew on the work of René Girard and Bruno Latour to study the way in which human use of mountains and valleys imposes upon inanimate sites the identity of death-dealer, both literally and symbolically.

Following these were several shorter inputs under the heading “Other spatial research in progress,” including work by Elizabeth Harris and Elliot Hardman. Elizabeth Harris (Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies) contributed insights into her recent research on “Religion, Space and Conflict in Colonial and Post-Colonial Sri Lanka.” With an overarching premise that in Sri Lanka, diverse historiographies of the land, legacies of colonialism, and decades of colonialism have led to space being a source of conflict, three case studies were given. The first was the “discovery” near Jaffna in the north of the country of the place where the Venerable Sanghamitta landed when she brought a sapling from a tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment in the 3rd Century BCE. The second was in the east where hot springs near Trincomalee, honoured by members of all religious communities for their restorative powers, were being claimed as an exclusively Buddhist site. The last example was a ridge of land near Muttur in the east on which a Buddhist *vihara* was to be built—on one side was a Hindu village and on the other a Muslim village. Concern was expressed that these developments were antithetical to reconciliation in the country.

The final presentation was by Elliot Hardman (Media and Communication Studies) on “Fictional Spaces of Film: The Local vs Global Spaces of Mexican Cinema.” Applying Benedict Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community” and Gilles Deleuze’s “any-space-whatevers,” he explored the construction of local versus global spaces within film through the examination of representations of public and private spheres of Mexico City in *Midaq Alley* and *Amores Perros*.

The afternoon plenary, like the morning's, revealed clearly some of the ways in which study of spaces of affectivity can cut across so-called "disciplinary divides" and open up space for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary exchange of ideas and collaborative work. One of the major outcomes of this dialogue was a request by delegates for another symposium on the same theme—both to find out more about other related work at the University and beyond, and have the chance to feedback on the progress of ongoing research. We discuss our reflections on these issues and the nature of the open "free" space after reporting on the second symposium.

The second Spaces of Affectivity symposium (September 2015) was attended by ca. 40 delegates during the course of the day, with thirteen research projects presented. The event started with the presentation by David Chester (Geography and Environmental Sciences) of his work with Angus Duncan (Department of Geography and Planning, University of Liverpool, UK) and Hamdan Al Ghasyah Dhanani (Department of Risk Management, Dubai Police, Dubai, UAE) on "Volcanic Eruptions, Earthquakes and Islam." The research examined the extent to which eruptions and earthquakes are explained using religious terms of reference within Islamic countries, and those where Muslims constitute a significant minority. The main issue raised was, whether the notion that disasters represent divine punishment is so pervasive that the only reaction for the devout believer is passive acceptance of suffering or, alternatively, whether the innovation of policies of disaster reduction is acceptable theologically.

Janet Speake (Geography and Environmental Sciences) followed with the paper "New Cartography: Where's Geography?" The study of the adoption of Global Positioning Systems (GPS)-based technologies (e.g., satellite navigation) reveals that few geographers are actively engaged in discussions about their impacts. Many of the current transformations in, and engagements with, GPS/navigation technologies and the developing new cartography/ies are taking place beyond the discipline of geography and the geographer's voice (for example, in psychology, computer science, and cognate inter/cross-disciplinary research). This paper asserted that it is now imperative for geographers to seriously consider the ways in which the relationships between geography, geographers, map-creation, and map-use are being transformed and what the fundamental implications for this inherently spatial subject may be.

Next, Niamh Malone (Dance, Drama and Performance) presented her paper "Culture as Contradiction in Urban Regeneration: Sanitization, Commodification and Critical Resistance in Liverpool One." She presented the case of the Liverpool One city center retail center, Liverpool UK, as posing a challenge to Henri Lefèbvre's understanding of the civic purpose and possibilities of city streets. Drawing on recent interventions by young performers, this paper considered the role of the



arts, and artists, in providing a possible antidote to what is widely perceived as the corrosive, identity erasing, profit-driven regeneration projects, exemplified in Liverpool One.

