

Introduction

Narrating Place-Relations

There is no obvious way to begin a discussion of human place-relations and spatiality in modern culture. There are few if any conventions that shape spatial analyses and theories. Discussions of human spatiality are shaped more by the diverse interests of those who engage in them—architectural, geographical, social scientific, literary, cultural critical, philosophical, religious, and so on—than by agreement. One consequence of this scattering is that the categories that control discussions of human spatiality are not fixed. As the editors of a recent volume on space point out, the term “space” is used “with such abandon that its meanings run into each other before they have been properly interrogated.”¹ A second consequence is that questions of places and of our relations to them appear more elusive and complex than, perhaps, they need to. A third is that in this area there are many competent and interesting contributors but no dominant or authoritative voice, school, or method.

Another way to make this point is to say that place and space have not had the kind of systematic and widespread attention in modernity that has been given to time and temporality. Perhaps this is because time, by its vulnerability to abstraction and measurement, is more philosophically engaging than space. Kant, in his early discussions of space, subordinates spatiality to temporality precisely because spatial relations are more physical. Time, thereby, is judged as more universal, and time, he contends, includes, with everything else, space.² Michel Foucault gives a different answer. He believes that questions of place and space have been the province of military and political interests, largely leaving to philosophy the more abstract prob-

lem of time.³ A third answer lies in an argument I recently made that a major shift in early modern culture occurred with Vico's application of Bacon's method of reading nature to reading history. Bacon read nature as a second scripture that was not optional but necessary if one is to know God, and Vico applied that practice to reading the history of nonbiblical peoples as scripture. Hegel added a crucial ingredient to Vico's shift when he dissolved the distinction between the histories of biblical and nonbiblical peoples and posited reading history as a way by which the effects of Providence are actualized. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, reading history as scripture, while at first it complemented reading the Bible, eventually displaced it.⁴

Without attempting to be exhaustive, I want to suggest another answer to the question of why in modern culture theories of time and history upstage theories of space and place. Modern culture was able to adjust to the loss of shared religious beliefs as they apply to temporality as it was not able to adjust to that loss in regard to spatiality. The loss of a shared ultimate beginning and ending, of Creation and Apocalypse, was redressed by the elevation of moments within history as decisive. Christianity already had done this by affirming the birth of Jesus as a beginning point that rivaled, if it did not overshadow, the beginning marked by Creation. Marking historical watersheds and distinguishing periods in history became part of Christian culture, and in the modern period identifying epochs and contrasting eras became characteristic acts, if not self-defining obsessions. Monarchies, political revolutions, radical cultural shifts: these all serve to mark decisive beginnings and endings, and modern culture can, perhaps, be no more accurately characterized than by the assumption it carries about itself as a period sharply distinguished in nature and value from what preceded it.

The erosion of the dominant religious view regarding ultimate places and their stabilizing and normative status could not so readily be redressed. The growth of cities in the nineteenth century did not add to but diluted the authority and prestige of their resident churches. The distinction between sacred and profane, while in some respects it may have become clearer, also became less important. Indeed, authority and prestige shift to the nonecclesiastical monuments of urban space. The relation of human orientations and interests to good and evil places, ultimately to heaven or to hell, along with the authority those locations traditionally carried, dwindled in their public currency. No culturally shared or conventionally stable alternatives were found by which the relation of particular places to the contrary poles of ultimate good and evil could be judged.

Time and history have largely defined modern culture, consequently, more than have space, place, and understandings of them. But in recent decades this situation has been altered. Fredric Jameson writes, "I think it is

at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism proper.”⁵ Michel Foucault also notes the recent cultural turn from the dominance of time to a dominance of place and space: “the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.”⁶ The influential geographer Edward Soja argues that one of the most important intellectual and political developments of the latter half of the twentieth century is that “a growing community of scholars and citizens has, for perhaps the first time, begun to think about the spatiality of human life in much the same way that we have persistently approached life’s intrinsic and richly revealing historical and social qualities.”⁷ If such a shift has occurred, and I think that it has, it could be taken as one of the signs that distinguish modernity from the rise of a postmodern culture.

However, I think it is mistaken to distinguish a postmodern from a modern culture sharply. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultural history, while it gave a temporal orientation to modernity, was also a history of changing places, relations to place, and spatial understandings. That history came to be read as an increasingly costly one. Places and relations to them formed a subtext to the progressive “scriptural” text of modern history. This subtext gradually, although at times also abruptly, emerged as dominant. Perhaps it would be helpful to rehearse some moments in this subtext and to suggest how and why its dominance occurred.

One often noted change in England in the early part of the nineteenth century was its shift from an agricultural to an industrial society. Agricultural products, both for consumption and manufacture, were increasingly imported, especially from the Americas and Australia. This change in large part accounts for an accompanying move from a rural and small town to an urban population. By the mid-nineteenth century, the balance tipped demographically in placing a majority of the population in cities. During the same time, imperialism and colonialism changed England from a small island nation to the center of a world empire. This expansion brought with it its own questions and problems so that by the end of the nineteenth century the relation of England to people in faraway places and other cultures began to be seen as complicated and often problematic. All of these changes affected London in particular, since it underwent rapid growth and emerged not only as a huge city relative to the rest of England but also as a great commercial center. Its identity was as much determined by the empire and its relations to

other great cities as to the rest of England. Since London needed to be connected and in constant reliable contact with other cities, efficient means of transportation and communication developed, and they altered spatial orientations. In all these respects, London was not an exception or aberration but an epitome and norm. As Malcolm Bradbury puts it, “London increasingly comes to typify the great city of modernity.”⁸ These many changes—industrialization, urbanization, empire, and transportation/communication—while concentrated in London, were widely felt, and they combined to create enormous shifts in place-relations and orientations to and understandings of human space. While nineteenth-century culture must be understood in terms of its preoccupation with history, that history must also be understood as marked by place changes, spatial dislocations, and reorientations.

