Movement and Change in/as Human Life

In the study of culture – comprising, in the context of this volume, studies of literature, language, and society – the question of the interplay between time and place has an even longer history than in the natural sciences. Palaeolithic cave paintings – sort or prehistoric comics\(^1\) – from some 35,000 years\(^2\) back can be read as narratives that transfer knowledge – as well as images of the represented moving figures (i.e. running animals) – over time and space to next generations, whatever their original artistic intent and value may be. Already in these very early human expressions there is an understanding of time and place as \textit{movement}.

Even if we discard the interpretational take on prehistoric traces, historical narrative ways of compressing and stretching times and distances are evident from the earliest known textual examples, like in the Sumerian text “The Instructions of Šuruppag”:

In those days, in those far remote days, in those nights, in those far-away nights, in those years, in those far remote years, at that time the wise one who knew how to speak in elaborate words lived in the Land; Šuruppag, the wise one, who knew how to speak with elaborate words lived in the Land.\(^3\)


\(^2\) A recent study, however, doubles the date of the earliest homo sapiens artistic expression; see Christopher S. Henshilwood, Francesco d’Errico, Karen L. van Niekerk, Laure Dayet, Alain Queffelec, and Luca Pollarolo, “An Abstract Drawing from the 73,000-year-old Levels at Blombos Cave, South Africa,” \textit{Nature} 562 (2018): 115–18, \url{https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-018-0514-3}.

In this – allegedly antediluvian – text, written around 2600 BCE, Šuruppag gives advice to his son Zi-ud-sura based on his time-tested experience. The Mesopotamian realm of Sumer is usually defined as the first historical human civilization as the earliest known records of symbolic written language (in this case in cuneiform) are from that area. What Šuruppag expresses in this excerpt is a distinct sense of time – the “far remote years” – that give the present a perspective on how to arbitrate life choices.

Ever since Albert Einstein developed the early-twentieth-century post-Newtonian\(^4\) theory of special relativity and general theory of relativity,\(^5\) questions of time and place have acquired increasing prominence in modern scholarly theories about the universe. Further developed in quantum mechanics, the problematics of the conjunction of time and place have complicated their form and function. We are yet to see the advent of a unified field theory – i.e. the ‘theory of everything’ – and continuous advances in research do not forebode any quick answer to the issue. Therefore, studies of culture have an important say on the matter.

‘All things flow and nothing stands’

The general spatio–temporal perspective presented above provides a window for the present volume. In Heraclitian fashion, it can be said that movement and change are among the few constants of life, that “all things flow and nothing stands” (πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει).\(^6\) This means also that life cannot stand still as it is in constant motion. Whatever the astronomical or quantum physical theories say about the relativity of place and time, in the human scale time moves steadily forward and people are locat-

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4 Isaac Newton published his theory of universal gravitation in his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in 1687.
ed in one place at any given time. Their cultural representations, however, can take whatever forms people can imagine.

In their countless different manifestations, the phenomena of time and place affect individuals, societies, countries, and communities. Depending on the circumstances, their effects can be perceived as either welcome or undesirable – as promoting dynamic flexibility, for instance –, or as an instability with many attendant problems. Drawing on multidisciplinary insights from the fields of English linguistics, literary and cultural scholarship and translation studies, this volume, *Movement and Change in Literature, Language, and Society*, focuses on the element of movement and change in human life.

Our contributors observe the themes of the volume from temporal and spatial perspectives, as they are here considered joint phenomena manifesting movement and change in human societies. This approach is reflected in the structure of the volume, divided into three parts, each dealing with different types of movement and change in space and time. *Part I* focuses on the themes in relation to space, *Part II* explores temporal movement and change, and finally, *Part III* features considerations of the interaction of these aspects. While the parts are distinctive in their foci, the individual chapters reflect on the themes of place and times in many ways interchangeably. In this way, they articulate an open approach to these interdependent dimensions. In the following, the chapters are introduced briefly in their specific contexts.