After the morning break, dance ecologist Rachel Sweeney (Dance, Drama and Performance) in her paper introduced “Sandskin | Bloodwater,” her land-water project developed in the Gascoyne region of Western Australia. Working on the themes of climate change and collective sustainable practice responses to recent flooding, she explored cross-disciplinary dialogue surrounding flood management by promoting sensate exchange between the languages of contemporary choreography, physical geography, ecology, and environmentalism. She explored how performance research practices surrounding “Sandskin | Bloodwater” were interwoven between embodied response, domiciled histories of place, and immersive movement practices. Informing a relationship of body, place, and memory, the terms “topographic movement,” “choreography as cartographic process,” and “physical synaesthesia” were used to stimulate further debate on the role of the senses in developing movement responses to flooded environments. Lastly, she reflected on how the body in contemporary site-based dance performance might operate as a shifting site, reflecting current cultural and ecological concerns by directly engaging with matters surrounding sustainability, based on its ability to articulate physically a critical response to interior (anatomical) and exterior (environmental) states.

Owen Barden (Education), in his paper “Heterotopic Affinity Spaces,” proposed a new way of thinking about a contemporary educational space which combines two established spatial metaphors to develop an enhanced understanding of a contemporary educational configuration. Drawing on the ways in which a Sixth Form (high school years 12 and 13) “dyslexia support workshop” was reconfigured into a space which exhibits features of both a heterotopia and an affinity space, he asserted that this space exhibited both features yet neither of these concepts by itself adequately explains the character of the space. Heterotopia does not adequately account for the shared learning endeavor, and affinity space is insufficient because it does not adequately account for the Otherness of the space. A new hybrid concept of *heterotopic affinity space* was proposed as a way of better understanding the project space, and as a tool for helping us think more clearly about contemporary educational spaces. Barden’s work, “Heterotopic Affinity Spaces,” has subsequently been published.

The roundtable group plenary discussion honed in, with vivid expressions of fascination by many participants, to the varied ways in which the work of well-known spatial theorists (particularly Lefèbvre) had been interpreted and applied

during the day's presentations in the contexts of different disciplines. This we return to discuss later.

In the first paper of the afternoon "Jews in the Postwar Stalinist Space, 1945-53," Christopher Williams (History and Politics) assessed, on the basis of Russian archival and other material, the historical debates on Soviet policy on the Jews in the USSR and analyzed how the Stalinist state from 1928 to 1953, tried to gradually exclude the Jews from the cultural landscape. The focus was on the anti-cosmopolitan campaign of 1947-1953 which defined Jews as "rootless" non-Russian patriots who threatened the integrity of the Russian state and post-war Soviet space. It concluded with assessing Soviet ideas of "space" and "place" and evaluating the impact this had on Soviet Jews and their communities, cultures, and traditions as well as how this influenced their attitudes to the Soviet state and their place in it.

Elliot Hardman (Media and Communication) then presented "Transnational Cinema and Film Geography: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue" in which he explored the construction of local versus global spaces within film, building on the work he presented in the previous symposium. In again examining the two films from Mexico, *Midaq Alley* and *Amores Perros*, he illuminated the complexities of how space is depicted on screen, in particular the representations of the public and private spheres of urban spaces.

Mary Mills (Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies, University of Manchester), in "Locating the Prophet: Political Geography in Jeremiah 26-28," examined the geopolitical concerns of Jeremiah 26-28, from the basis that its prose narratives provide a literary mimesis of issues of territoriality and cultural models of a colonial community. Drawing on political geography and on postcolonial theory, she argued that the text witnesses a state of ambivalence within the kingdom as to its capacity to own its homeland and to the struggle between collaboration and resistance with regard to empire.

Simon Podmore (Theology, Philosophy and Religious Studies), in "How Dreadful is This Place': Spaces of the Numinous," explored the idea that the Numinous evokes elements of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (a mystery eliciting fear and longing) in the encounter with the Holy in a manner which, he suggested, attests to an under-examined significance of place in the encounter between self and God (the *Numen*). This paper gestured towards a topology of the Numinous in relation to an analogous theory of the Romantic Sublime, illustrated further with reference to biblical and mystical motifs. This topology of the Numinous devotes particular focus on the notion of "creature-feeling" (*Kreatur-gefühl*): the irresistible sense of oneself as "but dust and ashes" before the Creator God. This "feeling" constitutes a form of self-abnegating self-consciousness which identifies oneself with the earth

while at the same moment dislocating the self within a creation transfigured and possessed by God. Through consideration of biblical numinous theophanies, he showed how the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) dimension of Creation and the Wholly Other Creator is impressed upon the human creature in a way which reveals and conceals hidden spaces of the Holy.

