1 Belonging, Narrative, and the Art of the Novel

Having mastered her adventures in Oz, Dorothy learns the secret of the ruby red slippers: There is no place like home. Repeating the phrase over and over, she calls her home into existence. There is indeed no place like home unless one calls for it. And there is no reason to call unless that place seems uncertain. But something is curious about this lesson, and this something becomes tangible in its repetition. Does the phrase mean that there is *no* place like home? This would attest to an almost sacred exclusiveness. Or does it mean that there *is* no place like home, which would attest to its elusiveness or even sheer absence? As one meaning dovetails the other, there is an eerie sense that home may be forever gone, or, once seen from Oz, turn out to never have existed. Alas, the return that stands at the end of Dorothy's story does not put an end to the concerns with where, how, and to whom she belongs that made her leave home in the first place—and that are perhaps the single most powerful generator of narrative.

Belonging as I conceive it is an inescapable condition of human existence—"not just being, but longing" (Bell 1), the desire for a place in the world without which both place and world would crumble. To feel and direct this longing we need a mediating structure; narrative is that structure. Just think of the many people who write diaries in times of trouble, and stop once things have smoothened out. In turning to narrative, we grapple with unsettling experiences and conduct the semantic, psychic, and geographic movements unleashed by them within the shifting parameters of space and time. Narrative's sweeping allure (it can be found in any culture) thrives on its promise to give meaning and mooring to our lives (which may include the dissolution of old and obsolete ties). Where, how, and to whom we belong depends on the stories we tell (or do not tell) ourselves. Today, matters of belonging are most rigorously debated in the contexts of transnationalism, postcolonialism, and queer and gender studies, usually to highlight states of troubled belonging caused by experiences of migration, diaspora, racist or sexist discrimination. These debates have brought out the centrality of these experiences in the formation of modern cultures, and they have been crucial in replacing notions of belonging as set (and saturated) in stable (and unjustly distributed) correlations of place and self with an understanding of belonging as inherently fabricated and provisional. Salman Rushdie's "imaginary homelands," Homi Bhabha's "third

space," Mary-Louise Pratt's "contact zones," Paul Gilroy's "black Atlantic," Iain Chamber's "impossible homecomings," and James Clifford's preference of "routes" over "roots" capture this critical impetus.

I have learned much from these debates, and I fully subscribe to their insistence on the tenuous, quintessentially performative nature of belonging, its contested and often precarious relation to space, race and gender, its nostalgic inclinations and cosmopolitan potential. For my own purposes, however, the (identity) political framework of these debates is limiting. Rather than focusing on particular sets of experiences, their proper recognition, and their capacity to resist hegemonic renderings of belonging (the national homeland, the nuclear family), I want to consider belonging as an anthropological premise of narrative. Yet pursuing this interest against the backdrop of these debates throws into sharp relief the racist, sexist, and imperialist implications that are couched in the notion of the human in part through its relation to narrative. In fact, narrative art, and the art of the novel in particular, were essential to creating the sense of self that (with its enlightened capacities of inner growth, rational conduct and critical interrogation) has come to define what it means to be human in the modern age. So yes, the human is a haunted point of reference, far easier dismissed from a position of white privilege than from one of systematic exclusion (to this day black activism gains force by insisting on its share of the human)—and hence vexed with the very dynamics of belonging that this book sets out to explore.[1]

In pairing belonging and narrative I hope to gain a new angle from which to address what narrative is and does; or rather, what we do with it, what it does with and for us, and why we are so endlessly inclined to engage with it.[2] With this focus, I am less concerned with narrative as a mode of representation and more with narrative use. In foregrounding the practical and pragmatic dimension of narrative, my study aligns itself with the work of scholars such as Barbara Herrnstein Smith, James Phelan, and, more recently, David Rudrum, in its conviction that "any definition of narrative that ignores the importance of use is […] incomplete" (200). While our engagement with narrative can certainly not be reduced to use in a utilitarian sense, it always occurs "on a particular occasion" and "for some purpose" (Phelan, *Rhetoric* 218). This also means that engaging with narrative always

1 From the first slave narratives written in support of the abolitionist movement to Ta-Nehisi Coates's recent protest essay *Between the World and Me*, "being human" serves as a rallying point against racial discrimination and injustice. The main reason for this insistence is, of course, the fact that modern slavery was based on a systematic denial of humanity to those degraded to the status of property. I discuss how Edward P. Jones's neo-slavery novel *The Known World* exploits these vexed aspects of belonging in my essay "Property, Community, and Belonging."

2 The heightened attention that narrative has recently gained in theorizing identity, social action and agency is a powerful testimony to the conundrum of belonging and narrative that is the concern of this book. See Somers, Ezzy, Gergen and Gergen, Taylor, Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity," Cavararo.

has practical value—a value that exists in relation to those who use it and their everyday needs. Based on these premises, what I put forth in this opening chapter is an understanding of narrative as an endlessly useful resource of orientation and emplacement on which we draw to shape, order, and sustain our relation with the world and everything in it. I argue that we engage in narrative to reach a more adept state of belonging; and that, in this basic sense, narrative is foundational to our being in the world, especially to our practical need for emplacement.

Moreover, building on this anthropological approach to narrative, I propose an understanding of narrative art in which the novel, with its endlessly malleable and searching form, assumes a special place. The following four chapters are meditations on this place, each based on one novel with its own situational and formal ramifications for the project of theorizing narrative use based on the human need to belong, and conjointly reaching across four centuries in probing narrative modes of emplacement and agency. These novels are American novels, which means they come from a place where belonging is even less of a given then in other parts of the modern world. They will take us to four iconic and conflicted sites of U.S. cultural history—the frontier, the region, the ghetto, the homeland—that are prone to bring out both the salience and significance of having a place in a changing world, and the proactive role that narrative assumes in the making und unmaking of this place.

Uses of Narrative

In a most basic sense, narrative is a kind of language use in which an act of telling serves the end of interconnecting dispersed elements across space and time, generally to reconstruct what has happened. And just as any other kind of language use, narrative is inherently dialogic—which is, of course, crucial to its use. It is geared toward a receiver with the hope of engaging her in an act of exchange. This exchange is never neutral; on the contrary, it always entails a desire for change in the receiver, be it of opinion, feeling, or mood. But change will not occur unless the receiver gets in on the narrative act. Participation can be light and wavering, a cruising through a narrative to grasp the plot and indulge in select passages (Barthes, *Pleasure* 10-13), but ideally it takes the form of playing along with the demands put forth by a specific mode of exchange. Yet no matter how we participate, it is the particular and concrete form of a narrative that regulates the terms of participation and exchange.

Theorists have described the dialogic dimension of narrative in terms of contract, transfer, transference, transaction, and feedback loops (Barthes, *Pleasure* 95-96; Iser, *Fictive* 236-48; Fluck (building on Iser), *Romance* 365-84; Brooks, *Reading* 216-37; Schwab, *Subjects* 22-48; Phelan, *Fiction* 5), and they have defined its purpose or use in terms of pleasure, desire, imaginary self-extension, and inner growth.