From the Romantics down to the close of the nineteenth and opening years of twentieth century, this history of change began to be read as taking a toll on the well-being of English life, including its moral and spiritual well-being. While there was much on the surface that spoke of confidence and optimism, there was also a growing sense of foreboding. It became difficult for some to read this history as a story of progress, particularly as a story of the coincidence of English history and divine Providence. As the society was becoming complex, destabilized, and dislocated, its religious identity became, especially after 1859, less assured. Evolutionary theories and German biblical scholarship had their impact on English culture at just the time when it was becoming, for these other reasons, less unified and secure. And London, the principal product of this history of change, came increasingly to be viewed as a “modern Babylon,” a place offering “manifold opportunities for Sin.”⁹

The minority voices of concern and warning turned into a widespread sense of loss during and after the First World War. All of the misgivings about changes wrought by events in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries found their justification and intensification in a war that was, among other things, dislocating and disorienting. History could now be read far more clearly as a story not of advancement but of loss, even of violence and of a human evil heretofore concealed by the deceptions and illusions of culture. This reading of history continued in the twentieth century and found support in economic depression and, even more, in the Second World War. What emerged to displace a confidence in and identification with history was a sense of having been betrayed by it, “conned,” as William Golding put it, into a great “mincing machine.”¹⁰

Along with an altered sense of history’s meaning, of history not as support but as betrayal, late modern culture, increasingly in the second half of the twentieth century, could no longer look to history as a source of cultural

identity and unity. Rather than thinking of history as culturally inclusive, the particularity of peoples, their separate histories and social locations, came increasingly to the fore. As Gianni Vattimo puts it: “There is no single history, only images of the past projected from different points of view. It is illusory to think that there exists a supreme or comprehensive viewpoint capable of unifying all others.”¹¹ This relativizing of history deprived it of its capacity to unify diverse peoples, and places more and more performed that function, especially urban locations and markets. Advanced capitalism and economic relations increasingly served to unify peoples spatially, howbeit commercially, with the effect of what we now refer to as globalization.

This brief and selective history supports the claim that attempts clearly to date the ending of modernism slight the continuities that tie the present with the early decades of the nineteenth century. Along the way, important shifts were noticed, whether Henry Adams’s 1900, Virginia Woolf’s 1910, or D. H. Lawrence’s 1915, but these mark changes in awareness, signals that what had been going on for some time should be taken starkly into account.¹² The subtext of rapidly changing places began to challenge the “scriptural” status of history. A shift becomes noticeable in the last quarter of the nineteenth century—I mark it with Hardy—and it continues to the present day. We are beginning now to read places as our cultural “scriptures” and to identify and evaluate ourselves and other people spatially. This is why spatial orientation and place-relations are basic to what is often referred to as a postmodern culture. The primary texts of postmodern discourses are spatial, and their principal interpreters are cultural critics, theorists, and human or cultural geographers. The problem is that, as I said at the outset, their language lacks conventions. Modern hermeneutics, whether biblical or secular, is still dominated by temporal categories, and reading and interpreting the text of human spatiality needs a more usable theory. We should see that need before turning our attention toward meeting it.

Cultural Studies and the Language of Place

Taking our starting point from what Jameson calls “today,” we can recognize the language of space as dominant for the discourses of late modernism. As Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift put it, “Space is the everywhere of modern thought.”¹³ We should look at some evidences of this present dominance of spatial language before turning to the problem that, I hope, begins now to emerge, namely that, as mentioned at the outset, we lack a stable way of talking about place and space at just the time when spatial texts have become scriptural.

One reason why the language of space dominates Jameson’s “today” is that the so-called postmodernist reaction to modernism was focused by ar-

chitectural theory and design. The distinctions and contrasts available in the shift from styles characteristic of modernism to those in reaction to them are easily recognizable. Photographs of the architecture of Las Vegas in the conversion narrative of architectural theorist Robert Venturi, for example, add visual clarity to written distinctions between modern and postmodern like those attempted by David Harvey and Jean-François Lyotard.¹⁴

The prominence of spatial language for Jameson's "today" is also due to the debt that cultural studies owe to critical sociologies. These analyses designate social placements and offer topologies of social distinctions. While countered by such sociologists as Anthony Giddens with his category of "structuration" and by all historical sociologists, sociology has a decidedly synchronic thrust that carries over into cultural studies. For example, Pierre Bourdieu in *Distinction* analyzes taste not by means of a hermeneutics of history and tradition, as does Hans-Georg Gadamer, but in terms of class-specific social location.¹⁵

In addition, cultural studies that are oriented by discourse analysis, often under the influence of Michel Foucault, chart or measure the locations granted discourses by institutions. Such acts of locating tend to de-temporalize and to spatialize the analysis of discourses.¹⁶ Rather than charted by intellectual history, knowledge is located spatially in terms of structures and resources, political and economic, that establish and sustain them.

Also, the coherence and uniformity that marked Marxist theories of history are generally eschewed in a postmodernist ethos, and such post-Marxist social theorists and critics as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe use spatial metaphors to play down social history and the teleologies it implies.¹⁷ What Lyotard calls metanarratives, defined as temporal orderings, tended to govern Marxist analyzes, and, since in a postmodern ethos they become suspect, more spatial and synchronic descriptions of political and economic conditions emerge.

