

## **EDITORIAL: Resonating Spatialities**

*by*

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Throughout my academic career, I have studied, taught, and written about the notion of space in American literature and culture. The visual intensity that characterizes print and digital manifestations of space, as well as the connections that can be drawn between narrative and space have always been central to my scholarly interest. The present special issue of *ECHOES*, entitled “Resonating Spatialities,” constitutes an opportunity to reflect again on the interrelation of space and narrative. This issue brings together five essays written for the undergraduate course “Methodology of Research,” which I taught to second-year students at the School of English of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki during the spring semester of 2024-2025. Teaching the literature cycle of the course allowed to extend my observations on space and literature, which is reflected in the subtitle I assigned to the cycle, “Space in American Literature, Culture, and Media.”

But why space? In the late twentieth century, the notion of “space” has been re-envisioned and theorized in new contexts, which gave rise to what was termed “the spatial turn” in contemporary culture and the humanities. The notions of space and place have been widely discussed as well as defined and interpreted in a variety of ways. For example, Marie-Laure Ryan et al. draw attention to the recent convergence of space and narrative, as a result of the narrative turn that took place in the humanities in the 1980s and the more recent spatial turn characterizing the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Similarly, Tatiani G. Rapatzikou and Effie Yiannopoulou explore “the role of humanist thought and practice in shaping thinking about the concept of human spatiality, from spatial imaginaries to literal topographies” (2).

This *ECHOES* issue focuses on the ways in which narrative and space intersect in American literary and cultural texts, approaching texts by nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century American writers and practitioners from a spatial perspective. The five essays included here explore spatial imaginaries across a range of texts, media, and cultural contexts. In doing so, the issue encourages students to deal with different genres (fiction, non-fiction) and media (film, mobile and digital), under the theme of space. The students read and analyzed American literary and cultural texts from a spatial perspective: from fictional literary texts such as Harriet

Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* to nonfiction such as Theodore Dreiser's "A Certain Oil Refinery" to media texts such as *Pose* (TV series) and *Pokémon GO* (mobile game). Through these varied materials, the issue demonstrates how the study of space can shed new light on the interpretation of literary and cultural texts. Adopting a spatial approach to the analysis of these texts, the issue examines the ways in which literature and culture can be informed by lived and imagined experiences of spatiality in different contexts. Issues of race, ethnicity, gender/sexuality, and class further deepen students' understanding of the role of space in American literature and culture. Different types of narrative space are also explored on the basis of Ryan et al.'s theories, such as maps as well as emotional, symbolic, strategic, and hybrid (virtual and physical) spaces. While the first four essays engage closely with questions of identity, the issue concludes with an exploration of how engagement with mobile locative media and augmented reality (AR) technologies alters our perception of urban space.

One of the goals of this course was also to acquaint students with American Studies as a diverse, plural, interdisciplinary field. In order to understand American Culture better, one needs to adopt different critical approaches, not only through literature, but through other genres and media. The course encouraged students to deal with different genres and media, such as short stories, novels, games, and movies, in an attempt to offer multiple ways to study American Culture. Richard Chase has stressed that "[t]he imagination that has produced much of the best and most characteristic American fiction has been shaped by the contradictions and not by the unities and harmonies of [American] culture" (1), a fact that is clearly emphasized in this issue through its focus on race, and gender/sexuality and space. The current issue explores this kind of dualism in the American mentality, or more specifically, "the contradictions which have vivified and excited the American imagination," to use Chase's words (11). More recently, Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean remind us that "Americans ... are ... divided as much as they are united. Where unity is apparent, this is only possible because difference has been hidden by the practice of power. The dominance of specific groups and perspectives in American life has obscured the fact that other groups were subordinate." However, in the 1960s, American Studies "widen[ed] its boundaries to include black studies, popular culture studies, ... film studies, ... ethnic studies, ... and Native American studies, among others" (Wise 313). This issue seeks to address these disunities by challenging the notion of a homogeneous American Culture and by foregrounding groups that have historically existed at the margins of power because they have been excluded from the mainstream, such as black people, Native

Americans, members of the LGBTQ+ community and the working class. In fact, most of these essays challenge dominant ideologies of race, gender/sexuality, and class that, as Douglas Kellner would claim, “serve to reproduce social relations of domination and subordination.” I thus find the essays in this issue of *ECHOES* both insightful and enlightening in the ways in which they approach the concept of identity formation from various perspectives in the context of American Studies.

Each essay is also accompanied by a creative representation of the ideas and concepts it discusses, such as a collage, a map, or a drawing. The five contributors in this issue conclude their essays with a personal reflection on the resonating spaces of the primary texts that inspired their projects, offering a creative and critical meditation that not only extends their arguments but also paves the path for future critical inquiry.

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Thomais Chatzoglaki discusses racial identity and slavery in nineteenth-century America through an exploration of symbolic, strategic, and emotional narrative spaces in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly* (1852). The map she has created visualizes one of the characters’ journey from slavery to freedom as well as the multiple ways space is represented and used throughout the narrative.

Maria Samaridou examines space and narrative as powerful tools of racial empowerment in Louise Erdrich’s *Tracks* (1988), investigating the harsh realities of American colonization and the cultural assimilation of Native Americans in early twentieth-century American society. Her collage visually represents and spatially captures the Native American experience as it unfolds across physical, cultural, and narrative spaces.

Alexandra Chatzi establishes perceptive links between early twentieth-century American industrialism, capitalism, and consumerism, and their effects on class identity through an analysis of spatial representation in Theodore Dreiser’s “A Certain Oil Refinery” (1919). Her collage of news headlines heavily draws on themes of advertising, materialism, and overconsumption, while also raising environmental concerns.

Maria Papastamkou captures the urban experience of the LGBTQ+ community in 1980s New York City, highlighting intersections of space and gender/sexual identity in the TV series *Pose* (2018). Her collage of real-life photographs and famous quotes addresses the sources of pain

the LGBTQ+ community experienced, as well as the strategies of survival and resistance they developed.

Aikaterini Chrysomallidou calls attention to the plethora of spaces——hybrid, locative, game, narrative, emotional, strategic——that emerge during gameplay in one of the most popular mobile games, *Pokémon GO* (2016-), produced by Google-owned corporation, Niantic, Inc. Her drawing depicts a player's simultaneous immersion in the virtual space of the mobile screen and the physical urban space, highlighting the interplay between digital and real-world spatial experiences.

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Taken together, these five essays disclose the multifaceted ways in which spatiality shapes and is shaped by identity and culture in American literature and media. By examining diverse texts, *Resonating Spatialities* underscores the critical potential of spatial analysis for understanding American culture, while also reaffirming the importance of interdisciplinary approaches within American Studies.

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