Space/Spatiality
Call for Participation

Key Concepts of the Humanities and Social Sciences | GSH | Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies

Guest: Prof. Dr. Birgit Neumann, Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf

Moderation: Prof. Dr. Gabriele Ripl, Chair of Literatures in English/North American Studies, Director, Department of English, Universität Bern

Date/Room:
- Public Lecture: April 4, 2019, 6:15 - 7:30 pm in F013, Unitobler, Lerchenweg 36
- Colloquium: April 5, 2019, 10:15 am - 5:00 pm in F-106, Unitobler, Lerchenweg 36

ECTS: 1.5

Application: By March 10, 2019 to toggweiler@wbkolleg.unibe.ch and in KSL: https://www.ksl.unibe.ch/ (Login with UniBe account, search with title)

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Public Lecture

The Spatial Turn in Cultural and Literary Studies
Travelling Media between Local and Global Spaces

Proceeding from J.M. Mitchell’s premise that space is “a process by which social and subjective identities are formed”, my talk sets out to examine the ‘spatial turn’ in cultural and literary studies. Broadly speaking, the ‘spatial turn’ describes the ‘increased attention to the spatial dimension of the historical world’ (Schlögel, 2003: 68, my translation). The spatial turn seeks to overcome the one-sided emphasis on time, which is characteristic of most Western theories, so as to enable a more nuanced understanding of the material forces involved in experiences and acts of signification. Space, according to prominent theoretical approaches, is not a mere physical container or a static backdrop against which temporal and dynamic events unfold. Rather, space is an enabling force, imbued with a sense of agency, which considerably shapes the formation of experience and knowledge. As the spatial turn brings to the fore the constructed, performative and open aspects of space, it also asks us to consider the relation between space and prevalent concepts of gender, the body, race and class. Space, it will become clear, is a performative practice, which unfolds frequently unpredictable socio-political effects.

My talk will trace different theoretical approaches that have contributed to the spatial turn in cultural and literary studies, focusing in particular on writings by Michel Foucault, Edward Said and Michel de Certeau. I will then move on to examine how the spatial turn resonates in more recent concepts of the globe, the world and the planet, which pay increasing attention to the transcultural entanglement of spaces. I am particularly interested in the question of how these concepts affect our understanding of the cultural work performed by media, such as literature, films and music. I will approach the relation between media and space from a twofold perspective: Firstly, I will show how cultural media bring imaginative worlds into being, and secondly, I will trace some of the uneven travels of cultural media across the globe, highlighting the transformative force of locality.

Colloquium

For PhD students and advanced Master students of the University of Bern

Part 1 of the colloquium is dedicated to the discussion of the lecture and the texts suggested by the guest. In Part 2, a core group present their PhD thesis, speaking for about 20 minutes (English preferred) on how the concept of “Space/Spatiality” connect to their research questions and which aspects of the texts are of particular relevance to their own work. The
presenters raise questions for the discussion with their peers, which should contribute to the development of their thesis. Finally, in Part 3, the conversation will open up again so that the other PhD or advanced MA-students have an opportunity to address issues related to their projects.


Prof. Dr. Birgit Neumann ist Inhaberin des Lehrstuhls für Anglophone Literaturen und Literaturübersetzen an der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf. Zuvor war sie Professorin an der Universität Passau und hatte Gastprofessuren an den Universitäten Wisconsin-Madison (USA), Cornell (USA) und Anglia Ruskin, Cambridge (UK) inne. Sie ist gewähltes Mitglied der Academia Europaea, des Editorial Committee for the Comparative History of Literatures in European Languages, des Advisory Board „Centre for Comparative Studies“ (Universität Lissabon) sowie Mitglied in weiteren internationaler Forschungsnetzwerken. Ihre Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen auf anglophonen Weltliteraturen, postkolonialer Literatur und Intermedialität, Kulturaustausch und Translation, Ecocriticism und Raum. Jüngere Publikationen zu: Ekphrasis in Postcolonial Literatures (mit Gabriele Rippl; im Druck); Anglophone World Literatures (Herausgeberin mit Gabriele Rippl; Special Issue, Anglia, 2017); Postcolonial Ecocriticism – Environments in Anglophone Literatures (Herausgeberin mit Sonja Frenzel 2017; Special Issue, Anglistik & Englischunterricht); Global Perspectives on Comparative Literary Histories (Herausgeberin mit César P. Dominguez; Special Issue Arcadia, 2018); New Approaches to the 21st-century Anglophone Novel (Herausgeberin mit Sibylle Baumbach, 2019) sowie des Handbook Anglophone World Literatures (in Vorbereitung; Herausgeberin mit Stefan Helgesson und Gabriele Rippl).