Finally, a commonly employed form of argumentation in cultural studies "today" tends toward spatial language. It could be called an argument from synecdoche. Because cultural analyses such as those offered by Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, or Marshall Berman cannot treat contemporary culture in its entirety, they regularly use one aspect or detail of the culture in order to characterize the whole. Highways, film, cell phones, and other forms of technology, communication, and transportation are offered as particular points where or from which the total culture can be viewed.¹⁸ Such juxtapositions of particular and general, of detail and the whole, are spatial in conception and effect.

The spatial language and orientations of such postmodern discourses, although dominant, tend to be free-floating and abstract. This has been noted by theorists and critics who, like Edward Said, have concerns for or

attachments to particular places. Said sees the widespread interest of literary and cultural theory in “writing” and intertextuality, for example, as spatial but, at the same time, as separating texts from their relations to specific locations by relating them instead to one another. The spatial qualities of textuality should not, he argues, abstract texts from particular, material spatial factors. His point represents a relevant intervention into the general direction toward the *atopic* condition of postmodernist spatial discourses.¹⁹

Indeed, current cultural studies, by virtue of a somewhat phobic attitude toward “reality,” seem condemned to occluding the particularity of sites and the dynamics of specific place-relations. In this respect, they continue rather than counter the dominant attitude of the modern period toward places and space. The shift from temporal to spatial language indicates less a change in relations to actual places or locations than a change in the way cultural theorists establish and interpret the primary texts of the present cultural situation.

Jacques Derrida, in fact, attributes the current dominance of spatial language not to actual places or attitudes toward them but to the need for warranting voice. Geological, architectural, and urban metaphors are indispensable for granting modern discourses the weight of placement in a culture in which speakers are often abstracted from actual locations or decline to declare their particularity.²⁰ He invokes the biblical narrative of the city and tower of Babel as a metaphor descriptive of spatial language use. As the diversification of languages gave rise to a cacophony of particular and partial discourses in the Babel story, so the language of space in contemporary discourses should call attention to specificity and partiality. Postmodern discourses should spell an “end to the plan of domination” by combining the language of position with that of dislocation.²¹ It is questionable that this call has been heeded.

As though picking up Michel Foucault’s challenge that space often appears as a philosophical exile and as needing a home that geography should grant it, Edward W. Soja asks cultural theorists to recognize that human interests are “space-forming and space-contingent,” products as well as producers of spatiality. In order for this to be recognized, cultural studies should not be carried on in a language that “submerges and peripheralizes the spatial imagination.”²² Soja, drawing heavily on the work of Henri Lefebvre, has been among American theorists most highly effective in addressing the neglect of spatial issues in the human sciences and the inadequacy of current spatial theories. His challenge is well worth heeding: “Whenever you read a sentence that empowers history, historicity, or the historical narrative, substitute space, spatiality, or geography and think about the consequences.”²³

Despite efforts of many voices to resist it, however, the tendency of post-modern cultural and literary studies is to allow spatial language to remain

abstract and rhetorical. This is said not to blame but to record the hold that displacement has on the language of space and place. The placelessness of the language of place and space in current cultural studies is produced by the abstract way in which space has tended to be treated in much of modern culture. Abstract space, unlike its Newtonian partner absolute time, has not, in the modern period, been adequately relativized. Spatial language may be so difficult to tie down because the primacy of absolute or abstract space seems consistent with common sense. People commonly think that particular places, places with qualities, are housed by an inclusive space that is itself uniform and without qualities. Inclusive abstract space is taken as primary and its particularizations as temporary and derivative. As Edward Casey puts it, "Once it is assumed (after Newton and Kant) that space is absolute and infinite as well as empty and a priori, places become the mere apportionings of space, its compartmentalizations."²⁴ This notion seems confirmed by models close to home. Our houses provide a general space that is subdivided into rooms with particular qualities and uses. The notion that space is first of all general and without qualities and that particular places with qualities are secondary and temporary has proven to be too firmly a part of Western culture to be dislodged by the move from modernism to whatever one calls the culture that today we are in. It represents the clearest instance in the culture of a lingering idealism, and it continues to determine how we think about and relate to space and place.

Space divorced from qualities and specific human interests also assumes authority because it is amenable to rational and mathematical languages and is therefore basic to planning, designing, and mapping. Such acts are crucial particularly to constructing, maintaining, and visualizing the massive social spaces that largely define modern culture. As Lefebvre puts it: "The thesis of an inert spatial medium where people or things, actions and situations, merely take up their abode, as it were, corresponds to the Cartesian model (conceiving of things in their extension as the 'object' of thought) which over time becomes the stuff of 'common sense' and 'culture.' A picture of mental space developed by the philosophers and epistemologists thus becomes a transparent zone, a logical medium."²⁵ Thus arise the pervasive assumptions about space both in modern and postmodern culture: that abstract space is primary and antecedent to particular places and that space is inherently free from qualities.

Finally, abstract space has such authority in our spatial language because it is so often and so easily related to social space, and social space dominates our spatial awareness. The language of social space tends toward abstraction because we think of the social whole as antecedent to its parts. We tend to posit society as a general container unifying the differing and at times contending segments or locations of the society. The scientific

interests of sociology privilege quantification, and abstract social space gives itself to geometric and other mathematical mappings. Our interests in social space, then, resist specificity, and they tend to subordinate particular human places.²⁶

