LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Imaginative Geographies of Home: Ambivalent Mobility in Twenty-First-Century Literature and Culture

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In the second decade of the new millennium, home is anything but a homely topic. There is nothing cosy or comfortable about the debates surrounding the current housing crises in many countries, let alone about the perceived threat migration poses to national borders and economies. There is nothing familiar or well-known about the consequences large-scale processes like globalization, climate change, technological advances and shifting gender roles will have on our most intimate surroundings. And there is nothing unsophisticated or rustic about the scholarship that has blossomed around the topic in the last twenty years, making home one of the most exciting areas of interdisciplinary collaboration. This is not least owing to the complex and multi-scalar character of home as a concept. As the social geographers Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling posit in their seminal introduction to approaches to home, it is 'a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two' – in a nutshell, as they put it, a 'spatial imaginary' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 2).

Our special issue brings together two aspects of home studies we see as particularly intriguing. Firstly, we consider home through the lens of another concept that has gained cultural currency in recent years: the notion of "mobility", which stands in a productive tension to "home". Secondly, we are interested in the specific contribution that contemporary cultural productions, namely literature and other media, make to

understanding what home – seen through the lens of mobility – means to us right now. Accordingly, the corpus of this special issue comprises literature, graphic novels, photography and film. Read side by side, the articles draw attention to the specific affordances that the different media and genres offer for mappings and experiences of home in an age of mobility.

At first sight, mobility may seem to be simply antithetical to home. In contrast to the stability promised by home, it stands for instability – or, seen in a different light, in contrast to the static character of home, it promises dynamic change. However, a way of thinking that combines both concepts draws attention to the pitfalls of this very binary. In the words of one of the foremost thinkers of the new mobility paradigm, Tim Creswell, 'it is now widely accepted that places are not fixed, bounded and inward looking but constructed out of multiple flows within and beyond a particular place' (Cresswell 2011: 576). By defining place in terms of flow – of people, goods, and images – Cresswell gives precedence to the close relation between place and mobility. Home is certainly no exception, as even such a crusty commonplace as 'Home is where the heart is' suggests, with its focus on the flow of human relations over the permanence of a specific location. At the same time, the paradigm of mobility crystallizes some of the central pressures bearing onto home as a place and a practice in times of the already-mentioned large-scale developments (e.g. globalization, technological advances, climate change). Both home and mobility are, as social geography reminds us, embedded in socioeconomic relations and hierarchies.

Our interest in the relation between home and mobility as a way to understand the way we live – and "do" home – at this very moment in time is, as already indicated, fused with an interest in the special contribution contemporary literature and other media can make to this understanding. If, as Edward Said famously argued in *Orientalism* (1978), the significance of topographic and material divisions of space is the construction of an "imaginative geography", then such cultural productions are the *loci* where these imaginations are condensed, reflected and renegotiated. While it can be argued that *all* spaces gain their cultural meaning through the ways in which they are represented and reflected on in media representations, it seems to us that home is special because it is a concept rather than a particularized place. Designating a space a home is a social act with a political dimension and emotional connotations. It entails defining for whom this space is a home, embeds this space into social relationships and hierarchies (such as family or state) and suggests an affective and evaluative stance. Consequently, "home" is rarely understood as a neutral description. More often than not, it evokes a whole network of individually as well as culturally coded meanings and emotions.

This is why the concept also lends itself to political usage. The currently resurgent tendency of the political right in many Western countries to appeal to a sense of the state as a "home" that needs to be protected against invasions from the outside is only one particularly salient example of the ideological force of "home". A wide array of diverse home ideologies can easily be identified when looking at current discourse landscapes. Put somewhat simplistically, on the right of the political spectrum, the white bourgeois home tends to be romanticized as the sphere of conservative family values, resonating with a nostalgic yearning for clear-cut gender roles and unchallenged white hegemony. On the

left side of the spectrum, the same associations are often endowed with a negative hue: the "domestic" here is shorthand for conventional conformity and reactionary attitudes that need to be fought off (see also Fraiman 2017: 1-4). At the same time, however, there are also leftist critics, such as Iris Marion Young, who make use of positive connotations of home in their call to extend key values, such as safety or privacy, as a basic human right to everyone (2001: 282-86). Indeed, such an up-holding of home as a critical value in the human rights debate can be juxtaposed with neoliberalism's financialization of home, where it is reduced to an investment asset within a hypermobile, global capital market, and where the affordability of home is seen to rest on the shoulders of the individual and his or her entrepreneurial skill in securing a decent income. The rhetorics of home, as these examples show, are at present often linked to an evocation of what we call "ambivalent mobility": the amenability of "home" to reflect both key promises and threats of the on-going societal changes and movements.