In all of these cases, time is the implied measure of purpose and use. Engaging in narrative can yield a pleasure that either confirms or disrupts the continuity of one's self (Barthes, *Pleasure* 14). It can keep the boundaries of the self open over time (Iser, *Prospecting* 242-248; Schwab, *Subjects* 22-28). And in progressing from beginning to end, it can cultivate of judgment (Phelan, *Fiction* 133-148), advance fictional justice and recognition (Fluck, *Romance* 389-400; 446-449), and endorse and suspend the death-bound logic of time (Brooks, *Reading* 107-112). Given the widely accepted understanding of narrative as a representation (and hence reconstruction) of events that have happened in the past, and given the vast body of theoretical work dedicated to the structural and philosophical problems that arise from this retrospective mode of engaging with the world, this inclination is hardly surprising.[3] Some of the most sweeping and philosophically ambitious narrative theories (Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, Peter Brooks's *Reading for the Plot*) conceive narrative as a dialogical model of understanding that is especially useful to grapple with the problem of human temporality and time-boundedness. They examine, for instance, how narrative, in both structuring time and progressively unfolding over time, teaches us basic lessons about the difference between past, present and future, or time and memory; and how narrative provides a virtual playing field for staging conflicts between Eros and the death drive, ultimately to the end of confronting our mortality (Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 3.; Brooks, *Reading* 90-112).

So yes, narrative is an immensely useful resource when it comes to grappling with the complex and intangible realities of time, and in unfolding over time it can generate such marvelous things as insight, awareness, affirmation, and joy. But are the ties to human temporality as exclusive in determining narrative use as it appears through the lens of this scholarship? Consider, for instance, that narrative creates spatial (with Mikhail Bakhtin we may say "chronotopic") orders without which it would be incomprehensible. Such orders are always symbolically laden through hubs of power, areas with restricted access, conflicting regions (country vs. city), or journeys to foreign places. According to Jurij Lotman, whose narrative theory displays a rare awareness of matters of space, "[a] plot can always be reduced to a basic episode—the crossing of the basic topological border in the plot's spatial structure" (*Artistic Text* 238).[4] But space not only organizes narrative, it also drives and directs it. Moreover, and crucially, the medial and material form in

3 If Lessing arguing in the *Laocoon* that literature a temporal, and hence more sophisticated art than the spatial art of painting is an early expression of this conundrum, Seymour Chatman's *Story and Discourse* and Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* are narratological and philosophical monuments. For more recent work on the topic see Currie, *About Time*; Grethlein; "Narrative Configuration."

4 The works of Bakhtin and Lotman are two notable exceptions to the negligence of space by narrative theorists. See Zoran, "Space" for an early attempt to assess the significance of space for narrative theory.

and through which we engage with narrative is always extended in space. The size of a book in our hands, the layout of letters on a page or a screen, the space between individual words, paragraphs or images, all this directly affects our mode of engagement. Narrative's relation to space becomes even more basic when we consider that storytelling presupposes emplacement. Narrative acts are always conducted from somewhere, and this somewhere has a concrete spatial form (the face-to-face situation of oral storytelling, a particular desk at a particular place in time). And because narrative is inherently dialogic, it reaches out from that place toward an interlocutor who engages with it at an equally particular place (a favorite reading chair, a beach, a subway car, a prison cell). The transformative effects aimed for by any narrative act materialize in the space unfolding from this extended "narrative situation."[5] They are bound to change the mode of emplacement on either side of the dialogical bond, and the storyworld harbored by a narrative is the space in which the terms and trajectories of this transformation are laid out. There is indeed a complex network of spaces and places produced and interlinked in any narrative act that determine its use.

Hence, an important claim that I make in this book is that narrative does not merely engage us in ways that resemble real-life experience.[6] Positing that one's state of belonging can effectively change through narrative engagement implies that life and narrative are somehow continuous, that the boundaries between the storyworld and the actual world are more porous and permeable than it is usually assumed. Rethinking the relation between space, place and narrative is key to substantiating this point, which Edward Casey squares as: "No implacement without implotment" (461).[7] Perhaps inspired by the heightened currency of matters of space and place in literary and cultural studies, yet certainly under the influence of "postclassical" extensions of their field, narratologists have recently begun to pay more attention to the underrated relation between space and narrative.[8] Sparked by the advance of cognitive narratology, there is, for instance, a sizable interest in the spatial metaphors that we use to describe what narrative is and does. Scholars

5 The term is drawn from Stanzel, who uses it strictly to describe structural features of a narrative text.

6 This would be the constructivist approach embraced by narratologists such as Monika Fludernik, Ansgar Nünning, and Meir Sternberg, and recently reinvigorated in the burgeoning field of cognitive narratology, especially by David Herman and Manfred Jahn.

7 As much as I like how Casey's formula captures the first-person-perspective of phenomenology through the repeated "i," for the purpose of theorizing narrative it makes more sense to stick with the term "emplotment" and the corresponding "emplacement."

8 Among these extensions of classical narratology are inclusions visual and oral media, non-fictional genres such as memoir and autobiography, and rhetorical theory and cognitive sciences. The term "postclassical narratology" was first coined by David Herman in his book *Narratologies* and quickly gained traction thereafter. For a recent overview of this development see Alber and Fludernik, *Postclassical Narratology* and *The Living Handbook of Narratology*.

have described the cognitive work of expressions such as "plotline," "thread," and "circularity" as translating the notorious elusiveness of time and meaning into the more tangible realities of distance and direction, and they have described the "narrative is travel" metaphor as converting temporal progress into spatial sequence and as mobilizing space under the impact of reading and writing it.[9] Yet sage and important as these revaluations are in broadening our understanding of narrative use by complicating narrative's privileged relation to time, in the end they remain limited in the degree to which they shed light on narrative's spatial dimension. The main reason for this is that they stick to a representational model of narrative that, due to its core premise of narrative being a retrospective mode mediating objects and events across time, does not allow for any direct transaction between physical space and narrative use.[10]

Bridging this divide is key to the project to theorizing narrative based on the human need to belong. Step one in this endeavor is to complicate, and possibly part with received notions of narrative as a stable backdrop to the messiness of life.

Life and Narrative (and) Art

Approached in the traditional way, narrative's capacity to mend troubled states of belonging is strictly retrospective. Categorically removed from life, it elucidates what already *has* been lived; in fact, it can only function as a basic form of human understanding because it *re*-creates (and thus recovers) life from a safe distance. This also means that narrative is viewed as a cognitive instrument to impose meaning and order on the natural disorder of human existence.[11] But recently scholars

9 See Kemp, "The Inescapable Metaphor;" Mikkonen, "The Narrative as Travel Metaphor." I discuss their positions at greater length in my article "Spatial Forms."

10 This tendency also persists in more general reassessments of the significance of space in our understanding of narrative, of which Marie-Laure Ryan may be the most prolific proponent. Her work on the topic offers a typology of different manifestations of space in narrative, it traces these manifestations across different media, and it explores the relation of space and narrative together in collaboration with two geographers. But throughout this series of comprehensive and nuanced studies, and especially in the most recent, interdisciplinary one, the two domains remain clearly separated: There is space as an object of narrative representation, and there is narrative as a means of dealing with space. See Ryan, "Space;" "Narration in Various Media;" "Space, Place;" *Narrating Space*. I discuss her position at greater length in my article "Spatial Forms."

