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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Reinhard Sieder, ed. *Die Räume der Geschichte*. Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2006.
182 pp. EUR 20.50 (paper), ISBN 978-3-7065-4263-0.

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Published on H-German (February, 2008)

Spaces in Historical Analysis

This issue of the *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (*Austrian Journal for Historical Sciences*) takes on the theme of “the spaces of history” and attempts to provide a more reflective consideration of the spaces that inform historical analyses. As editor Reinhard Sieder explains in the opening paragraph, spatial ideas can be found everywhere in the historical, social, and cultural sciences. They construct the very objects of study in these fields: “European history,” “cultural space” (*Kulturraum*), “lower class,” and “upward mobility,” among others. The problem, Sieder writes, is that “[a]bstract, metaphorical and concrete ideas of space are jumbled together and this creates some misunderstanding” (p. 5). Indeed, the diversity of contributions in this volume tends to underscore just how differently space is understood by historians and suggests that in many cases historical practice could benefit from more systematic attention to notions of space in research and writing.

The most provocative treatment of the journal’s topic occurs in the opening essay by Alexander Mejstrik. He argues for a more methodical consideration of space in the social and historical sciences that goes beyond encyclopedic, typological and purely theoretical frameworks (p. 12). Mejstrik tries to develop a “discussion tool” based on Gaston Bachelard’s notion of epistemological profiles in *La Philosophie du non* (1940). Mejstrik draws on Bachelard to describe four epistemological variables or ways of knowing and understanding space: animism, realism, rationalism, and surrationalism. Together, these variables cover a lot of ground, including emotional, physical, abstract, and analytical dimensions of spatial

thinking. More important than their descriptive qualities though, is the way they are supposed to function as a tool for “extending and revising”–or “rectifying” in Bachelard’s terminology–existing ways of spatial thinking. However, although Mejstrik provides a detailed discussion of each variable, it remains unclear how all four might be used together in an empirical study, despite some hints Mejstrik provides at the end of the article. Perhaps a book-length treatment would allow Mejstrik to contextualize his project more precisely within the science studies-related work of Bachelard and to develop concrete examples of what his “discussion tool” means for research practice and historical explanation.

Nonetheless, Mejstrik’s epistemological variables seem to offer a helpful approach for historical projects that consider connections between national identity and geographical space (territory). In this respect, as Sieder also observes in his introduction, a certain resonance exists between Mejstrik’s theoretical discussion and Christoph Kählerberger’s empirical essay on “Invented Europe.” His analysis addresses the spatial construction of Europe in several of the epistemological senses described by Mejstrik. Given the recent trend in EU educational politics to encourage the development of a “European historical awareness” through educational institutions, Kählerberger asks, “What is European history?” (p. 150) and investigates what European awareness means through a content analysis of three history books used in Austrian *Gymnasien*.

As a general conclusion, Kählerberger finds that the

desire to arrive at a unified European identity leads to an oversimplified “invented tradition” defined by a singular linear historical development that selectively highlights “democracy, legal rights, individual freedoms and Christian thinking” (p. 151). In the trio of textbooks he examines, this tendency begins with geographical representations of “Europe” and continues through to discussions of European cultural identity. Interestingly, KÄhberger suggests as a spatial corrective a more dynamic notion of Europe based on the idea of “osmotic space” (p. 164). He writes: “Transcultural *flows* take on spatial importance and relativize nation-state centered thinking. To *not* imagine Europe according to the nation-state model, not as a territorial, political and cultural unity in the world separate from and in contrast to others could ... prevent a world-scale repetition of the fatal inner-European developments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (p. 164).

In contrast to KÄhberger—who makes the discursive construction of spatial order his explicit object of study—the remaining three contributors integrate spatial considerations into their analyses in more and less explicit ways. Ulrike Felber’s article “JubliÄumsbilder. Drei Ausstellungen zum Staatsvertragsdenken 2005” compares the historical content of three exhibitions that marked the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of Austria’s 1955 State Treaty. Felber sees the commemorative exhibitions as an opportunity to incorporate new research findings (those of the Austrian historical commission and recent studies on postwar Austria) and offer new perspectives on Austria’s postwar history. Clearly, Felber had hoped to find more critical treatments of issues like Austria’s role in World War I and gender than those realized in the exhibitions. Felber’s critical assessment is clearest regarding the connections and disjunctions between the thematic concept, the artifacts themselves, and visual implementation. She does a good job of pointing out when material objects can contradict the textual narrative and notes that in some cases artifacts that remain uncontextualized fail to offer any coherent message at all.