Cultural productions such as literature, film, photography, TV and plays are central sites where the relations linking home and ambivalent mobility are explored and the values attached to their familiar rhetorical usage become tangible, in different ways: sometimes reinforced, sometimes critically deconstructed or subverted, sometimes transformed. Literary and media scholars are making crucial contributions to a growing body of research that maps out the contested arena of home as a hot new topic for scholarship, as signaled by (among others) the consolidation of such efforts in the interdisciplinary Bloomsbury series *Home*, launched 2017. The series includes a volume by the literary scholars Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei, who had already made a fundamental contribution to the topic with their compilation and systematization of cultural theories concerning the home (*The Domestic Space Reader*, 2012). Their latest offering is an edited collection on representations of 'alternative' domestic spaces: *Living with Strangers: Bedsits and Boarding Houses in Modern English Life, Literature and Film* (2018). Another prominent example for a new wave of home scholarship is Susan Fraiman's rethinking of feminist takes on domestic space. In *Extreme Domesticity: A View from the Margins* (2017), she analyses a wide range of novels, films, television shows and non-fictional writing to bolster her argument that home is 'far more heterogeneous, unstable, and politically contradictory' (7) than both proponents and detractors of a feminine ideal of domesticity have made it out to be. Even more recent is Laura Bieger's monograph *Belonging and Narrative: A Theory of the American Novel* (2018), which identifies narrative as a fundamental means of home-making, and the genre of the novel as a primary agent in creating places. Like Fraiman, Bieger is thus interested not only in home as a place, but also in the praxeological dimension of home as something that needs to be continually made and remade.

While much exciting work on home, then, has already been done in the field of literary, media and cultural studies, a systematic mapping of intersections between literature/media, home, and mobility has not been conducted yet. In the next section, we offer a first step towards such a mapping by distinguishing three focal areas relating home and media. Our grid can be used as a point of departure not only for a systematic analysis of home from the perspective of literary, media and cultural studies, but also to chart the heterogeneous terrain of existing research on home in these disciplines. Our main emphasis, however, rests on showing how our model may fruitfully be applied in the

analysis of literature and narrative media, as this helps frame the contributions to this volume and may offer pointers for future research.

Home and Media in a Mobilized World: Three Focal Areas

We propose distinguishing between three focal areas within the study of home in literary and cultural scholarship: (1) *home(s) as the subject of representation in literature and media*, (2) *home as a carrier of figurative meaning within literature and media*, and (3) *media practices as forms of home-making*. Of these areas of interest, (1) is certainly the most obvious: home and home-making, the challenges and struggles they involve, the hopes and promises they are supposed to fulfil, have always been an important subject in literature and continue to be so in contemporary culture. As we suggest by proposing the second area, beyond this mimetic function in reflecting real-life homes, literary homes (2) often carry a level of figurative meaning, which frequently becomes an object of scholarly attention. For example, the country home that is the setting for Chekhov's *Cherry Orchard* stands, as Nicholas Grene argues, for 'all Russia' (2014: 37), while in Gothic fiction, attics and cellars of homes often embody repressed aspects of an individual or a whole society.[1] Of course aspects (1) and (2) are closely connected, since one and the same element of a text (e.g. the description of the physical and material structure of what is called "home") can be read as referring to home as a phenomenon in its own right or as signifying something else. We prefer conceptualizing them as two different focal areas, however, insofar as they differ in terms of the function that is accorded to the concrete home as presented in the text. If one attends to the first level, one asks how a text reflects on the topic of home as an extratextual phenomenon. If one looks to the second level, one is interested in how the concrete spatial or experiential phenomenon of home is used in order to explore a different (or larger) topic.

While these two areas both pertain to the textual level of representation (home *in* literature/media), the third focal area relates to the production and reception of literature and other media: literature/media *as* home-making practices. Laura Bieger's book is one example of such a perspective, as she sees narrative and novel-writing as means to construct notions of home and belonging. The question of how the production, circulation and consumption of media relates to home-making can be addressed on an individual level (e.g. the significance of media objects and practices in private homes) as well as on a collective level (e.g. the role of the concept of national literature in imagining the nation as home).

Of the three focal areas, the first one appears to be fairly straightforward. However, a closer look at how homes are represented in literature and media quickly reveals the slippery complexity of "home". Many literary works unfold what may be called an ethnographic gaze in their careful representation of how "home" functions as a multi-dimensional concept in the everyday life of individuals. Even the word "home" itself may refer to diverse aspects such as a concrete physical structure (e.g. a house), people, feelings such as belonging and comfort, or a combination of these different elements.