**From Place to Place**

*Place*. What would be as simple as that? A place is a place, after all. However, when we probe the concept of place, we are soon involved in a long-term, winding debate over its definition. In his 1977 study *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan noted that in (then) recent ethnological studies it had been found out “that nonhuman animals also have a sense of territory and of place. Spaces are marked off and defended against intruders. Places are centres of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied.”7 In the human context, then, marked spaces become places imbued with significance, “physical spaces that people naturalize through patterns, behaviour and

communications." The travel from an undifferentiated ‘space’ to a signified ‘place’ has no definite boundaries – a ‘location’ can become a site of for example abode, livelihood and/or worship due to a variety of reasons. In cultural studies, the symbolic sphere becomes a defining one for the human experience, because as far as we know, non-human species do not have a similar kind of a relation to places, although there are legends of elephants (and pre-homo sapiens humans like the Neanderthals) having human type of sense of place.

In the six chapters of Part I, place is considered in terms of mobility, location and identity. Place may form the context, or it may exist in relation to other places. These can be locales close to each other, gaining significance through their commonalities and differences, or nations far away from each other. Part I opens with two chapters on mobility in British literature. Lynne Pearce’s chapter “Mobility, Memory and Textual Practice: Re-reading Thomas Hardy’s Woodlanders” combines the mobility theories of social sciences to explore the theme of movement in physical space as an expression of romantic love and mourning in Thomas Hardy’s The Woodlanders. Jopi Nyman’s chapter, “Music, Mobility, and Borderscapes in the Fiction of Jamal Mahjoub” observes the theme of space on a more metaphysical level, analysing music and borderscapes as an expression of cultural space and mobility in Jamal Mahjoub’s fiction.

The next two chapters deal with postcolonial literatures and spaces. The colonial and postcolonial Caribbean as a cultural space has generated specific cultural practices and formations, and in “Postcritical Erotic Intimacy: Engaging with Oral Sex and Change in Caribbean Literature,” Elina Valovirta explores the expression of sexuality in Caribbean literature. Colonial history is present also in Amin Beiranvand and Joel Kuortti’s chapter “Written on the Body: Representing Torture in Waiting for the Barbarians,” an exploration of different types of physical and mental torture J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians. The novel portrays colonial South Africa, and through an analysis of the colonialistic image of the barbarian, the writers

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show how the colonizer recontextualizes the colonized as the other in order to justify torture.

The last two chapters in the Part I concern questions of identity. In his chapter “From Dublin to London: Dermot O’Byrne, Arnold Bax, Pádraig Pearse, and the Music of Identity,” Anthony Johnson studies the cultural chameleonism and social mobility of Arnold Bax, i.e. Dermot O’Byrne, man of complex and mobile personalities, namely Irish and English; poet and composer; Irish nationalist and Master of King’s Music. Johnson shows how, through his music and poetry, Bax/O’Byrne claimed two different, even conflicting, national identities. Part I concludes in “In Search of Identity: Terms Related to American Nationalism during the 1760s and 1770s,” where Johanna Rastas conducts a diachronic analysis of identity-related lexis in contemporary letter materials to explore the theme of change in the context of the development of American national identity.

*From Time to Time*

*Time.* If possible, time is an even more complex and elusive term than place.\(^{10}\) When did time begin and (when) will it end? The measurements of time have changed during its history, and the current scientific as well as everyday basic unit is the second. Second was defined in 1967 as “the duration of 9 192 631 770 periods of the radiation corresponding to the transition between the two hyperfine levels of the ground state of the caesium 133 atom,” and in 1997 refined that “this definition refers to a caesium atom at rest at a thermodynamic temperature of 0 K.”\(^{11}\) In textual narratives time is not, however, restricted by the physical realities of time. Thus, as we saw already in “The Instructions of Šuruppag,” narrative time can go against the continual present of existence, and the duration of a second is not constant. Consciousness of time enables (at least) humans to play with the ideas of going back and forth in time, even if that would not be possi-

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ble in the real world. Cultures have developed different conceptions of time from linear to circular and variations of these.