Akin to the first symposium, the final presentations of the day were presented as reports of other spatial research in progress, starting with William Blazek (English), who gave a summary of some of his key ideas about space explored especially in his publications about First World War literature and narrated space, such as “Artistry and Primitivism in The Enormous Room.”

Feng Su (Education) provided insights into research conducted with Margaret Wood (York St. John University, UK) on “Space, Place and Academic Leadership.” This work advanced a socio-spatial understanding of academic leadership, which they argued should be attentive to contextualization. Su elaborated their concepts of “space” in terms of subjective interpretations of lived experiences, and of “place” as contextualized physical locale or setting. Their perspective of leadership through the lens of leadership spaces and contexts (places) offers an alternative perspective to the prevalent narrowly reductionist discourse of academic leadership typically constructed in terms of universalized leadership skills, attributes, traits, styles and so on. Contending that we cannot separate people from the contexts of their experiences, they drew on the work of Tuan on space and place, as presented in “Space, Place, and Nature: The Farewell Lecture,” to develop and apply his idea that place can impart qualities which influence who and what leaders are and become.

Annalaura Alifuoco (Dance, Drama and Performance) reported on her work “No-Thing, What of That? Body Politics and Affects.” Framed within aesthetics, she explored philosophical, phenomenological, political, and ethical considerations on “body,” “incorporeality,” and “disembodiment.” Its premise was to show how form-shifting and shape-lacking corporeal forms emerge within the frame of “the event” of experience as the virtual (id)entities for subjective (trans)formation (Foucault), and as the critical spaces for moves of dissensus (Rancière). Her interests intersect expressions of the “virtual event” (Massumi) with radical and non-normative modes of being, feeling, desiring, and imagining (with and without the body). These arguments reconnect the paradoxes and tensions in the work of immateriality and affect by focusing on the non-objectual sense and sensibility of not wholly human forms, including new echoes, resonances, and rhythms of “lived” practices and “alive” experiences. Situating the fractal spatiality (and temporality) of the “body without an image” (Massumi) as an active, transformative sense that escapes representational perception, she addressed the experience of “phantom syndromes” and the diverse ways in which it creates a metaphoric and metamorphic (rather

than representational) return to the affected and affective body of things. Such an approach, Alifucoco argued, opens up a gap in space and a suspension of time that exercises pressure on the social and the corporeal matter of the “whole” body-identity which can generate changes in, or understandings of, natural, cultural and virtual bodies, where “body” and “identity” are understood not as complete entities, but as always already expanded and extendable.

Alan Hodkinson’s (Education) work, “‘Safe Spaces’ in Education: The Marginalisation of Places of Equality and Social Justice,” was reported on briefly in the context of the general concept of space and specifically the use of safe space as an educational “buzzword.” He examined the history of space through summative snapshots of the periods of inertia, the rapid development of spatial theories, and an analysis of safety. Using the analogy of weaving fabric, he explained how this was the “warp” that threads his analysis together. The “weft” of the analysis was detailed through an examination of school electronic media and through five provocations. He emplaced the argument that safe spaces are actually not safe, but are in reality “warped spaces” in which landscapes of inequality reveal topographies of despair—mimicking modern capitalist and technological development.

Like the first, the second symposium was received enthusiastically by participants. In its concluding discussions, suggestions were made to further share ideas and for colleagues, individually and collectively (for example in departments and faculties), to reflect on what had been learned during the symposia. Colleagues expressed the wish to continue the dialogue, collaborate with each other and reflect, and whenever appropriate, incorporate newfound insights into their research. Several of the participants who had presented their research at the symposia had already published or intended to publish their work; many of the studies have been published subsequently (which we refer to elsewhere in the essay and in works cited). As an example, Su acknowledges that his article, “‘Place,’ ‘Space,’ and ‘Dialogue’: Conceptualising Dialogic Spatiality in English Faith-Based Universities,” was developed from the paper given at the Spaces of Affectivity symposium in September 2015.