From a spatial perspective, the author devotes a significant amount of description to the arrangement of each exhibition, explaining room shapes, object placement, and how visitors are guided through the rooms. However, architectural space seems to be of little explanatory consequence, since Felber comes to the same conclusion for all three exhibitions: the exhibit makers have placed too much weight on the second republic of Austria as a historical catharsis; there is too little critical discussion of Austria’s Nazi history; there is not enough

attention to gender; and displays oversimplify Austria’s post-war history as one of “guilt and atonement” (p. 88). While space is neither taken for granted nor neutral, the spatial relations described seem to play at most only an illustrative role in the historical narrative created through text, artifacts and art. Still, the importance of spatial arrangements to the experience of each exhibition should not be dismissed and perhaps rather given more consideration from the perspective of exhibition visitors. I also wonder about the spatial significance on another level: What might it matter that two of the exhibitions were located in Vienna (Upper Belvedere and the Vienna Technical Museum) and one at the Schallaburg in lower Austria?

In contrast to Felber’s careful attention to the physical spaces that shape an exhibition, Karsten Linne’s article addresses the “projection and fantasy history” created by the “colonial sciences” in Germany. Between 1938 and 1943, a number of academics from several disciplines (ethnology, African studies, agriculture and forestry, medicine, economics, law, geology, and so on) were enthusiastically involved in research agendas aimed at providing practical knowledge for a German recolonization of Africa. While the military pushed the war front east as far and as long as it could, intellectuals willed it south toward the African continent. At the same time that colonial researchers were willingly serving the Nazi regime, they were often also serving their own self-interests. Regime-supported research considered “vital to the war effort” meant protection from military recruitment. As Linne puts it, “it was better to consider distant African problems sitting at a warm desk in a German university than to freeze, to starve or to die in Moscow or Leningrad” (p. 105).

Given the issue’s special focus, it is surprising that the spatial analysis in this essay seems underdeveloped. Linne opens his contribution with a provocative contrast between the real German colonies “lost” in 1918 and the academic labor expended on the fantasy of their return through assumed German victory in World War II. This intriguing relationship between real and imagined spaces, however, remains implicit and unexamined. What Linne does provide is a detailed description of the intensification of colonial research from 1938 to 1943, as supported by National Socialist government ministries, and the special role played by the University of Hamburg.

The final essay by Peter Melichar demonstrates the discursive importance of space. Sieder contextualizes Melichar’s essay as an example of “Kulturraum” and notes that a “space of history is conceivable not only

through its constructed or natural borders, but rather also through who lives in that space. By living, working and symbolizing their meanings in a space, residents mark it as a 'cultural space' with ethnic-linguistically, religiously, politically, or economically legitimated inner and outer borders" (p. 7). Specifically, Melichar addresses the question of how Austrian antisemites constructed their "object of hate" in the interwar period (p. 114). This question and the answers Melichar provides are meant to redress the tendency in studies of diverse antisemitisms as well as in studies of the Jewish diaspora to collapse differences among Jewish identities into an overgeneralized, undifferentiated Jewry. Melichar identifies three strategies used by interwar antisemites in Austria to identify "Jews": "the attempt to define 'Jews' (politically, legally, and by confession), to track them (as countable employees), and to count them (through demographic, economic, and employment statistics)" (p. 114). Employing these strategies, antisemites managed

to construct an "abstract Jewry that in such a form never existed before and basically existed only as an anti-semitic fiction" (p. 128). In this case then, space is a metaphorical construct based on the idea of social and cultural boundaries—with very serious and material consequences. Implicit within Melichar's essay is how spatial thinking—the shifting dividing lines between inclusion and exclusion—pervades social and cultural differences and informs justifications for political actions.

Through both positive and negative examples, this volume encourages a more reflective treatment of space in historical analysis—or perhaps even an epistemological overhaul, if Mejstrik's essay is any indication. In this respect, taken together the essays are significant beyond their individual focus and content. And yet they raise more questions than they answer regarding the significance of the "spatial turn" to historical practice and knowledge. Perhaps the discussion will continue in subsequent issues of the journal.

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Citation: Shannon McMullen. Review of Sieder, Reinhard, ed., *Die Räume der Geschichte*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. February, 2008.

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