11 This understanding of narrative, which Metetoja aptly calls "epistemological" for its primary focus on understanding the world, rejects assumptions about "the nature of reality" including the ontological dimension of narrative, while indeed making a strong ontological claim in positing "a deeper level at which human, lived experience is immediately given, and human existence in general—as part of the flux of the real—is nonnarrative in character" ("Human Existence" 91).

from fields as diverse as sociology, anthropology, psychology, political philosophy, legal theory, feminist theory, and organizational theory have come to claim something vastly different about narrative; namely, that narrative is "an ontological condition of social life." In abrogating the received division between life and narrative, scholars aligning themselves with this position assert "that stories guide action; that people construct identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within a repertoire of emplotted stories; that 'experience' is constituted through narratives; […] and that people are guided to act in certain ways, and not others, on the basis of the projections, expectations, and memories derived from a multiplicity but ultimately limited repertoire of available […] narratives". And if "everything we know from the making of families, to coping with illness, to carrying out strikes and revolutions is at least in part a result of numerous cross-cutting story-lines in which social actors locate themselves" our common understanding of action and agency is in dire need of revision (Somers 613-14, 607).

For Margaret Somers, who I am quoting here, the "cross-cutting story-lines" that orchestrate social relations are strikingly spatial (as is Somers's entire "relational and network approach"). Addressing these same social relations from the perspective of human geography, Doreen Massey claims that they "always have spatial form and content: they exist, necessarily, both *in* space (i.e. in a locational relation to other social phenomena) and *across* space." In fact, Massey defines space as "the vast complexity of the interlocking and articulating nets of social relations." Conversely, "a 'place' is formed out of the particular set of social relations which interact at a particular location." Delving deeper into the social mechanisms of place-making, Massey expounds: "the singularity of any individual place is formed in part out of the specificity of the interactions which occur at that location […] and in part out of the fact that the meeting of those social relations at that location […] will in turn produce new social effects" (*Space, Place* 168). So yes, the places in which we dwell are formed out of ever-shifting sets and networks of social relations. But how do the social effects that, in altering these constellations, continuously make and remake these places materialize, take hold, and spread? Because social actors locate themselves and draw on an available repertoire of storylines—which is another way of saying that narrative plays a formative role in the production of space and place.[12]

See also Metetoja, *Narrative Turn*, which reconstructs the troubled career of storytelling from the postwar crisis to its recent return.

12 If it makes a lot of sense to assume that narrative plays a crucial part in the production of space and place it is important to stress that practically none of the thinkers of the spatial turn—Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey come to mind—have given thought to this nexus. A notable exception is the opening chapter of Massey's *For Space*, which I discuss at length in my essay "Spatial Forms." The few works that do engage with both space and narrative—such as

Recent developments in social psychology confirm these ideas.[13] For Kenneth and Mary Gergen, two of its leading proponents, "[t]he present analysis stops short of saying that lives are narrative events. […] Stories are after all forms of accounting, and it seems misleading to equate the account with its putative object. However, narrative accounts are embedded within social action. Events are rendered socially visible through narrative, and they are typically used to render expectations for future events." I find this argument highly compelling: Events "become laden with a storied sense" because our daily lives are immersed in narrative; they "acquire the reality of a 'beginning,' a 'climax,' a 'low point,' an 'ending' and so on," and in turn, they are experienced in accordance with how they are indexed, both individually and collectively. Tying this back to the question of how narrative participates in the production of place, the social effects that drive this operation materialize, take hold, and spread in part because life is imbued with narrative. "In a significant sense, then, we live by stories—both in the telling and the doing of the self" (18). And this is where narrative art enters the picture. According to the Gergens, the stories by which we live are taken more or less directly from the realm of art—not in the sense of life copying art but in the sense of art being "the vehicle through which the reality of life is generated" (18). The Gergens do not say more on this issue, but if art is assigned with the role of a privileged creator of scripts for our everyday use, it must be conceived as a separate realm in which we can experience things without pragmatic consequences (there is no need to call the police when reading about a mass murderer in a novel).

So yes, the stories by which we live are deeply pervaded with all those novels, memoirs, graphic narratives, films, television series, computer games, in short, with the narrative art and media that we routinely engage with. But how to account for the quizzical fact that the stories by which we live seem to gravitate toward these artistic forms, and what does this mean for the ties between belonging and narrative that are the topic of this study? It means, first and foremost, that narrative art is more directly invested in matters of belonging than it might seem at first sight. In being one step removed from the messiness of life (and thus committed to representing rather than living it), it stages and explores the narrative drive engendered by the need for a place in the world as a life-sustaining "need to tell." And by this I mean that human beings (for reasons to be further explored in the following section) interpret their surroundings and articulate their being in the world in relation to them, hoping that someone is listening. The most practical way in which

Nye's *Space and Narrative* and Psarra's *Architecture and Narrative*—refrain from conceptualizing their interlocking productivities. The Special Issue on "Space, Place and Narrative" of *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, ed. by Nicole Maruo-Schröder and myself aims at filling this gap.

13 For further examples see *Narrative Psychology*, ed. Sarbin; especially Sarbin's own contributions to this volume; *Hermeneutics and Psychological Theory*, ed. Messer, Sass, and Woolfolk; *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. Berkowitz.

concerns with belonging play out in narrative art is indeed in such interlocking acts of articulation and interpretation. These acts can take on an endless array of different forms, but they all share one basic feature: the assertion of narrative agency. And if agency is usually understood as the capacity to act within a given social world by making choices and imposing them on that world, narrative agency is the capacity of a narrating agent to make choices about the telling of her story and impose them on the (story)world.

Narrative agency is not unique to narrative art; on the contrary, it is an inherent feature of all narrative. But in the realm of art the choices that a teller has in terms of selection and combination multiply.[14] And if we conduct our lives in and through stories (rather than merely recounting them), social and narrative agencies converge in far-reaching ways. Think, for instance, of the forms of agency asserted through written correspondence, emails and text messaging in our present age, letter writing in earlier days and on special occasions still today. Early novels turned to the epistolary form to stage and explore this kind of agency. In fact, Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly, or, Memoirs of a Sleepwalker* makes for such a productive read in the context of this study because the agency that comes with the form of the letter is both asserted and perverted in this novel (the letter-writing narrator is a sleepwalker). But narrative agency does not exist in a vacuum. As a mode of engaging with the world by imposing choices on the world, it brushes against given orders, be they real or imagined. And this is precisely how narrative agency is a staple of narrative art: Within the confines of a literary work, it takes shape against the backdrop of distinctive—chonotopic—conjunctions of psychic and spatial orders or imaginaries. Tracing these interlocking constellations and agencies is a primary aim of the following chapters, which take us to places as different as the post-revolutionary frontier, a remote and enchanted stretch of coastal Maine, an urban ghetto at the peak of immigration, and a Midwestern homeland haunted by environmental destruction and 9/11. And as my readings will show, four different models of the human psyche—based on the skeptical empiricism of John Locke and David Hume, Swedenborgian mysticism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and present-day neuroscience—are couched in these settings in ways that determine the actions performed in them and the dwelling places emerging from them.

14 While Butler conceded this much in her essay "Giving an Account of Oneself," she insists that this kind of (narrative) agency has severe limitations. Iser discusses the narrative *modus operandi* of selection and combination with regard to "fictionalizing acts," but the basic pattern of receptive engagement drawing from both the world of the text and the word of the reader to actualize a text and its meaning can be applied to reading in general. Fictionalizing acts, and by extension narrative acts in general, make themselves and their strategies of world-making "observable" through the necessity of selection and combination. See Iser, "Fictionalizing Acts."