When we think of space, especially social space, in an abstract way, great harm can be done. The imperialist colonial enterprise is inconceivable apart from such ingrained habits of mind. Newly occupied lands became vulnerable to planning imposed on them by minds conditioned by abstract ways of viewing places. Particular places and the relations of their inhabitants to them could simply be subsumed by rational categories that could legitimize economic and political agendas. Mary Louise Pratt, working with travel books about Africa written by visiting Europeans in the nineteenth century, for example, details how little interest was taken by the colonists in the relation of the indigenous people to their locations and in the particular qualities of those places. The general landscape was emphasized.²⁷ Operating with similar critical tools, Timothy Mitchell shows how French and British colonists imposed an order on Egyptian societies that was assumed to be not order of a particular kind but order itself. This order, which identified certain arrangements in social space as consistent with rationality, could be imposed as unproblematic and requiring acceptance by Egyptians as their ticket for access to the advances of modern culture. The effect was to control a society under the pretext that abstract arrangements made society more fully human.²⁸ A third example is offered by William Pietz in his study of the creation of the “fetish” as a Western notion applied to non-Western cultures. This category allowed colonized cultures to be viewed as unpredictable and even irrational. In order to stabilize economic transactions, these societies were required to submit to uniform commercial planning, which entailed suppressing or marginalizing practices determined by specific locations. Again, admission to the fully human (that is, modern) world was thought of as synonymous with attitudes toward space that favored abstraction, quantification, and rational, economic transactions.²⁹

Abstract space is particularly consistent with a social space determined by economic interests. Such a space gathers into itself, so to speak, all particular places, defines them, and assigns them their value. The primacy of economic interests in the construction of social space allows other forms of place-relations to be devalued. An inclusive economic system discounts not only particular values but also the value of particularity, including relations with particular places. As Lefebvre points out, spaces, when absorbed by such abstract notions, conceal both the historical conditions that gave rise to them and the actual differences between them in order to conform them to an imposed rational homogeneity.³⁰

However, while cultural theory and criticism, especially postcolonial

theory and criticism, are sensitive to the havoc wrought by imposing abstract notions of space on particular locations, cultural studies do not counter the real or potential damage such language warrants by challenging it with a more adequate theory of human place-relations. Current theory and criticism have not thrown cultural studies back on their resources to forge a hermeneutics of spatial texts that will enhance the particularity of places and of the relations of humans to them. This may be due to the close ties between postmodernist and economic interests. Architecture, for example, which so influences the styles and attitudes of postmodernism, is heavily dependent upon economic conditions even while it is irreverent toward them.³¹ Robert Venturi, for example, can celebrate the architecture of Las Vegas without adequately noting the commercialization of human interests and the commodification of pleasure that are so much a part of that setting. When cultural studies employ an abstract spatial language they betray their lingering attachments to—even, perhaps, their dependence on—the economic system that so fully forms modern and postmodern attitudes.

It is my opinion that the language of place and space in current cultural studies maintains its currency not because of its inherent stability and significance but negatively, by virtue of its contrary relation to modernity, particularly modernity defined by history. In other words, the language of place and space, to the degree that it is stable and has meaning and force, holds a derived, oppositional position. What is needed, then, is to identify a cultural location where the language of place and space has a rightful role, generates positive content, emphasizes the particularity of places and of people's relations to them, and stands not in opposition but in relation to the language of actions and events, of time and history. We find this, I believe, in modern narrative discourses.

Spatial Language and Narrative Discourse

Narrative theory, however, is unprepared to respond to this challenge or invitation. This is because narrative theory, rather than doing justice to the full potential of spatial language in narrative discourse, subordinates it. It does this primarily by making temporal language, that is, the language of actions and events, central to narrative discourse, thereby subjecting narrative to the dominant discourses of modernity.

In my view, narrative discourses potentially challenge modernity or surface its subtext by giving prominence to the language of place and space. In narrative discourse, spatial language can generate a significance of its own without being separated from the other languages of narrative, including the language of action and event. The necessary and potentially prominent role of place and space in narrative discourse and its embeddedness among the

other languages of narrative provide at least a partial remedy to the current pervasive deficiencies of spatial understandings, such as abstraction, fragmentation, and opposition to temporality. The language of place and space is always a part of narrative discourse and can be a principal locus of a narrative's power and significance. Places in narrative have force and meaning; they are related to human values and beliefs; and they are part of a larger human world, including actions and events.

To establish the importance of narrative place, we must first challenge the disparagement of narrative discourse in postmodernist cultural and literary studies, a disparagement epitomized by Lyotard. This disparagement is due to the habit of defining narrative primarily in terms of time and temporality. As we have seen, postmodernism marks the emergence of spatial language as a dominant over temporality. Narrative, therefore, has been a victim of the general turn of the culture away from the language of time and history. We are not accustomed to thinking of narrative when we think about place and space. Recognizing the role of spatial language in narrative discourse and rehabilitating narrative in current cultural theory are, therefore, mutually reinforcing projects.

The rehabilitation of narrative depends upon resisting the widespread assumption that the dominant language of narrative must be the language of temporality. We need not look far to find examples of recent theorists who define narrative temporally and by doing so contribute to its disfavor in present cultural studies. Frank Kermode, for example, defines human time as basically an undifferentiated succession of "now" points, and he treats narratives as responses to that situation. Narratives grant order to time by giving to mere sequence a beginning and, more important, an ending. Kermode's theory of narrative as a concord-producing response to the actual nonconnectedness of events appears to grant cultural significance to narrative by giving it soteriological functions; narratives and the practices of reading and interpreting them heal the split that people otherwise suffer between the reality of events in their noncoherence and the need of people to understand events as related to one another and to a significant beginning and end.³² However, by defining narrative in primarily temporal terms, Kermode restricts the relevance of narrative and narrative theory to current cultural studies.