In order to do justice to the multi-layered meanings of home (even in everyday usage), we suggest differentiating between spatial, material, economic, social, emotional,

and cognitive dimensions.[2] The spatial dimension pertains to the geographic location and size of home while the material dimension refers to both material structures (e.g. a brick house, apartment, wood cabin etc.) and the material objects associated with home, such as pieces of furniture, family heirlooms or pictures on the wall. The location, size and materiality of home feed into its economic value and hence the economic dimension. Home is frequently conflated with family, which is reflected in the social dimension. The emotive dimension of home pertains to the fact that it is often also considered a feeling or emotional state: ideals of home arguably exert a powerful attraction because they typically feature the home as an affective space that provides the experience of comfort, warmth, belonging and safety. As the ideal home is often represented as a site of familiarity, it makes sense to also distinguish a cognitive dimension of home. This grid can help to systematize the models of home depicted in literature according to the main dimensions of home that are brought into play. Further questions include the interrelation between these dimensions in a specific representation (e.g. do they seamlessly map onto each other or are there tensions?) and how they are evaluatively coded by characters and/or the artistic work as a whole.

Despite the slipperiness of home as a concept, it is possible to identify some key trends in the focal area "representations of home in literature and media" that reflect modern mobilities. There is a lively strand of scholarship pointing out how many current artistic works showcase forced mobility in the wake of destabilizing processes such as climate change and economic crises (see, for example, the contributions of Mieke Bal, Winnie L.M. Yee and Maureen E. Ruprecht Fadem in Sandten and Tan 2016; Birke 2018; 2019; Gladwin 2018: 167-85). These works raise awareness of the way mobility functions as 'a key difference- and otherness-producing machine, involving significant inequalities of speed, risks, rights, and status' (Salazar 2017: 60). Another key topic in contemporary literature and narrative media continues to be the endurance of neo-colonial power structures and the exploration of how forms of togetherness are both shaped and put under pressure by migratory flows embedded in global power hierarchies (see, for example, Butter 2014). Artistic works are not only attentive to the competing experientialities of homemaking in a hypermobile world, but they themselves also help shape the resulting ambivalent 'structures of feeling', to use Raymond Williams's term, through their representations of home.

A focus on home in a figurative sense, our second area, adds an important facet for a full understanding of how contemporary literature and media critically negotiate mobilities in a globalized world. Many of these productions tap into the multi-scalar character of home, according to which home may range from the body to the world or even the cosmos. This scalar fluidity makes it easier to use home as a prism for exploring more abstract topics such as nationhood. Media analysis needs to take into account the fact that a number of metaphors and allegories, not least the time-worn allegory of the nation as a home, have gelled into commonplaces that are frequently activated to argue for specific regulations of mobilities, for example in the current political discourse on the migration crisis. The affective dimension of home is frequently harnessed to bolster claims that the 'doors of the nation' need to 'be shut' against unwanted immigrants, who are cast in the role of threatening intruders.

Such popular usages of the home as a conceptual metaphor in political or quotidian discourses may be strengthened by their dissemination in literature and the arts. However, artistic production may also resist and undermine established conceptual metaphors by complicating meanings of home through their own particular figurative homes. Many literary or artistic works creatively make use of metaphors, allegories or metonymies to develop unusual imaginative geographies of home that unsettle entrenched ways of thinking. Scholars, then, can choose between two avenues of research: focussing on the use of home as a conceptual metaphor in contemporary politics and literature (where literary productions themselves can be criticized for cementing popular discourses of home); or, conversely, exploring the potential of literature and other media to provide a counter-discourse, by paying close attention to how artistic works give figurative meanings of home a unique or critical spin of their own.

When scholars shift attention to the third focal area, media practices as forms of homemaking, then the interplay between media developments, home lives, and intricate patterns of mobility in the twenty-first century takes centre stage. The idea that media practices play a central role in the way in which we "do" home has been explored on many levels, from the attention to narrative as a way of effecting belonging (see Bieger 2018) to the notion of certain media formats and technologies as fostering community and intimacy. Raymond Williams' work on "mobile privatization", which is concerned with the way home-centred activities such as watching television afford the imaginative transportation of media users to other places, is one of the well-known contributions in the realm of media studies,[3] but one could easily add a wealth of other or more current examples. In the twenty-first century, the digitalization of media is opening up new ways of home-making in societies marked by mobility and globalization. Digital homes are created online through new modes of communication and networking (see e.g. Mair 2016 on language use in discussion forums of Jamaican, Nigerian and Cameroonian diasporas). More traditional media feature, for instance, in the ongoing collaborative research project 'Constituting Global Convivence' at Vienna University, which investigates how the portable album or collection book may serve as "diasporic media" (Pelz and Windsperger 2015: 267) that enable the forging of 'transareal community' (269) and a sense of home.