In tracing how narrative agency evolves amidst the places and people in which and from whom belonging is sought, I assume that the forms that such agency gains within a literary text—in the novels considered here through the letter, the sketch, the found object, and the brain-as-storytelling-machine—can travel beyond the confines of the text. Caroline Levine has recently made similar claims about form. To assess form in both its social and aesthetic dimensions and capture the complex relation between the two, she borrows the concept affordance from design theory, where it describes "the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs" (*Forms* 6) resulting from the limits and restrictions that make a particular form distinctive. Narrative agency as I conceive it is latent in narrative materials and designs in precisely this way—"*carr[ying] its affordances with it*" (19; emphasis in the original) when moving back and forth between the social and the literary world. However, my own thinking on the social relevance and mobility of narrative forms is invested in reception aesthetics rather than formalism, especially in Wolfgang Iser's notion of the articulation effect of fiction. For Iser, fiction has the power to express and make available to experience what would otherwise be diffuse and mute. If structuralism has taught us that these articulations are condemned to reiterate the codes and conventions in and through which they operate, I have no intention to refute this view. But giving account of uncertain states of belonging involves a struggle with the unsayable that almost by default pushes narrative toward and across the limits of the sayable. Narrative is, through this experiential disposition, equipped with an inherent drive toward exposing and transgressing its own conventionality, and this drive can unfold with fewer constraints in the depragmatized realm of art. Why? Because this realm is "bound to mobilize the imaginary in a different manner, for it has far less of the pragmatic orientation required by the subject, by thetic consciousness, or by the socio-historical, all of which channel the imaginary in quite specific directions" (Iser, *Fictive* 224).

The performative "play of the text" (Iser, *Prospecting* 249-61) that becomes tangible here opens up a space in between the world of the text and the world of the reader, between what is imagined and what is real. And when a reader inhabits this space, the two worlds become permeable. It is for this reason that engaging with fiction—which Iser defines as an activity, fiction as shorthand for "fictionalizing acts"—can lead to a revision of the narrative frames and formulas by which we live. Narrative thus reinvigorates itself in and through art, and in doing so, it perpetually refurbishes its potential use. Paul Ricoeur speaks of a "life of narrative activity" to describe this autopoetic thrust of narrative: Sustained by an ever-changing repertoire of experiences brought to language, it thrives on a tension between sedimentation and innovation that creates ever-new forms ("Life in Quest" 24). Note the point of convergence here: Both Iser and Ricoeur contend that new narrative forms become available beyond the realm of art in the fusion of the world of the text and the world of the reader. And this leads Iser to insist that narrative art is always invested in use. Its "pragmatic significance […] for action becomes

unmistakable" once we acknowledge this dimension (*The Fictive* 168). Dorothy's call epitomizes this kind of action: it gets her home and ends the story. But if narrative is both produced and consumed out of the yearning for a place in the world, the main attraction of engaging in it may reside less in the promise to get home, and more in the promise to go on a journey—not necessarily to get home but to encounter new modes of dwelling, and to try out new forms of agency along the way.

In proposing that narrative is a practical component of dwelling in the world, the larger goal of this book is to unsettle prevailing views of narrative as a mere mechanism of ideology. To this day, such views dominate literary and cultural studies, especially my field, American studies, in which narrative is mainly of interest to find out how a literary text fits into a larger discursive field, and particularly how it collaborates in regulating the subject positions contained in this field. But this interpretive framework comes at a cost, for it presupposes a relation between a literary text and its reader that is located, first and foremost, on a conceptual (or cognitive) level. A resistant reception penetrates its object intellectually while affective mobilization is seen as manipulation. From such a perspective, aesthetic experience is reduced to a mere function of interpellation, and conversely, art produces "aesthetic regimes" that the critic must resist and unravel.[15] Yet if we have come to take it for granted that even the most idiosyncratic, incoherent, or open-ended account of where, how, or to whom one belongs is conducted within ideological constraints, how can radical proclamations of non-belonging (politically desirable as they may seem) be fundamentally different? Is the refusal to belong not just another narrative of belonging, another way of using the form-giving power of narrative to carve out a place in the world for oneself, tenuous and provisional as it might be?

Giving an account of where, how, and to whom one belongs is indeed nearly impossible to resist; it is too deep-seated a psychic and social need.[16] Suspicions of this need take us to a well-known terrain: As a subject-forming power to be exposed and disseminated at almost all costs, the prescriptive aspects of narrative are an all-too-familiar target in the "resistance paradigm." But while there can be no doubt that narrative is inclined to bring disparate elements into a socially intelligible (and thus at least somewhat coercive) whole, using narrative as the mediating structure through which we feel and direct our need for a place in the world is bound to extend and revise existing forms and norms simply because they do not seamlessly fit. In a narrative theory based on the human need to belong a

15 The term "aesthetic regime" is drawn from Rancière. For strong critiques of the resistance paradigm see Fluck, "Theories of American Culture;" Ickstadt, "Pluralist Aesthetics;" Voelz, *Transcendental Resistance*.

16 Judith Butler has taken up this issue in her aforementioned essay "Giving an Account of Oneself." See also Ricoeur, "Narrative Identity;" Ezzy, "Theorizing Narrative Identity." A good example of the critical desire for radical states of non-belonging is Pease, "Remapping the Transnational Turn."

double bind of coercion and transgression thus emerges as a motor force connecting narrative use and narrative art. From such a perspective, the need to tell that stems from and gives shape to the human need for a place in the world becomes a critical resource for tracing concerns with and limits of belonging at particular conjunctions of time, space, and social being. In confronting the subject-forming power of narrative as a symbolic structure with an interest in the human need to tell that operates in and through this structure, the experiential dimension inherent to any regimic mode of "distributing the sensible" (Rancière 13)—its eccentric involvement with making and unmaking this structure—gains critical weight.

Subjects of Belonging

If this theory defines narrative primarily in terms of use we need to know more about the *user* in this equation: about the human being—which is, almost by default, conceived in terms of its being a subject—engaging with narrative out of an existential need to belong, and about how this disposition defines its relation to the world. Acknowledged or not, assumptions about human being and subjectivity subtend any theorization of art and culture (either by way of endorsing or by way of rejecting notions of human expressivity). Narrative theory is no exception, and for one that is based on the human need to belong, spelling out these assumptions is a must. Moreover, it provides an occasion to explicate the anthropological premises of some other narrative theories. My own search for theoretical models has led me to the anthropological philosophy of Helmuth Plessner, especially to his notion of "eccentric positionality," which I want to briefly introduce before broadening the discussion.[17]

For Plessner, all matter can be defined by the ways in which it is positioned in the environment, and the first distinction he introduces is that between live and dead matter: Live matter has bodies, and these bodies not merely have contours, they have boundaries. Moreover, and crucially, the traffic across these boundaries defines their place (or positionality) in the world. Plants, for instance, are living

17 Plessner's work has been subject to a remarkable rediscovery in recent years, but remains little known outside of the German-speaking academic world because only a fraction of it has been translated. An English translation of Plessner's monumental *Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch*, originally published in 1928, is currently in the making. A first effort to present Plessner's philosophical anthropology to the English-speaking academic world is de Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*. See Horstmannshoff, *The Loop* for an insightful discussion of Plessner's model of subjectivity and its ramifications for the study of human space-boundedness. In stressing the "ecstatic" dimension that engenders human consciousness by pulling it out of itself, Judith Butler's recently republished reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* in *Subjects of Desire* is engaged with related concerns.