Gérard Genette goes further and is more deliberate than Kermode in dismissing the language of space from an account of what narratives are or do. Genette defines narrative as "the representation of an event or sequence of events, real or fictitious, by means of language and, more particularly, by means of written language."³³ Narratives contain both "actions and events, which constitute the narration in the strict sense and, on the other hand, those objects and characters that are the result of what we now call *descrip-*

tion.”³⁴ Genette does not take these two kinds of language as actual or potential equals. Lest we misunderstand him, he sharpens his point: “narration is concerned with actions or events considered as pure processes, and by that very fact it stresses the temporal, dramatic aspect of the narrative; description, on the other hand, because it lingers on objects and beings considered in their simultaneity, and because it considers the processes themselves as spectacles, seems to suspend the course of time and to contribute to spreading the narrative in space.”³⁵ For Genette, description impedes and even halts the main business of narrative, which is to represent actions and events. Consequently, he not only relegates “description” to a secondary role in narrative but even considers “description” and its spatial effects not to be constitutive parts of narrative. A description does not become part of the narrative but “forms a sort of cyst that is very easy to recognize and to locate.”³⁶ He concludes that narrative, because it cannot exist without descriptions, never appears in pure form; “narrative exists nowhere, so to speak, in its strict form. The slightest general observation, the slightest adjective that is little more than descriptive, the most discreet comparison, the most modest ‘perhaps,’ the most inoffensive of lyrical articulations introduces into its web a type of speech that is alien to it, refractory as it were.”³⁷ Rather than include the language of space in his account of narrative discourse, Genette defines narrative as a pure form that always, due to contamination by spatial language, appears in compromised and attenuated ways. Knowing that narratives inevitably contain spatial language, he brackets out such language in order to produce a definition of narrative as unlike any narrative that actually exists.

Paul Ricoeur commits himself as well to the primacy of the language of action and event in narrative discourse. This commitment arises from the constant interest in human temporality that controls his work. Ricoeur is not first of all interested in narrative, as he is also not first of all interested in the many other topics he has taken up in his work—metaphor, symbol, interpretation theory, or the dialectics of ideology and utopia, for example. In all these topics, he is interested first of all in human temporality, and these topics grant ways to explore the mysteries and problems of that philosophical and even theological topic. Consequently, he gives his attention primarily to plot in narrative and to the relation of events to patterns of coherence or “followability.”³⁸

Seymour Chatman favors time in narrative for a somewhat different reason. Influenced by Russian formalism, he distinguishes the *fabula* of a narrative from its *sujet*, and this ends, as for most who follow this path, in a separation of events in their putative sequence from events as they are presented in the narrative. Narrative, then, is a combination of temporal mate-

rial and a certain treatment of it.³⁹ Though coming at the matter from a very different starting point, Chatman's theory ends up looking much like Kermode's.

If in narrative theory space is taken into account at all, it will, as J. J. van Baak says, be "viewed in its subordinate and subservient role in relation to the other thematic blocks: space providing formally indispensable locations for occurrences, characters, their actions and experiences."⁴⁰ While most often subordinated to the language of action and event, critics and theorists also subordinate spatial language to the other languages of narrative. Leonard Lutwack, for example, subordinates place and space to character, and Carl Darryl Malmgren subjects place and space to a dominant interest in narrative point of view.⁴¹ Critics and theorists who elevate character or point of view to perpetual prominence are similar to Kermode, Genette, Ricoeur, and Chatman in taking one of the languages of narrative discourse and lifting it to a permanently dominant and defining position. Rarely is such elevation given to the language of place and space, however. Narrative theorists, then, regularly manifest two errors. First, they allow their theoretical interests to confine them to, or to privilege, one of the languages of narrative. Second, while differing as to which of the languages they choose for privileged and even exclusive attention, they agree that, if the language of space has a role at all in narratives, it will likely not be a prominent or, even less, a dominant one.

Despite a widespread disregard for the language of place and space in narrative by modern theoretical and critical discourses, there are exceptions, and I should note some of them. Edward Said, to whom I already have referred, provides one. He points out that we read particular novels with such attention to temporality that we overlook the function in them of space, geography, and location. More important, we place novels, in our general account of their cultural role, in a historical context, that is, as providing one of the ways by which English society appropriated its past, adjusted to its present, and anticipated its future. However important that role may be in accounting for the novel in the formation of English consciousness, it is also the case that the English novel granted its readers a spatial sense of England not only as centrally located relative to outlying areas but also as relating those areas to England in imperial terms. From Defoe through Austen, during the whole of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, distant lands not only are out there but they also, by being under English control, can, without serious question, be visited and referred to, thereby being incorporated into a continuous spatial compass.⁴²

Jeffrey R. Smitten stresses spatiality in his study of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables*. The house not only contains but even sponsors

events and actions.⁴³ He suggests that narratives can be called spatial whenever attention is given to environments that become distinguishable from human control, that is, whenever places take on a power or significance of their own.

Joseph A. Kestner also respects the language of space in narrative, and he supplies some helpful terminological distinctions. He defines *place* in contrast to *space* as particular in contrast to general, and he arranges narrative places into scene, setting, space, environment, and atmosphere, moving, in that order, from the most particular to the most general. He also suggests a grammar of locations that can be drawn from narrative conventions, locations that recur and have significance because certain kinds of people predictably inhabit them or because certain actions are likely to occur there.⁴⁴ Kestner is less successful, in my opinion, when he attempts to tie kinds of spatial language in narrative to kinds of visual art—narrative scenes to painting, descriptions of character to sculpture, and the total arrangement of a narrative's parts to architecture.⁴⁵

Finally, Sharon Spencer traces an increasing occurrence of the language of place in twentieth-century narrative. She sees literary modernism as a watershed in narrative form, by which an emphasis on temporality is replaced by an emphasis on space.⁴⁶ While I agree with Spencer that the language of space is prominent and at times even dominant in the narrative discourses of literary modernism, I do not think that a gap between modernist and earlier narrative discourses is opened by a shift to spatial language. I think the more reliable move is to normalize the language of space as a constitutive part of narrative discourse rather than to make its increasing role definitive of a new narrative mode.