Scope of this Special Issue and Introduction to Individual Articles

In this special issue, the question of how ambivalent mobility affects our sense of home as a space and a relationship is discussed in the light of all three focal points. While almost all contributors examine home as a subject of representation, there is also a marked attention to home as a carrier of figurative meaning (see especially Heinz's discussion of home as an allegory for the nation), and one of the articles offers an intricate analysis of new media practices as forms of home-making in a contemporary world marked by mobility (see Maly-Bowie's contribution).

In contrast to publications which focus on one particular media form or format (see e.g. Laura Bieger (2018) on home in the novel or Nicholas Grene (2014) on home in theatre), we have chosen to bring together articles considering a range of different media: the graphic novel, narrative fiction, film, photography and PR material. Firstly, this reflects

our sense that the ambivalent mobility of home is of transmedial significance and productivity. Secondly, this collection is meant as a step towards mapping the specific contributions different media formats can make to reflecting ways of understanding and doing home. While the article by Sarah Heinz explores the interrelations of home and mobility in the genre that probably garners the most attention within literary studies (and also literary geographies), namely the novel, Wibke Schniedermann and Jon Hegglund explore the potential of the less often investigated graphic narrative.[4] Their contributions highlight how the visualization of spaces in the combination of drawn image and word opens up a whole range of possibilities for showing how the spatial dimension of home is always affectively and cognitively charged. While in the films that Julia Leyda investigates, the ambivalent mobilization of home is conveyed in a trajectory of moving pictures, Julia Faisst shows how in the genre of photography such narratives can be condensed into just one image. The survey of different medial responses to home in a social world marked by mobility is rounded off by Barbara Maly-Bowie's discussion of how the media services provider Netflix presents itself as opening up a new set of home-making practices. Although they by no means exhaust the whole range of relevant genres and formats, the articles – taken together – convey a sense of the large spectrum of possibilities media possess to reflect and transform our sense of home in the twenty-first century.

The special issue begins with **Julia Leyda's** article 'Climate Crisis, Financial Crisis: Negative Mobility and Domicide in 21st-Century American Cinema'. Leyda has coined the term 'negative mobility' to capture how home is rendered precarious in contemporary US films that deal with the housing crash on the one hand, and anthropogenic climate change on the other. These twin forms of "domicide", that is, the 'intentional destruction of home' (Leyda with reference to Porteous and Smith), result in involuntary mobility: eviction and climate migration. With the help of her two case studies, the films *99 Homes* and *Snowpiercer* (both 2014), Leyda shows how contemporary cinema unsettles optimistic patterns of upward/outward mobility (which are deeply rooted in US-American ideology) by staging a negative image of mobility that is involuntary, downward and aimless. Special attention is paid to the aesthetic and affective strategies used by the filmmakers in response to the representational challenges posed by the financial crisis and climate change.

The theme of negative mobility is picked up in **Wibke Schniedermann's** article on 'Non-Places of Homelessness: Mobility and Affect in *Somewhere Nowhere: Lives Without Homes* and *Borb*', which reflects on how mobility can become a strain and stigma for those who are forced into homelessness. Schniedermann makes use of Marc Augé's concept of "non-place" to discuss critically the relationship of vagrant people to public spaces – the only sites left for them to inhabit. Building on this discussion, she then investigates how the genre of graphic narrative may serve as an especially apt medium for challenging the hierarchical ordering of public space. The affordances of the graphic narrative form in the fictional *Borb* (2015) and the documentary *Somewhere Nowhere* (2012), Schniedermann argues, are utilized to evoke different reader responses. While the depiction of homelessness in *Somewhere Nowhere* is geared towards evoking readerly empathy, *Borb* works with an appalling repulsiveness that furthers readers' emotional distance from the protagonist.