bodies with no special relation to their boundaries, and this makes their positionality *open*. Animals do have a special relation to their boundaries; in fact, their high-strung nervous system makes their positionality *closed*. Human beings have a self-reflexive relation to their boundaries; they not only live and experience their lives, but they also *experience the experience* of their lives. And this decenters their positionality, making it *eccentric*. In Plessner's words, "[wo]man is not in an equilibrium, [she] is without a place, stands outside time in nothingness, is characterized by a constitutive homelessness (*ist konstitutiv heimatlos*). [She] always still has to become 'something' and create an equilibrium for [herself]." And because this state is "unbearable" it becomes the "ultimate foundation of the *technical artifact* (*Werkzeug*) and that which it serves: *culture*." In fact, the eccentric positionality of human beings is what makes them "artificial by nature" (*Schriften* IV 385; my translation, emphasis in the original).[18]

Based on this model, I contend that human beings are incomplete—non-sustained—without narrative; that in engaging with narrative, they assert— create, build—a place in the world. In substantiating this claim, I want to broaden the discussion. Defining human being via a fundamental lack, and assigning art and culture with a primary role in remedying this lack grew into a sprawling discourse in the twentieth century, with philosophical anthropology, phenomenology and psychoanalysis as its main intellectual venues. Plessner's "eccentric positionality," Martin Heidegger's assumption that human beings are "thrown" (*geworfen*) into a world without meaning, Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of the "absolute freedom" to which man is condemned, Sigmund Freud's notion of "the uncanny" (*das Unheimliche*) haunting us where we feel most secure and familiar, Jacques Lacan's "mirror stage" as a primal scene of a subject formation based on misrecognition, these are all figurations of the modern subject, uprooted and alienated, some of them "paranoid, even fascistic" (Foster, *Return* 226).[19] What they all have in common

18 In the final chapter of *Stufen des Organischen*, Plessner deducts three anthropological laws from human beings' eccentric positionality: (1) that human beings live in a state of "natural artificiality" that give occasion to the production of culture; (2) that they live in a state of "mediated immediacy," condemned to express themselves again and again to find themselves; and (3) being the animal with a utopian standpoint, they are always searching for a secure place—thus the monopoly of religion—yet unable to ever reach it.

19 "Ghosted in his theory," writes Hal Forster about this implicit historicity of Lacan's mirror stage, "is a contemporary history of which fascism is the extreme symptom: a history of world war and military mutilation, of industrial discipline and mechanical fragmentation, of mercenary murder and political terror. In relation to such events the modern subject becomes armored—against otherness from within (sexuality, the unconscious) and otherness without (for the fascists this can mean Jews, Communists, gays, women), all figures of this fear of the body in pieces come again, of the body given over to the fragmentary and the fluid" (*Return* 226). I find this observation more than apt. Set into perspective like this, Lacan's theory of subject formation becomes

is a conflicted and uncertain sense of belonging—and this tell us that theoretical vogues are bound up with concerns with belonging as well. One can only speculate about why poststructuralist models, with their alleged relativism and their respective marginalization of existential concerns have exhausted their explanatory power while materialist approaches such as object-oriented ontology, speculative realism and cognitive linguistics are on the rise today, but it seems safe to say that our thoroughly globalized, mobilized, and digitally mediated world has given new relevance to questions of belonging.

This book is part of this *zeitgeist*, but contrary to the new materialisms, which tend to deemphasize or even level the significance of the human, its goal is to think beyond the postmodern *without* eliminating its "residual humanism" (McGurl, "Geology" 380). And for this project, anthropological philosophy and phenomenological hermeneutics offer useful alternatives to the psychoanalytical models of subject-formation (grounded in Lacan's mirror stage and Althusser's notion of ideological interpellation based on Lacan) that have come to dominate critical discourse in the wake of the linguistic turn.[20] My point of departure in assessing these models is something they have in common: They all base their notion of what it means to be human on the idea of a constitutive lack. But this lack is conceived in different ways, with vast implications as of how human beings are shaped by this lack, and of narrative's role in shaping—constituting—human beings.

In psychoanalytic models, narrative springs from the experience of losing an undifferentiated state of wholeness: the state of being one with the nurturing mother. Driven a relentless desire (Peter Brooks even calls it a *narrative desire*) for something irretrievably lost, narrative generates projections that range from nostalgic regress to utopian transgression. As such, it is immensely productive, a force that coerces us to imagine and act in order to make up for what is perceived as lacking. These operations are irreducible to expressing and giving coherence to a mere want, for they are backed by a visceral need to belong not unlike the irreducible needs of the material body.[21] In fact, the primordial experience of loss creates a

tangible as a historically conditioned radicalization of the Freudian, narcissistic loss of undifferentiated wholeness—a conceptual move with far-reaching implications for the possibilities of entertaining a sense of belonging within the frame of this particular model.

20 See McGurl, "Geology" for a lucid discussion of how speculative realism and object-oriented ontology endorse an amplified antihumanism as a means of thinking beyond the latent humanism of the postmodern. For recent returns to Heidegger and Plessner see, for instance, the 2017 *Modern Fiction Studies* Issue on "Dwelling in the Global Age" and de Mul, *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology*.

21 This need-and-demand structure of "narrative desire" follows Lacan's reinterpretation of the Freudian concept, in which desire is born from a split between need (for nourishment/the mother's breast) and demand (for love). It is "irreducible to need, for it is not in its principle relation to a real object, independent of the subject, but rather to a phantasy; it is irreducible to demand, in

psychosomatic sense of incompleteness that narrative seeks to mend, for Brooks by enlisting the rivaling forces (or desires) of Eros and the death drive for engendering plot. And since narrative desire is ultimately the desire for the end (death, quiescence, non-narratibility), narration serves as the tool with which to emplot one's life "toward [that] end under the compulsion of imposed delay" (Brooks, *Reading* 295).[22] Read along these lines, Dorothy's act of calling her home into existence promises verbal eloquence and psychic enchantment but no material gratification. And by the same token, maturing in matters of belonging increases the capacity to transform material need into psychic demand. But the underlying need is never replenished. It leaves "memory traces" (55) that seek—demand—realization in the realm of the imaginary, in places like Oz. From a Lacanian perspective, such places are imaginary in troublesome ways: As phantasmatic images of wholeness they reiterate (and thus keep alive) the primal scene of loss. Where a Freudian desire to belong is quintessentially the desire of one's death (prompting Brooks to argue that narrative desire is ultimately the desire for the end, for a promised state of quiescence), the Lacanian counterpart is essentially circular, leading to ever more desire, and never to more belonging.

So yes, there are different psychoanalytical models, but in one aspect they all agree: The yearning subject may dream of, yearn for, or even contest having a place in the world—but it cannot *build* such a place, for the place that is longed for is quintessentially phantasmatic. It may have been these implications that led Gabriele Schwab, in her psychoanalytical model, to D. W. Winnicott rather than to Freud or Lacan. For Winnicott, the mother's absence creates a "transitional space" that functions "as a space for the imagination's testing and mastering of the demands and tasks posed by the gradual development of intersubjectivity"—a process that makes this space potentially generative of poetic speech with the effect of alleviating the subject's entanglement with the symbolic order (*Subjects* 22-48; here 28).[23] In fact, the psychic space of "transference" invites the subject to continually reshape its boundaries through an imaginary encounter with others. This also means that narrative use does not necessarily create misrecognition (as it does for Lacan); it can indeed lead to valuable transformation. Narrative art assumes a special role in this model that points toward Schwab's affiliation with Wolfgang Iser and the Constance School. In providing protected versions of this psychic space,

that it seeks to impose itself without taking account of language and the unconscious of the other, and insists on being absolutely recognized by the other" (Laplanche and Pontalis, *Vocabulaire de la psychoanalyse* 122; quoted in Brooks, *Reading* 55).