If we recognize the constitutive role of spatial language in narrative discourse and do that without denigrating the other languages of narrative, we end with a more complex and variable understanding of narrative discourse than is otherwise available. Such a theory of narrative recognizes the variety of languages in narrative discourse and the ability of any one of them to be prominent or even to dominate the others. The languages that constitute narrative discourse can be designated as the languages of character, of actions and events, of the teller's interests or attitudes, and of place or environment. This does not mean that these four languages are parts of narrative the way, as one theorist put it, "engine, chassis, and wheels are parts of a car."⁴⁷ Narrative discourse is not a process by which preexisting discourses are brought into relation to one another. Narrative discourses are not secondary and derivative but primary and generative. And one of the evidences of narrative's status is that the four languages that constitute narrative discourses are always already not only present but related to and interactive

with one another. However, the fact that in particular narratives these four languages are always already present, related, and interactive does not mean that all four must be of equal importance. The point is that the language of place and space is always operative in narrative, always related to narrative's other languages, and potentially as able as the others to be prominent and even dominant in a particular narrative discourse.

When readers take note of the language of space in a narrative, they usually do so by referring to "setting." But "setting" condemns the language of place to inherently passive and secondary roles. "Setting" suggests background, necessary, perhaps, but never, like the other languages of narrative, foregrounded. Also, the other terms imply content, while "setting" seems to lack it; the term sounds empty as well as passive. We say of someone that "he is a character" or that "she has character." "Plot" also gets infusions of significance because we use the term as a synonym for scheme and design. And tone—the language of material choice, of attitude toward the material, and of style—has connotations of color, evaluation, and relationships. "Setting" is an inadequate term for covering the possibilities of the language of space in narrative discourse because place and space need not stand only as background and need not lack force and significance.

Indeed, spatial language in a narrative can be active, meaningful, and primary. The various locations of a narrative can be read as constituting a kind of "geographical synthesis" in the narrative analogous to the kind of synthesis of actions and events we refer to as the narrative's plot.⁴⁸ A narrative's "geography" can set limits and boundaries to the narrative world, determining, for example, what occurs, what is possible, and what can and cannot be expected. In addition, the language of space can set conditions, either negatively or positively arrayed, that resist or enhance the interests or attitudes of characters or narrators. As J. E. Malpas says, "we understand a place and a landscape through the historical and personal narratives that are marked out within it and that give that place a particular unity and establish a particular set of possibilities within it."⁴⁹ Because the language of place plays such roles it may be better to refer to a narrative's "atmosphere," "environment," or "geography" instead of "setting." "Atmosphere" allows for a range of density and pressure, and an "environment" can be hostile, suggesting force and significance. We think of geography as granting circumscription, designating places, and clarifying relations between them.

While places in narratives can have force and significance, their value is not constant and predictable. Differing places can evince a range of positive and negative qualities. While conventions help readers to interpret the language of space in a narrative, there is lack of stability in the conventional meaning of locations. This is due not only, as Edward Soja points out, to the

fact that in our culture a split has occurred between spaces and their meanings but also to the fact that the meanings of spaces are complex and ambiguous.⁵⁰ The result of this lack of agreement in the evaluation of places is that spatial values, ranging from strongly negative and feared to strongly positive and desired, are as primary as the locations to which they variously are related.

The language of place becomes prominent in a narrative not only when it is strongly evaluated but also when the reader is transported to an unaccustomed place or when a familiar place is radically altered. Such impertinence generally occurs by encounters with places that have a negative relation to the well-being of the characters or narrator. Characters and narrators raise questions about their locations more readily when they are radically altered or have become unpleasant than when locations are customary and support their interests. Some of the most striking instances of space-dominated narratives in this century—*The Plague* of Albert Camus, for example, or Franz Kafka's *The Trial*—draw the attention of characters and narrators to their environments because conditions arise that make a familiar place strange and a supportive place antagonistic.

When the language of place, environment, or atmosphere is prominent or dominant in a narrative, the other languages of the narrative tend to be deformed toward it. This dynamic among the languages of narrative discourse deserves comment.

The language of place in a narrative is often subordinate to the language of character, as when descriptions of a room or house serve to indicate a character's personality, tastes, or social standing. The language of space can be subordinate to plot, as when it provides places where events can occur. However, the language of space begins to dominate character and plot when it determines the characters that are likely to appear in certain locations or the kinds of events that occur. So, institutions—hospitals, prisons, the military—are arenas that determine who will appear and what kinds of things will go on. Kinds of buildings, differing rooms of a house, open fields, and other locations can affect character and plot. The language of place becomes even more determining when, as in several narratives to be studied later, action or characters are restricted to a particular place. Characters are thrown or held together by the confines of the space, and they are forced by place to deal not only with one another but also with the spatial conditions that they share.

When the language of space becomes dominant in a narrative, especially by bearing negative or threatening potential, characters are more determined by their situations than they otherwise would be and are put into more reactive than initiative roles. In an environment of a heavily negative

kind, survival rather than development and enrichment becomes the major concern. Characters are flatter and have fewer options. Such conditions give rise to what has been variously referred to as the vanishing hero, the pariah, the exile, and the stranger in modernist narratives. When place takes on characteristics of an antagonist, characters find themselves attacked not by other human beings but by pervasive, indefinable, and malignant spatial conditions, and they are not likely to know how to contend with them. Rather than a human antagonist against whom, even in defeat, a character can achieve some stature by virtue of resistance, an indefinite set of negative conditions can reduce characters to bewildered helplessness and their responses to impulsive or desperate reactions that may worsen their situations. Characters also tend to become, when determined by the language of antagonistic space, little more than types of responses to the conditions. So, in *The Plague* we have characters that are embodied examples of a range of human reactions to a terribly negative situation. An allegorical meaning-effect begins to emerge in such a narrative whereby characters represent human types—in this case, the person of reason, the person of faith, the person of courage, and the coward, for example.