Julia Faisst's article 'Capturing Eviction in America: Forced Dislocation and the Iconography of the Housing Crisis' continues the discussion of negative mobility by engaging with contemporary foreclosure photography, especially John Moore's World Press Photo award-winning series *Evicted*, 2012. Drawing on theories of spatial inequality and the political imagination, Faisst examines how this successful photographic genre exposes and criticizes housing inequality in its representations of a dislocated middle class threatened by downward mobility. She also addresses the bias towards whiteness in her selected material: the eviction photography under consideration exclusively concentrates on white citizens despite the fact that the black population bore the brunt of the eviction crisis. Given that the political imagination of eviction photography comes into being through the interplay between the photographer, the photographed and the spectators of the photo, Faisst is particularly concerned with the ambivalent role of the photographer who witnesses the scene of the eviction as well as that of the spectator who later looks at the pictures.

Jon Hegglund's article 'A Home for the Anthropocene: Planetary Time and Domestic Space in Richard McGuire's *Here*' shifts attention to the question of how home might be imaginatively mapped in the era of the Anthropocene. Drawing on materialist ecocriticism and cognitive narratology, Hegglund discusses why the representation of non-human planetary time constitutes a striking challenge for traditional narrative forms. He then analyses the way Richard McGuire makes use of "home" in his graphic novel *Here* to tackle this challenge. *Here* features "slices of life" over time within the same house – a building from the 1900s in the northeastern USA. As a result, home is anthropomorphized metonymically because it 'prompt[s] the reader's desire for and projection of biographical human lives within its walls' (Hegglund 2019: 187). This, in turn, fosters an empathetic sense of general humankind. *Here* combines the spatial fixity of the site called home with a vast temporal mobility that ranges from 3 billion BC to the 23rd century. In this way, the intimate or human scale of home is intertwined with the deep historical time of the Anthropocene. By also merging the depicted storyworld with the materiality of the book form, *Here* establishes home as a '*primary* condition of being-in-the-world' (190) and hence provides the anchor point for perceiving the Anthropocene in terms of everyday spatiality.

While the previous articles focus on Western imaginations of home, **Sarah Heinz** adds a non-Western perspective by critically engaging with 'The Immobilised Family: Home, Homeland and Domopolitics in Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*'. She uses William Walter's concept of domopolitics, which refers to the government of a state in the name of a specific model of home or household, to explore the complex 'nexus of home, control, power politics and family in literary representations of homeplaces in postcolonial Nigeria' (Heinz 2019: 201). Through the analysis of the presentation of family life in Obioma's 2015 novel, she demonstrates how the endurance of "home" in contemporary Nigeria is seen to hinge on a patriarchal immobilizing of families. This imaginative geography of home life can be read as a harsh comment on Nigerian domopolitics with its concomitant ideals of strong male leadership in the postcolonial context. Heinz emphasizes that Obioma's novel not only provides critique, but also offers a forward-looking definition of belonging that eschews the pervasive domopolitical

equation of homeland and genetic belonging: the novel's marked use of parables points to a dialogic notion of belonging based on acts of multiple narration.

The special issue concludes with **Barbara Maly-Bowie's** article '"Home is where your Netflix is" – From Mobile Privatization to Private Mobilization'. Maly-Bowie examines Netflix and its mobilizations of home by adopting William Raymond's concept of "mobile privatization" as an analytic lens. As she points out, Netflix draws heavily on the concept of home in its self-promotion, which serves to domesticate its new technology. This domestication relies on reclaiming and remodeling the mobilities of television. The streaming service also presents itself as a home for those who are otherwise marginalized and excluded from mainstream society. The "homely" personalized television experience offered by Netflix embeds dispersed cultural spaces into the private sphere, thereby deflecting attention from exclusionary neoliberal dynamics and data-driven commercialization. Towards the end of her analysis, Maly-Bowie reframes Williams's concept of "mobile privatization" in terms of what she calls "private mobilization". This allows her to highlight how, in the case of Netflix, the private may also serve as a valuable resource for artistic production and socio-political change. Where most of our contributors take a primary interest in the concrete representation of home as mobilized and ask how this ties in with metaphorical or praxeological dimensions, Maly-Bowie turns the perspective around and explores the dynamics of the geographies of home from the primary vantage point of the new home-making practices opened up by changes in media environments.

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Notes

[1] There are large overlaps between research on literary representations of houses and that on homes because, as Monika Shafi emphasizes in her study *Housebound* (2012), the house frequently features 'as a place that, in its history and physical substance, shapes and mediates lived experience and connects it to a vast storehouse of the home imaginary' (3).
[2] Some of these categories have also been suggested by Blunt and Dowling (2006). See also Birke and Butter (2016: 31-2).
[3] Cf. Williams (1974). On the interplay between media, mobility, home and identity, see also Morley (2000).
[4] However, the body of work investigating comic books from the perspective of literary geographies is growing, see e.g. Dittmer (2012) and Peterle (2017).

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