22 Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is the "masterplot" of Brooks's narrative theory. See Chap. 2, which was separately published before as "Freud's Masterplot."

23 See also Schwab, *Mirror* 1-46. Coming out of the Constance School, Schwab casts her notion of reading as an act of "transference" deliberately against Iser's notion of "transfer," which she finds too schematic in its intersubjective engagement with the other.

narrative art assures that the experience of breaking down the boundaries between the real and the imaginary can be reenacted throughout a person's life. For Schwab, narrative gravitates toward poetic expression and fictional boundary-crossing because human beings yearn for an "other." This understanding of narrative corresponds with a psychic structure that is highly amenable to change and explicitly geared toward imaginative culture. And yet, the transformation that it envisions remains confined to a logic of internalization and projection: The yearning subject may keep readjusting its boundaries when engaging with narrative art time and again, but it cannot transform what lies beyond them.

Peter Brooks argues along similar lines when proposing that all narrative acts are bound to "discover, and make use of" the intersubjective and inherently dialogic nature of language itself (*Reading* 60). Embedded in this discovery is the secret of "narrative transference"—Brooks's ruby red slippers. "The motivation of plotting is intimately connected to the desire of narrating, the desire to tell, which in turn has to do with the desire for an interlocutor, a listener, who enters into the narrative exchange" (216). Turning to Roland Barthes's notion of the "contractual" nature of all storytelling—its asking for something in return for what it supplies—Brooks contends that contract is too static a term to conceive of this exchange; unsuited to acknowledge the degree of transformation invoked by it. I could not agree more with this assessment, especially of the yearning for a receiving other that is both expressed and pursued in and through narrative. But I also cannot fail to notice how close these ideas are to the basic premise of reception aesthetics,: that narrative is incomplete without a willing receiver, and that theorizing narrative must thus account for the insurmountably (inter)subjective and provisional dimension of transfer and exchange. Schwab makes a similar move when combining Winnicott's transitional space with George Poulet's phenomenology of reading to substantiate the transformative capacities of consuming narratives (*Mirror* 25-27).[24] It is worth pondering over these phenomenological proxies here for another moment, for they bring out a striking disposition of the psychoanalytical model of subjectiviy: Without at least a hint of the decidedly spatial positioning of the subject envisioned by phenomenologists (and especially without the *thetic* move toward the world that this school of though tends to stress), engaging in narrative is a self-serving operation of desire. What it engenders is nothing but a mere symptom of an insurmountable state of lack. And while the results of this relentless process may be interesting or even innovative manifestations of the basic lack of and from which they speak, their only remedy is to "love" or "enjoy" one's symptom.[25]

24 Another important point of reference for Schwab is Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*. In this early monograph, Kristeva, who is usually steeped in psychoanalysis and poststucturalism, turns to Husserl's idea of the "thetic" to conceptualize signification's inherent positionality, its indispensable and processual working across space.

25 This last formulation evokes Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!*

What, then, do phenomenological models have to offer? They, too, assume that narrative is born out of lack, but this lack is not the result of a primary experience of loss; it is in and by itself foundational. Human beings are not hardwired to the environment like other animals, and the lacking connectivity marks the world (when perceived by this "impaired" life-form) with a fundamental lack of meaning. Which is why human beings experience themselves as "thrown" (*geworfen*) into a world that is infinite and opaque. At the same time, however, realizing this lack of meaning and connectivity sets in motion a life-long activity of interpretation, to which the unknowability of one's death poses the greatest challenge.[26] This is the basic set-up of Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics and, acknowledged or not, it has vast repercussions on the works of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and the Constance School. All of them assume, in one way or another, that interpretation (which I view as a mode of narrative engagement) is a basic constituent, "an anthropological modality […] that achieves a never-completed mediation between human beings and the world." For Gadamer, texts are the intermediary objects (*Zwischenprodukte*) of this activity, "their manifestation as writing operates as a temporary stasis in an ongoing dialogical process" (Schwab, *Mirror* 17). And although not a direct influence on these phenomenological hermeneutists, Plessner's model of "eccentric positionality" is seamlessly compatible with their ideas on this matter. Moreover, and crucially, Plesser's model links concerns with embodiment to the sources and trajectories of narrative use that become tangible here. To reiterate a point that I have made above, for Plessner, it is the self-reflexive relation of the human body to its boundaries that generates the recurring need to express its being in the world in relation to the environment. Narrative forms and practices exist for this very purpose.

It is important to stress that the lack of meaning and connectivity in phenomenological models is just as insurmountable as the lack of wholeness in psychoanalytical models. However, in not going back to a traumatic experience of loss (the lost state of wholeness with the nurturing mother), it is less inclined to produce hermetic states of mourning such as nostalgia or melancholia, or other self-enamoring desires. Rather, it is a type of lack that draws its bearer out of herself and into the world, forcing her to engage with the world. In Paul Ricoeur's words: "It is because there is first something to say, because we have an experience to bring to language, that conversely language is not only directed towards ideal meaning but also refers to what is" (*Interpretation* 21). The phenomenological type of lack thus leads directly to a yearning for voice and form—to language, which assumes its referentiality (and its narrative capacity) through the existential yearning to make the world over in terms that are meaningful. And because of this entanglement

26 See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, esp. chapters 4-6. *Da-sein*, Heidegger's term for this existential reality of human being, is not an unmediated basis of being, but in arising from its own projection, it is already the result of interpretation.

with the ontological condition of being in the world, human language is, according to Ricoeur, "not a world of its own. It is not even a world. But because we are in the world, because we are affected by situations, and because we orient ourselves comprehensively in those situations, we have something to say, we have an experience to bring to language" (*Interpretation* 20-21). (Perhaps we turn to etymology for precisely this reason: to decipher the changing character of experience brought to language from its shifting reference to what is.)

"Orientation," "situation," these are traces of narrative's spatial dimension. In Heidegger's notion of "dwelling," this dimension is much more pronounced. The experience of being thrown into a world that fundamentally lacks meaning (and thus lacks a securely given place) not only triggers a fundamental need for interpretation (and thus for narrative); it also leads to the realization that dwelling is not a given but a matter of *learning* to dwell. For Heidegger, being in the world assumes a place and sense of self through *building*—an activity that, if correctly performed, gathers dispersed aspects of the environment and sets human beings in relation to the world thus opened up for them to dwell. It is indeed the realization of this lack that "*calls* mortals into their dwelling" ("Building" 159; emphasis in the original).[27] And while it would, of course, be foolish to dispute Heidegger's deep-seated concern with human temporality, in his later work (starting in the postwar years) the experience of temporal contingency leads straight to an investment in place-making. But building may or may not succeed; in fact, it is the ability to *think* that enables both building and dwelling.[28] And this ability is tied to a sensuous mode of perception. Placed in a semantic field with terms such as "being let into" (*einlassen*), "being turned toward the world in a friendly manner" (*der Welt freundlich zugewandt sein*) and "nursing" (*hüten*) (Heidegger, "Was heißt denken?"; my translation), thinking is the primary means of becoming immersed in the world's lack of meaning.