To round up phase one of the essay, both symposia, operating as open, inclusive and “free” space, were successful on a number of practical levels. This included the positive response to the free call for contributions. Responses to the open presentational format and interest in “mixing-up formats” resulted in less-conventional deliveries—including Rachel Sweeney’s pictorial essay and several image-centered deliveries, such as those by Niamh Malone and Janet Speake, as well as more conventional modes such as read papers and text-based presentations.

It was also evident that the symposia had for many of us generated deeper understanding of the fruitful nature of interdisciplinary research. Our approach of “let’s see what happens when we move away from traditional disciplinary lenses and boundaries” proved illuminating and valuable. This approach showed clearly the fruitfulness of engagement across arts, humanities, and geography—each contributor presented on a topic about which they were passionate, while being energized by hearing about the work of scholars in different fields of knowledge. All presenters were using tools of spatiality and knew what they were “doing with space.” In dealing with their chosen spatial tools, they presented examples of genuine, informed spatiality. Intriguingly, the use of the common language of spatiality was lit up by their use of different tools and discipline-specific perspectives and interpretations. Initially, there seemed to be uncertainty for several participants about what to expect from listening to other studies from disciplines. However, as time progressed, there was growing curiosity and awareness of how learning about how the use of the basic spatial tools within other disciplines might inform their own research as well as of the potential synergies which might be accrued from reaching across discipline borders.

This environment, we conceive of as being a form of open, free, Lefèbvrian third space in which transformations take place. We believe that the symposia were distinctive in offering an alternative to usual practice which tends to claim to be “doing” spatial, “doing” interdisciplinarity with a nod in the direction of spatial theory, followed by material which presents standard, routine methodologies framed within the normative discipline boundaries of individual and cognate subjects. We encouraged the crossing of borders and discipline-imposed territorialization in order to find and explore interdisciplinary common ground.

We now move onto phase two of the essay in which we consider the papers presented from the perspective of the relevant interdisciplinary literature on which our reflections build. One clear point of location for the interdisciplinary enterprise is the concept of geohumanities (Dear et al.). We argue, from our experience of engaging in the symposia, that humanities, arts, and geography provide subjects which mutually expand the intellectual horizons of concepts of identity, relationship, and difference. Mutual benefit occurs when these concepts receive attention in parallel research fields and when individual scholars perceive what their interdisciplinary colleagues are achieving in exploring, for instance, the public spaces of urban environments—whether this is to challenge privatization of urban wastelands or to evaluate the use of scenes in modern films.

Common ground for all these endeavors is rooted in modern critical theory, in the work of geographers such as Doreen Massey, Edward Soja, and Nigel Thrift, for example. These scholars, in turn, have at their base a connection to the work



of philosophers and sociologists—in particular the theories of space provided by Henri Lefèbvre. Soja’s concept of First, Second and Thirdspace, for instance, provides a version of Lefèbvre’s layered approach to space as material, conceptual, and experienced.<sup>3</sup> As noted by Jon Berquist, Lefèbvre was keen to dismiss the separation between space as pure form, an abstract theory, from applied space, as found in everyday places (4). In his perspective, there is no neutral space but rather all spatial concepts reflect human projects to control and manage the delivery of spatial sites; such management relates to human hopes and fears such as a desire for freedom and difference in postmodern thought. Hence, space and affectivity can be seen as symbiotic agents in the production of material sites. As a major contemporary of Lefèbvre, Edward Soja’s concept of Thirdspace [*sic*] is particularly important in providing a lens for the symposia. It offers the vision of creating a space in which the presumption is of positive affective engagement across disciplinary borders.

Spatial research, in this context, involves examination of the many and various ways by which humans modify space via their usages and also physical changes to sites, for example, Mark George in *Space and History: Siting Critical Space for Biblical Studies* (27). Close attention to real-life spatial praxis reveals that the three dimensions noted by Lefèbvre and Soja do not stand in isolation from one another. Lefèbvre himself sometimes morphs from one dimension to another, blurring the distinctions between categories. As Huie-Jolly remarks “their boundaries are blurred. They morph from one to another . . . and gain new resonance when placed in conversation with other theorists” (51). Within the framework of the symposia, the ‘other theorists’ come from the several subject disciplines represented by participants, with their own research adding to, redefining, and re-using the foundational spatialities of classic scholarship in exploring production of space.