When the language of space dominates a narrative, its plot is also flattened. Not as much can happen. A heavy atmosphere can even break the continuity of time, and plot becomes more episodic. Actions and events are more causally related to the conditions than to one another. Rather than having a significance of its own, the time of the narrative can easily become the time it takes for the conditions to expose themselves and to exert their effects or the time it takes for the characters and narrator to explore the environment.

Domination by the language of space will also alter the role of the teller in a narrative. When the language of space dominates, the material of the narrative is not so much chosen by as forced on the teller. The attitude of the teller also becomes not one of moral evaluation, which would give tone the authority of judgment as well as selection, but one of uncertainty and obsession. And word choice will be determined by the urgency of the situation rather than by the richness of the teller's vocabulary or the skills and resources of the teller that would require more relaxed conditions. The language will tend to be spare and unadorned, a language that reports conditions and their details objectively and dispassionately. One finds, for example, a cool, even eerie detachment of tone in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, by which a horrible place is described in a quite matter-of-fact way.

Important as these consequences of a dominant and negative language of space are for the language of tone, even more significant consequences arise from the rhetorical effects of a dominant language of negative space. The

language of negative place in a narrative helps to create a relationship between the narrator and narratee. A common threat or situation of stress can be posited under which both narrator and narratee stand, and between them a communal identity of the distressed, of victims, or of survivors can develop. This consequence of negative space becomes important for modernist narratives because they are written in increasingly complex social and cultural situations. In these situations, authors and readers cannot be counted on to have much in common. The loss of a shared world, of encompassing values and interests, between narrator and narratee, requires techniques for establishing relations between them. The language of negative place is a very effective way of producing that result. In fact, it could be argued, in reply to Sharon Spencer, that one of the reasons for the rise in prominence of the language of space, especially negative space, in fictions of the modernist period is the need to create shared situations when they are no longer readily provided culturally. The modernist description of “the human condition” as problematic and threatening is inseparable from this rhetorical need and potential.

A sharp rise in prominence of the language of space over the other languages of narrative occurs in modernist writing, although that rise is not as sudden or unprecedented as Spencer suggests. Lee T. Lemon, in an essay on the language of environment in nineteenth-century English fiction, charts a developing interest during that period in what he calls a “hostile universe.”⁵¹ While places in Jane Austen’s novels are shaped to support the needs and interests of characters, in the fiction of Thackeray, the Brontë sisters, and Dickens environment becomes increasingly prominent, complicated, and even threatening. In *Wuthering Heights* (1847), for example, the environment exerts force on the characters and complicates their relationships. Characters are affected by aspects of their locations that they neither control nor understand.

Indeed, one could go back further to point out that Defoe placed characters in strong relation to places. Social and natural contexts are recognized as forces, and environment has consequences for human needs and potential. And one could refer to the epic tradition and to biblical narrative as demonstrating how places are not only prominent but exert influence on characters and action. In other words, the potential prominence of the language of place in narrative discourse is not uniquely actualized by literary modernism.

Finally, we should note that the language of place and space, which is always present in narrative, is given prominence in modern fiction not only for reasons internal to the narratives but also because of the larger cultural context. The narratives I shall examine give prominence to the language of place because they contend with their environments. They serve to make the

language of place specific and related to human interests and contend with cultural attitudes and practices that undervalue or distort places and human relations to them. This means that these texts need not be validated by or subjected to some kind of spatial theory in order to be significant players in spatial discourse but, rather, that the spatial theory implicit in them needs to be released, organized, and placed in a complementary and correcting relation to other theories. These narratives do not simply depend upon theories or cultural assumptions about places and the relations they have to human needs and values. They generate and contend for certain understandings of human spatiality. The main purpose of this study is to release their potential contribution to current understandings of human place-relations.

Toward a Narrative-Based Theory of Place-Relations

My aim is to derive from texts of six modern writers the outlines of a theory of human place-relations that is incipient in their narrative discourses. In the narratives I have chosen the language of place and space is prominent, if not dominant. The incipient theory drawn from them has been turned back onto the texts as principles of organization. I shall describe the organization and thereby outline the theory. This anticipates the third part of the study, in which the incipient theory is elaborated by bringing it into conversation with other, diverse theories of human spatiality.

There are three components of the theory of human place-relations derived from the narratives and turned back onto them as a structure for this study. The first distinguishes between kinds of human place-relations. The three kinds of human place-relations clarify one another by contrast, although each also has its own distinguishing characteristics. This means that there are differential relations between the three kinds. Having a relation to one kind of place is to a large degree defined as not having a relation to one of the other two kinds.

The narrative discourses that I shall examine differ from one another, then, in the prominence given to one rather than to either of the other kinds of place-relations. While all of the discourses agree that the present state of places and of the relations of people to them in the culture are faulty and that these faults have consequences for human moral and spiritual well-being, they disagree about which kind of place-relation needs most to be corrected. They differ by giving prominence to one of the three kinds of place-relations.