27 In what reads like an anticipation of the spatial turn, Heidegger contends in this essay that we can only think of space as space used by human beings (and thus as social space), given to them through their need to dwell, and constantly changing under their building efforts. Here is one particularly iconic passage in this regard: "When we speak of man and space, it sounds as though man stood on one side, space on the other. Yet space is not something that faces man. It is neither an external object nor an inner experience. It is not that there are men, and over and above them *space;* for when I say 'a man,' and in saying this word think of a being who exists in a human manner—that is, who dwells—then by the name 'man' I already name the stay within the fourfold among things. […] Spaces, and with them space as such—'space'—are always provided for already within the stay of mortals. Spaces open up by the fact that they are let into the dwelling of man" ("Building" 154-55).

28 See Harris, *Ethical Function* for an extensive discussion of Heidegger's trialectic of building, dwelling, and thinking.

Moreover, and crucially, thinking can make present what it perceives. In a later essay, "… Poetically Man Dwells …," these romantic implications are amplified in the move from thinking to *poiesis*, a hermeneutic practice that is assigned with the capacity to transform the world into a suitable dwelling place by means of taking imaginative measures.[29] For Heidegger, Hölderlin's poetry exemplifies these forth-bringing capacities of verbal art (the title of the essay is borrowed from Hölderlin), but is Dorothy's act of calling not a similar attempt of taking measure? Of exploiting the imagination to express and direct her longing for that place called home, and to realize and embrace its inherently evocative, provisional, and mediated nature? Two correlated trajectories become tangible here that I will further explore in the final section of this chapter. If Dorothy's call gives voice to a quintessentially *modern* sense of being in the world, what we discover at the end of her journey is an enhanced tie between belonging and narrative *art*. And if one of the challenges of modern life is that home often lacks a stable referent whose evocation could make this place present (like a passe-partout), calling out for that place may not be not enough. More often than not, it has to be built, word by word, sentence by sentence, storyline by storyline.[30]

29 The forth-bringing capacitiy that *poiesis* brings to dwelling resonates with Heidegger's general notion of art making present that which is not yet present and can only become present through art. See Heidegger, "Work of Art."

30 If heightened concerns with belonging in our present age make it worth returning to Heidegger today, such a move must reject his reactionary longings to return to an Arcadian place untouched by modernity at all cost. Plessner provides a wholesome counterweight here. For him, yearnings for a place in the world should resist the bourgeois overexpansion of inwardness that looms large in Heidegger's thinking (and in existence philosophy in general), and instead turn the constitutive inscrutability of human being into a political obligation. Writing against the backdrop of the Great War, the faltering Weimar Republic, and the rise and fall of Nazi totalitarianism, his Jewish background made him an ardent cosmopolitan where Heidegger wrote and dreamt about preserving his Black Forrest hut. The fault line between the private and the political that become tangible here (and that Plessner explores in his later work, especially in *Macht und menschliche Natur* and "Schicksal der Deutschen") is resurfacing today from a vastly different constellation, yet with undeniable force. How to deal with the injustices inflicted upon so many by a rampant financial capitalism and environmental recklessness, with religious and expansionist wars, and with the millions and millions of people left anxious and uprooted under these circumstances, mobilized not only by immediate threat or hardship, but also by digitally mediated notions of a better life circulating around the globe? If living in today's world has indeed lent new relevance to existential matters, a return to existence philosophy is only feasible when its traditional concerns with private wellbeing and self-realization are opened up to larger social responsibilities. See, for instance, the conference on "Political Existence" at the Centre for Studies in Practical Knowledge and Philosophy Department at Södertörn University, Sweden in November 2015.

A hermeneutics of dwelling, in the poetic sense suggested here, is not a genuinely phantasmatic enterprise. It is a practical function of narrative, and perhaps even its primary use. That this use gravitates to the realm of art to give meaning and mooring to our lives makes it an especially potent remedy; in fact, without this drift, the stories by which we live would soon become stale and our dwelling places out of sync with our needs.[31]

Historical Trajectories

Expanding narrative into the ontological realm is a contestable enterprise, which is why I want to revisit and contextualize this claim. According to Stephen White, whom I will follow here for a moment, the recent "turn" toward ontology gained traction once the term no longer referred to a restricted field of philosophical scrutiny into matters of being but to a more general questioning of what "entities" are presupposed by our theories. Ontological concerns have hence migrated from philosophy to other fields, among them cultural and literary studies, where they have surfaced in claims about affect, language, narrative, objects and subjects.[32] And if the sense of uncertainty brought about by the crisis of late modernity has affected many of the things taken for granted in the modern world, the new interest in ontology may very well be "the result of a growing propensity to interrogate more carefully those 'entities' presupposed by our typical ways of seeing and doing" (4). In the proverbial front row of these interrogations are "enlightened" ideas about the human subject, sustained by the familiar subscriptions to its self-reliant and socially disengaged autonomy. Ontological commitments growing out of the waning certainty about the "Teflon" constitution of the modern subject hence seek to replace it with a "stickier" one, with the effect of stressing its manifold dependencies on natural, social, and cultural worlds. Conceiving the subject through an existentially imposed and narratively sustained need to belong is such a commitment.[33]

31 Riceour uses the term *pharmakon* to describe this alleviating, healing dimension of narrative. *Interpretation Theory* 43; quoted in Valdés, "Introduction" 6.

32 For the first development see, for instance, Hemmings, "Invoking Affect;" McDonald, "Language and Being," and "The Ontological Turn." Some key texts of the second development are Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus;* Meillassoux, *After Finitude*; Gabriel, *Transcendental Ontology*; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Latour, *Reassembling the Social*; Harman, *Guerilla Metaphysics*.

33 It is worth stressing that this line of reasoning is seamlessly compatible with posthuman revisions of this "entity," for it locates the life-form in question in a thoroughly hybrid space between its being and its environment. And if the network (with its familiar challenges to nature-technology and subject-object dichotomies) has become the dominant mode of life-world, the life-form in need to belong may or may not be human anymore; yet it is still quintessentially weak and mortal, and still inclined to use its narrative capacitates to deal with these basic vulnerabilities.

For White, the new commitments go hand in hand with a shift from "strong" to "weak" ontologies—ontologies that, rather than positing foundations of human being whose validity is categorically unchanging and of universal reach, operate upon a basic set of conceptualizations that are at once fundamental *and* contestable. Instead of postulating fixed ideas of "human nature or telos," they present context-bound "figurations of human being in terms of certain existential realities." And while these realities are "in some brute sense universal constituents of human being" (9), their meaning, even when analyzed in the most clearly defined correlations, is categorically indeterminable (no matter how closely we scrutinize language, life, or death, we will not find a discernible essence or terminal meaning). My contestable claim, then, is that human engagement with narrative is one of these existential realities; that narrative springs from the eerie feeling that we are weak and mortal, and that using its mediating capacities is imperative if life is to be moored and meaningful. The ways in which we feel weak and mortal are, of course, never fully articulable, and they change over space and time, place and lifespan. But modern life has amplified these feelings, and in doing so it has boosted narrative productivity. For when the old keepers of certainty (such as feudalism and theology) lost their coercive powers, narrative offered itself as a viable tool to counteract the vastly multiplying, accelerating, and often persistent feelings of uncertainty that people now had to face. An increased and increasingly metamorphosing engagement with narrative has thus been generated as the articulating, structuring, and implementing *agent* of belonging.