As Rachel Sweeney’s work entitled “Sandskin | Bloodwater” demonstrates, Lefèbvre’s work on the production of space and his understandings of third space—an open and free space—provided context for the symposia, which was both open in terms of purpose and scenario, and free in that researchers learn of and from others’ work, responding to it as it touched upon their own understandings. Sweeney emphasized the ways in which placing an alien body in a community site of tragic experience serves to encourage that community to deepen their experience of traumatic experience. Her work that draws on the Lefèbvrian view of third space as imaginary space between conceptual space and material space, alluding to the porosity of borders, provided a scenario for both the organizational dimension of the symposia and the ensuing discourse. Sweeney’s research also illustrated the importance of imaginary spaces as she examined the capacity of the body-installation to promote environmental reflection on the relations between land, earth, and body in Australian topographies. This is one case study of the



ways in which, even though not mentioned or alluded to in any of the promotional material or call for papers for the symposia, Lefèbvre's work proved a significant reference point for presenters. Their work aligned with his theories in *The Production of Space*, revealing interests in how human beings create and use space and place to construct their understanding of society, insofar as their explorations of social meaning of places such as mountains, streets, and volcanoes draw on the relationships between physical sites, abstract spatial construction, and the lived experience of places.

As noted above with regard to the work of Rachel Sweeney, the symposia elicited valuable interventions regarding the nature of space and place-based activity in performance of cultural identity. Other examples of such engagements are found in studies of the role and function of streets in cities. Niamh Malone's presentation on "Culture as Contradiction in Urban Regeneration" (published in *Kritika Kultura* 30/31), is one such study of the tension between private and public presence in, and ownership of, urban streets. Susan Forde's work "Everywhere and Nowhere" in Bosnia and Herzegovina provides another case study exploring the reaction to, and treatment of, people viewed as outsiders on local streets. Elliot Hardman's reflections on transnational cinema in Mexico offers a parallel reflection on the socio-political role of street settings for plot action, while Elizabeth Harris's exploration of commemorative spaces in Sri Lanka highlights the manner in which competing political regimes attempt political dominance via temple-building projects.

Whereas the papers noted above emerge from the disciplines of performance art, Janet Speake's paper "Do You (Really) Want to Know Where You Are? Affectivity and Aerial Spatiality" demonstrates the parallel interest of cultural geography in spatial location and navigation. Here, Speake builds on her paper "I've Got My Sat Nav, It's Alright" to investigate how scientific tools such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) gain an extra dimension of functionality when explored in relation to human affectivity—in the areas of (dis)orientation, security and being, and/or feeling lost.

As with Harris's paper, another key interdisciplinary engagement in spatial studies links science and religion. Whereas Harris dealt with building projects, the work of David Chester, Angus Duncan, and Hamdan al Ghasyah Dhanani in "Earthquakes, Volcanoes and God" demonstrates the ways in which religious systems of belief provide tools for explaining cause and effect in conditions of unforeseen national or regional disaster. Their perspectives on the roles of earth scientists working on disaster risk reduction and interpreters of the social effects of religion in times of disaster prove the value in a free and open interchange across subject fields in arts, humanities, and sciences. These themes have subsequently been extended

and explored in the paper by David Chester, Angus Duncan, and Janet Speake's "Earthquakes, Volcanoes and God: Comparative Perspectives from Christianity and Islam," published in the interdisciplinary-oriented journal *GeoHumanities*.

A particular emphasis which emerged from the dialogues that occurred in question and answer responses to the papers mentioned above is that of the value of flows. The movement away from static concepts of reality and towards a porous perception (Massey) as set out in the work of Gilles Deleuze, with his theory of the Body without Organs, also proved a useful spatial tool. In this theory, the body is defined not as a single organism nor a lived body, but as having indeterminate organs or transient organs (Deleuze and Guattari). In her work "Alterity, Pain and Suffering in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel," Mills used this theory to reflect on the profiling of identity as a concept of multiples rather than a single process (14). Mills argues for the value of Deleuze's view that map is not grid, that mapping is an exercise not closed in on itself but one that removes the blockages to energy transfer which closed boundaries invoke, as a valid interpretive mode by which to examine prophets, their bodies, and socio-cultural explanations of historical events.