One kind of place-relation can be housed under the category of “cosmic or comprehensive space.” This is a sense of placement within a space that precedes, outstrips, and includes humans and their constructions. Often this kind of place-relation is associated with nature, but nature, by the close of the nineteenth century, has become sufficiently problematized to prohibit its

simple identification with comprehensive space. Nature is not clearly and finally distinguishable from culture, although some locations and phenomena, like wilderness and storms, are more natural than cities and other human constructions. Natural locations or situations often are used to suggest or represent cosmic or comprehensive space, but such space is not, without qualification, identifiable as natural space.

The second kind of place-relation is social or political. Such space is created by the relations of people to one another, the structure of those relations, and the laws and mores that regulate them. The narratives I shall examine identify modernity with the rise to dominance of social, particularly urban, space. Indeed, one of the problems they seem in consort to expose is that human place-relations are swamped by the power and pervasiveness of social, political space. For all of them, modern social space is problematic not only because it dominates other kinds of places but also because modern social spaces are constituted in ways that resist positive relations with them. Texts that emphasize social space as primary have the job of clarifying what a more viable or humanly enhancing kind of social, political space would be.

The third kind of place-relation I designate as “personal or intimate.” I avoid using the term “private” because it suggests ownership, and ownership is not necessary to relations with personal or intimate places. Ownership as definitive of personal space reveals its domination by social space. One of the difficulties with personal, intimate space, as with comprehensive space, is to free it from social space, especially social space as structured by economic determinations.

These three kinds of space or place-relations structure the study because the writers are arranged according to them. In each of the first two parts of the study, I shall move from cosmic, comprehensive (Hardy and Greene) to social, political (Conrad and Golding), and to personal, intimate (Forster and Spark) space.

The incipient theory in these narratives not only posits human spatiality as complex by being constituted of three kinds of place-relations but also reveals that human place-relations are two-sided. On one side, they are physical. Without physicality there can be no place-relations, only substitutes for or images of them. However, place-relations also have a spiritual side. They have a significance or attraction that cannot wholly be accounted for. Having said this, however, it also appears that while place-relations include both sides, one side will be perceived or presented as more needed and valued than the other.

The two-sided character of human place-relations, which is the second aspect of the theory of human spatiality drawn from the narratives, is also

turned back on them as an organizing principle. The first part of the study deals with three early modernists—Hardy, Conrad, and Forster—who have two things in common. First, they respond to the deficiencies and potentials of human place-relations by attempting to invoke values and orientations located in the past. Second, all three of them present narratives that imply a diagnosis of contemporary place-relations that targets a lack of physicality. The narratives of all three direct attention to the primacy of the physical in place-relations. We shall have to see what this means, then, for comprehensive, social, and intimate place-relations. Meanwhile, the second part of the study deals with three later modernists—Greene, Golding, and Spark—whose fiction depicts the spiritual more than the physical side of place-relations. In addition, as much as the fiction of the early modernists directs attention to the past, the fictions of the later modernists direct attention to the future. Instead of retrieval, we find search and projection. Using Paul Ricoeur's categories, I have called these two sides or directions in the language of place-relations “archaeological” and “teleological.”⁵²

The third aspect of the theory is more implicit to the whole of the study. This pertains to the depiction or adumbration by the fiction of positive place-relations. All six writers agree that modern spaces and place-orientations are harmful, especially to moral and spiritual well-being; that human beings have a great need and potential for positive relations to places; and that positive place-relations can be both imagined and experienced. It is not, therefore, the negative in modern place-relations that these narratives emphasize. Negative places and placelessness are preliminary in their work to the more important task of retrieving or adumbrating positive place-relations. The principal value of these texts, it seems to me, is that they counter either implicitly or explicitly the problem that places and place-relations have become with positive alternatives.

Commonly, positive place-relations are characterized by the feeling of being “at home.” But “at home” tends to favor intimate space, although one can be, as William James put it, at home in the universe, and one can feel at home in a social setting. I find “at home” an inadequate designation for positive place-relations not only because it favors intimate space but also because it smacks too much of arrival and permanence. Indeed, this reservation should be underscored, because it would be best, with all the attention I shall give to place-relations, not to begin talking about place-relations as though they are fixed and represent “rootedness.” People move between places as well as dwell in them. Indeed, one feature of a more fully human sense of place-relations—a feature that narrative secures—is the important relation of placement to human mobility and temporality. Placement and movement imply, clarify, and stimulate one another. I have tried to incorpo-

rate some of these complexities by characterizing positive human place-relations as “accommodating.” I end each discussion of the six narratives I have chosen for more detailed study by rehearsing the characteristics of positive place-relations implied or advocated by each, characteristics that allow the six otherwise diverse narratives to support a single norm.

These three components of the incipient theory of place-relations derived from the fictions—that human spatiality is constituted of three kinds of place-relations, that these relations are two-sided or two-directional, and that all place-relations can be evaluated by the use of the single norm of “accommodating”—are individually dealt with in the third part of the study and placed in conversation with other prominent and diverse theories of human spatiality. These conversations allow the incipient theory not only to draw from others but also to amend and correct them.

In the conclusion, I shall return to the question of sharp dichotomies in the language of place. Returning to some of the points made in this introduction, I shall look at the sharp distinctions drawn by modern theorists between secular or profane and sacred spaces. I shall argue that a negative assessment of social places and place-relations, particularly regarding urban space, has become a fact in cultural studies. This factual profane is then used to steady and grant significance to individually sponsored theories or constructions of “sacred” place. Whether these constructions and theories are sponsored by secular or religious interests, by political or aesthetic dispositions, they all depend on agreement concerning the factual profane. I shall argue that the factual profane is a rhetorical construction and that various forms of sacred space should be theorized not on such a narrow and vulnerable basis but on a more adequate theory of positive place-relations, a theory that this study is designed to advance.