Just as time in literature is mutable, literary studies deal with time in numerous ways. One of the approaches has to do with literary periodization. Literature (just like any other strand of culture) has been divided in historical periods that are given specific characteristics. Then, narrative manipulation of time is an important topic in literary analyses. Furthermore, study of literary translations considers the significance, methods and contexts of translation, just as well as the changes in these aspects over time. Reflecting these lines of enquiry, Part II opens with two considerations of literary periods. Mehdi Ghasemi, in “Hyperhybridism: Postmodernism is Old but not Old Fashioned,” examines one literary-cultural period or style, namely postmodernism. Ghasemi discusses the discontents expressed against the term and the alternatives suggested for it, proposing one further label, ‘hyperhybridism’, to cover the elements the elusive period designation carries. In the second chapter of Part II, “Movement in the Present: Poetry as a Mindfulness Project in Bernadette Mayer’s Studying Hunger Journals,” Elina Siltanen suggests that the hard-to-periodize author, Bernadette Mayer, should be studied outside the existing discussions of experimentalism and traditional self-expressive fiction. She conducts an analysis of Mayer’s work as a mindfulness project, an exercise of observing, rather than analysing one’s own cognitive movements.

The following three chapters concentrate on the questions of new discourses and communicative practices in a changing environment forcing the discovery of new strategies. In “Reading and Translation in the Age of the Internet: Findings from a Case Study of a Terry Pratchett Novel Read in Finland,” Damon Tringham studies the new information retrieval strategies used by present day readers of translations, when encountering an unfamiliar cultural concept. Hanna Limatius’s chapter “From Fat Acceptance to Body Positivity: Social Movements in Plus-size Fashion Blogging” analyses the discourses on social movements of body positivity and fat acceptance in present day fashion blogs. The change of ideas analysed in the chapter is located in the online communities constructed through blogs. In the final chapter of Part II, Erzsébet Barát analyses the figure of the migrant in present day Hungarian political discourse. In her chapter “Study-

12 Bulk of the contributions in the volume were first presented as papers at the 8th conference of the Finnish Society for the Study of English in Turku (2017). The theme of the conference was “What’s in a Century?” and it dealt with issues like periodization.
In the humanities and the social sciences, place and time can never be considered wholly separate phenomena. The context and circumstances of a person or event are always dependent on both of these aspects, and movement in space always also implies a movement in time. The human experience itself – our memories and personal histories – are construed as segments in time; consequent events taking place in space. This may be seen in the opening chapter of Part III, Lena Englund’s “Where the Past and the Present Intersect: Memory and Regret in Doris Lessing’s Autobiographical Writing,” where themes of movement and change are explored through the analysis of Doris Lessing’s autobiographical writings, treating time and regret as the focal points through which different positions taken by Lessing in different times are recontextualized. A rather opposite position is explored by Ira Hansen in “I’ve been here before: Ursula Todd’s Repeated Returns in Kate Atkinson’s Life after Life,” where the fictional life and repeated rebirths of Ursula Todd are analysed as a representation of the meshwork structure of the human life; the movement through life as a complex structure of entangled lines.

The last two chapters the volume explore the effect of time on representations of people, things and phenomena. Joel Kuortti’s chapter “Babur and Rushdie: Negotiating Mughal Histories,” explores the representation of a people in two texts of different text types describing the same Mughal community and its significant historical events. Time is a significant aspect here as it determines the perspective of the text, while the theme of place may be viewed in more metaphorical manner; a place of representation of a pluralistic view of the events in different text types. Finally, in, “Between Domestic and International: Sibelius-related Translations as Reflections of National Change,” Turo Rautaoja closes the volume with an exploration of the shifting perceptions of Jean Sibelius and Finnishness, presented by the original and translated versions of Georg Göhler’s essay “Orchesterkompositionen von Jean Sibelius.” In this chapter, temporal and geographic distance of the texts explains the change in the representation of Sibelius and Finnishness in these texts.

All in all, the volume brings together a wide variety of analytic approaches to the enigmatic concepts of place and time. The articles show
that these concepts are indeed central to considerations of literature, language and society.

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Joel Kuortti and Sirkku Ruokkeinen

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Time does go on —
I tell it gay to those who suffer now —
They shall survive —
There is a sun —
They don’t believe it now —

— Emily Dickinson, #1121

Bibliography