In Deleuze's approach, there is no radical separation between film—settings engaging with determinate, geographical, historical, and social space-time—and the engagement with fantasy, fiction, and dream milieux (159). This perspective provides a platform for the work of Annalaura Alifuoco, whose paper explores the themes of shape-shifting within the field of aesthetics and embodiment. Drawing on the work of Foucault and Rancière, she conducts an examination of how shape-shifting and shape-lacking corporeal forms emerge within experiential events. She links embodiment, affectivity, and spatio-temporality to create a definition of corporeality as "factual no-thing-ness"—subverting binary measurements of identity and relationship, whether these be object/subject or nature/culture. In this way, she points to the "absence of social meaning" as inherent to human self-awareness, together with the destabilization of "subjective integrity" as a strong concept on which to construct larger paradigms of community, society, and culture, themes also visited in *Nothing Here Yet Speaks, Again* and *In the Event of a Wound: Vi(r)t(u)al Archives of Flesh and Blood*.

From dynamism in regard of the social production of space, via Deleuze's engagement with inanimate "subjects," there is a short step to Latour's Actor Network Theory. Once again, the view emerges that "society" is not a static, abstractly defined entity but constantly in motion and re-shaping surfaces. Mills's paper on mountains and valleys as sites of ritualized death in biblical texts seeks to explore the variety of ways in which plot agency in narratives is given to topographical sites of high and low land. This in turn provides, within the primary texts, a social commentary on the benefit to the community of individuals sacrificed for the greater good of

the wider community. As Latour observes in *Reassembling the Social*, the social as an “object of performative definition vanishes when it is no longer performed” (37). This performance of the social is a complex matter because “mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning they are supposed to carry” (39). As with Deleuze’s range of actors from human person to time and season, so Latour defines “agent” as any reality which contributes to the performance of social identity.

This constant fluidity in any social map leads Latour to argue that society and system are concepts which do not exist as absolute, singular entities. Rather, there exists a transient reality created through the intersection of agencies involved (108). As noted by Murdoch, non-animate actors have equal agency with animate beings, while the total scope of the social is contained not in any one actor but in the flows of energy along the networks of agency. As Mills’s paper suggests, mountains and valleys as sites of ritualized death provide an affective agency that communicates social values to readers. This interest in affective geography from a humanities angle is paralleled in Speake’s paper “Do You (Really) Want to Know Where You Are?” by the sciences approach to the affective links between artefacts and human users of them—in this instance, the moving maps made available on smart phone applications. At its core lies the issue of how human beings map their localities and thus provide geographic frame to support a sense of self-identity. This is achieved by an emotive attachment to the smart phone map where the moving dot indicates subjective location. Energy flows between phone and person to bolster optimism and sense of purpose. When the device malfunctions, however, feelings of being lost, disoriented, and lacking direction emerge.

The work of Simon Podmore, whose field is philosophy and religion, adds further aspects to affectivity and space. In his study “How Dreadful is this Place,” a philosophical interrogation of the nature and function of the abyss, Podmore moves from human bodies to textual bodies and to the symbiosis between philosophical explanation and emotions of fear and loss. Subsequently, his further reflections on the numinous of topology are presented in “Theophany of the Abyss, Job and the Negative Numinous” and in Chapter 2 of *Dark Night of the Holy: Apophatic Abyss and Negative Numinous*.

In drawing phase two to a close, we have provided reflections on the papers in the context of the relevant interdisciplinary literature to demonstrate that despite (pre)conceived disciplinary boundaries, there were multiple (sometimes unexpected) commonalities.

Moving on now to the third and final phase of the essay, we present our own philosophical responses and overall evaluations of the symposia. The generic impact of listening to multiple presentations led participants to reflect further on

the interface between material experience and the human imagination, in which physical features gain deep meaning within the symbolic world of human discourse, while retaining material visibility in the physical environment. At base, this is a truly spatial matter which demonstrates the importance of paying careful attention to the mutually influencing forces of human embodiment and the contextualizing environment of nature and cosmos. In the contemporary world of ideas, attention is turning to environmental and ecological concerns, together with a growing sense that planet Earth could manage its own affairs without human intervention.

One aspect of the broadly ethical aspect of this awareness concerns the autonomy not only of other animals, but also of what may appear to be passive objects such as water sources and climate under the title of attunement (Sexton et al.; Wilson). This concept indicates the ways in which the independent value of non-animate entities takes centerstage in scholarly research. Discussion of the independent subjectivity of material sites does not happen only because care for the planet, vital for human security, requires careful scrutiny of sites such as sand dunes and tectonic plates. Debates have the greater benefit of providing a tool for a better understanding of material places and cosmic forces, as they operate both outside human impact and within the managed world of human control of their energies. From this perspective, humanity is encouraged to give due respect to earthly realities. One key tool for communicating a moral sense of nature is to be found in the imagination, individual and communal, which by arousing emotive reactions to a range of natural beings, marks both the intimacy of relationship between human beings and their environmental partners, and yet underlines the individuation of each such entity. In this context, it can be argued, language about space and place coheres with materiality such that metaphor and symbol perform social grasp of physicality. The physical order, meanwhile, remains outside the iconographies which human groups develop as common tools for addressing social meaning and values.

Enquiry into spaces of affectivity applies not only to artistic, philosophical, socio-cultural responses to lived experience but also to evaluation of the social profile of education. Su and Wood's paper sought to deconstruct a contemporary view of academic leadership as the acquisition of a universalized skill set. Regarding this view as a reductionist approach to the topic, Su and Wood suggest the importance of considering a socio-spatial approach to educational theory via specific contextualization, echoing the fundamental approach of Lefèbvre to the production of space and place, as that which carries the sense of "homeliness" (see also Su, "'Place', 'Space' and 'Dialogue'"). Drawing on the work of Tuan and his body-modeling of geographical measurement, they argued that places impart qualities which influence who and what leaders are and can become. Hodkinson's paper "'Safe Spaces' in Education. The Marginalisation of Places of Equality and

Social Justice” not only surveys the development of spatial theory historically but weaves into this “warp” understanding derived from case studies as “weft.” The whole cloth produced by this method of working tackles the use of the phrase ‘safe spaces’ as an ideal identity marker for classrooms, aligning theory with examination of electronic media. In this process, Hodkinson, in building an earlier piece, “‘Safe Spaces’ in Education: Ghettos of Marginalization and Dominance/or Places of Equality and Social Justice?” balances a utopian approach to space with the dystopias he identifies in specific educational contexts.

These approaches to explaining reality align with the prevailing interest in affective geography as shown, for instance, in Thrift’s work. Viewed from the angle of emotive power, objects become subjects, agents of social construction alongside human actors. Performance art demonstrates ways in which co-impacting agency can occur. Bodily placing in specific spaces not only highlights social responses but also provides a tool for political commentary on the practice of commerce in a contemporary shopping mall. To sum up, then, it became clear that the symposia had been productive in eliciting work across disciplines, filling a gap in current scholarship regarding the nature of space and place-based actions by bringing to bear the role of spatiality to situate and give meaning to human affairs—on the streets, in performance, in narratives. Working from the other end, scientific and technological tools such as GPS gain an extra dimension when human interaction with the use of such tools is examined. The space in scholarship which these essays address is encompassed with the term geohumanities. The underlying principle of the symposia was that humanities, arts, and geography mutually expand intellectual horizons when they receive the fruits of research in parallel fields and perceive what scholars more widely are achieving in space- and place-related projects—often linked to the use of contemporary critical theory, as with the work of Henri Lefèbvre.

Indeed, the symposia papers overall reflected the value of taking seriously Lefèbvre’s argument in the *Production of Space* that “a materialist Marxist view of the making of space” (33) is controverted by Thirdspace, which deals with social, experiential engagement with material environments. Lefèbvre also notes that there is no “radical separation between works of art and products,” such as to “imply the work’s total transcendence of the product” (77). Hence “social space cannot be adequately accounted for either by nature, climate, site. Forms of production alone do not give rise to particular social situations in a particular site” (77). The production of social space is a complex and multi-faceted dynamic which the symposia aimed to address. In dealing with the nature of relations between artefacts, intellectual modes of thought and case studies of lived experience participants from performing arts, education, philosophy, religion, and geography provided a rich agenda of papers, all of which expanded conceptualization of social



meaning via the use of a spatial, often visual, paradigm. The papers demonstrated both the value of employing classic tools such as a three-dimensional definition of space and, at the same time, interrogated the scope of spatiality as interpretive lens.

Within this overall setting, three stand-out features of the symposia were clear.

- First, the individual and collective discovery that, despite (pre)conceived disciplinary boundaries, there were (un)expected multiple commonalities.
- Second, the challenge to an individual's reflections on their version of their own research lens through having heard from and talked with Others about 'their' interpretation of the same theorists.
- Third, awakening awareness of new themes and opportunities to discuss and explore them.

If the first of these eventualities encourages collegiality as a counter to the common separation of academics into segregated departments and faculties, the second provides a fresh and invigorating challenge to researchers within a discipline both to communicate clearly their version of spatial practice to colleagues from outside a given subject field and to receive and embed reactions to their theoretical lenses and material examples emerging from a wider academic community into their own working definitions of space and place. With regard to the third point noted above, such open cross-disciplinary dialogue morphs smoothly into a more interdisciplinary mode, in which collaborative projects across subject boundaries are key. An illustrative case in point here was the interest of those working in the performing arts with spatiality as viewed through the lens of theology.

The imperative for engaging in cross-disciplinary communication that can lead to interdisciplinary collaboration between colleagues has permeated discourse during the symposia and subsequently. Participants in the events discovered interest, excitement, and energy to work anew on both their own research initiatives and those of others. In this context, the symposia extended the investigation into space and affectivity not only via research products but through the renewal of the human researcher, in such a manner as to make it proper to speak of spaces *of* affectivity. The core content of a space of affectivity, it can be suggested, is the symposium itself. Viewed from that angle, the predominant theme of the events is found in commonality of words, a view exemplified by the post-symposia reflections of Alan Hodgkinson that:

Within the working, and sometimes machinations, of this interdisciplinary group it has become apparent how individual words have come to dominate discussions.



Whilst it is obvious that we all have a commonality of words and phrases, it is in the operationalisation of words such as space that our different and differing interpretations surface. Our interpretations, it seems, are bounded, controlled and regulated by subject “dialects” and dialectics that impose a further gulf between signifiers and the signified and renders our unique disciplines as a discipline that threatens to make our group less interdisciplinary and more intradisciplinary. Our work then within the realms of geohumanities seeks through “provocations” to each other and within and between subject boundaries to create a new common discourse for analysis.

We press for the development of this common “free” space in which this discourse may be framed and developed, while at the same time our subject “dialects.” This discourse continues apace. Performing arts and education in particular, push forward the explorations of third space and open, “free” space, and take a lead in developing our understandings of space and materiality as never being neutral, and of our inherent capacity to create our own transformative and transformational space. It is intriguing, exciting, and challenging work in progress, ripe for further and additional exploration.

## NOTES

1. Conceptualizations of third space generally refer to a radical, in-between, and Other space, which due to specific societal and spatial interactions, can generate the potential for social, political, and economic transformation of everyday life. As such, third space has been utilized to explore transformation within specific spaces by disciplines within arts (especially the performing arts), humanities, social sciences, and education—within specific subject, cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts (see Bustin and Speake). Much of this work is grounded in Henri Lefèbvre’s *The Production of Space* but also in the ideas of third space developed by Homi Bhaba and Edward Soja. In relation to the Spaces of Affectivity symposia, the ideas of Lefèbvre and, in particular, Soja on third space (especially of the spatialities of realities, representation, and perception and the potential for transformation) were a major motivating influence. At the core of these conceptualizations of third space is how people’s lives in real space (Lefèbvre)/ First Space (Soja) are influenced by representational space/Second Space to create real and imagined space/Thirdspace. In his book *Postmetropolis*, Soja describes Thirdspace as “a fully lived space, a simultaneous real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency” (11).
2. At the start of setting up the symposia, the proposal was to engage in cross-disciplinary discourse. So, the dynamic was to encourage academic colleagues to move beyond the horizons of their specific subject discipline to listen and respond to research emerging from an “alien” field. As the presentations moved through and especially within the round table discussion, participants encountered approaches to space in a different discipline that resonated with their own spatial methodology. They moved intellectually across borders and performed an interdisciplinary style of dialogue in which the Other is no longer the outsider but functions as an insider within a common discourse.
3. Lefèbvre’s *The Production of Space* is a key iteration of this. See also Note 1.

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