The etymological history of the term bears traces of these developments. At first, "belonging" was strictly used in the substantive plural to refer to objects of possession ("my belongings"), but by the mid-eighteenth century this use was complemented by the abstract singular ("belonging") that denotes the existential, emotional state that concerns us here. This semantic drift away from substantive, unilateral claims of ownership (and, by extension, to a secure and proper place in the world) points toward a profound restructuring in the social organization of property: In the emerging market economy, material possessions began to take on a supplementary rather than a stabilizing function; as "goods" they were perpetually consumed rather than securely possessed. In this situation, belonging assumes a new meaning ("to belong") that testifies to an increased need to make use of the verbal capacity to bind and cohere. This capacity was further enhanced by the fact that the new term was intransitive: It reaches out and moves toward something (a place, a person) to become complete, and this quality enhances its use for orientation.[34] In sum, the change was substantial. "Belonging" now functioned as a relative rather than an absolute marker of position, which also means that it became

34 This etymological assessment is based on *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1933 reprint 1961); *The Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology* (H.W. Wilson, 1988); *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1966); *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, Second Ed.

inherently deictic. Indeed, the structural incompleteness marking it now served to enhance and proliferate the practical ties between belonging and narrative.

Once again, the relation between space and narrative offers itself as a viable trajectory along which to expound these ideas further. Following Edward Soja, I take the recurring "recomposition[s] of space-time-being in their concrete forms" that are the result of modernization as constitutive of the ever-shifting, heterogeneous fabric of social being that Soja calls modernity (*Postmodern Geographies* 27). And from this notion of modernity as modernization, and modernization as a dynamic compound of temporal, spatial and social forces, it is just a small step to arguing that the perpetual transformations thus unleashed are conducted to a substantive degree through narrative. Which brings me to Henri Lefebvre's famous model of space as produced in a trialectic of perceived space (*espace perçu*), conceived space (*espace conçu*), and lived (including represented) space (*espace vecu*): Lefebvre does not mention narrative in his model of spatial production, but from the perspective of this study there can be no doubt that it features prominently throughout. In the conceptual mode of producing space, it plays a key role in architectural planning, legal discourse, building instructions, and so forth. It pervades the perceptual mode of producing space in the manifold processes of cognitive mapping, especially the correlation of perceptions and memories. And it essential for the lived mode of spatial production, for instance in the fabrication of tales and images that charge space with habitual, symbolic, or ritualistic value, and that are indispensible to making it familiar and meaningful. Spelling out these transactions has vast repercussions for matters of narrative use, especially for the aspect of *narrative agency*. In fact, an important claim that I make in this book is that the frequent recompositions of time, space and social being caused by modernization have turned this kind of agency into a crucial skill—and, respectively, into a highly desirable good for consumption and consummation.

Even so, it would be wrong to assume that modernity invented belonging. Rather, it laid open a fundamental uncertainty in the human condition that was formerly covered up by the coercive epistemologies of religion and feudalism, and that now prompted a relentless narrative productiviy. The "modernized" need to belong is indeed thoroughly mobilized, inclined to build ever-new homes, often by turning inward rather than outward, or by attaching itself to a series of homes rather than to just one that is thought to be singular and irreplaceable. In our own—global, digital—age, the spatial correlatives of belonging have become increasingly vexed as geographical and social spaces are less and less congruent, and dwelling practices are potentially ever more deterritorialized.[35] In fact, modern life

(New York: Macmillan, 1916); *Dictionary.com Unabridged, based on the Random House Dictionary*, http://dictionary.reference.com; *Middle English Dictionary*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu.

35 See, for instance, Beck, "Vorwort." Arjun Appadurai goes so far as to argue that dwelling in the world has become so drastically deterritorialized and infused with imagining one's life based on

has gradually dematerialized the modalities of belonging, shifting them away from beloved and presumably stable landscapes, dwellings, and social bonds, away from a soil that has been cultivated by one's family for generations, away from durable and secure possessions, away from struggles over ownership and dispossession—and toward the world of letters and the imagination.

These claims are at once vastly general and decidedly limited. My argument is, first and foremost, an argument about the changing uses of narrative in the ever-changing fabric of modern life. Specifically, I suggest that within the uneven continuum of modernity, the advent of *Neuzeit* opened up new trajectories for the structural and practical ties between belonging and narrative. Powered by the "discovery" of the Americas, the emergence of global trade systems, the rise of individualism, instrumental reason, and the "enlightened" formation of knowledge, the conditions of life changed substantially in the Western world around the time of the Renaissance, with the effect of enhancing the need for orientation and emplacement on a massive scale. In this situation, the demand for new stories to live by leaped to unprecedented heights, causing a sheer explosion of narrative, "whether in fiction, history, philosophy, or any of the social sciences," which dethroned theology and established history "as the key discourse and central imagination" (Brooks, *Reading* 5-6). The pertinence that historical storytelling gains at this time is a powerful token of narrative's altered function to mend troubled states of belonging in the modern world. The development was driven by a loss of providential plots and their capacity to settle doubts about the existential constituents of human being, and it absorbed, as Hayden White has forcefully argued, the basic modes and conventions of *literary* storytelling, with the effect of blurring the line between factual and fictional narrative in its scientific quest for meaning.[36]

The other significant change occurred in the realm of literary storytelling, most notably through the emerging form of the novel. The story of the novel as the paradigmatic literary form of modern life has often been told—so often that

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the offerings of globalized mass media that "ethnography must redefine itself as that practice of representation which illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories" ("Ethnoscapes" 200). However, he then only gives a most rudimentary sketch of what ethnography as a practice of representation may amount to, leaving aside how notions of representation are currently rethought in ontological terms. Similarly, Doreen Massey who, when contemplating the present state of "[t]hat place called home" in the light of these current challenges, insists that it "never was an unmediated experience" (*Space, Place* 164), but then does not care to address any of the further implications that this basic *necessity* of mediation has for matters of emplacement and belonging.

36 Applying Northrop Frye's formalist model to historiography, White argues that writing history follows the same basic narrative modes as fiction (comedy, tragedy, romance, satire), which are, in turn, inclined to use different kinds of figurative language (tragedy to metonymy, romance to synecdoche, satire to irony). See White, *Metahistory*, and "Literary Artifact."

is has become deeply engrained into the history of modernity itself. For Walter Benjamin, the rise of the novel bears testimony to an emerging state of alienation, brought forth by the capitalist rationalization of work routines. The resulting death of oral (and thus communal) storytelling solidifies this unfortunate state.[37] Arguing along similar lines, Georg Lukács sees in the novel the quintessential expression of a "transcendental homelessness" (*Theory* 41), "the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God" (88), "of an age in which […] the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem" (56). Its prototypical hero is a "product of estrangement from [an] outside world" (66) that has become internally heterogeneous and fractured. The novel responds to this unhomely world by turning the search for form into its primary artistic end, and in doing so, it "transform[s] itself into the normative *being of becoming*" (72-73, my emphasis). Mikhail Bakhtin, although diametrically opposed—enthusiastic—in judgment, confirms these observations. For him, the novel is "a genre-in-the-making" that we find "in the vanguard of all literary development (11)." Its "peculiar capacity to change" stems from "a very specific rupture in the history of European civilization: its emergence from a socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society, and its entrance into international and interlingual contacts and relationships" (11)—in short, from the modernizing processes launched by *Neuzeit*.

That the novel "is determined by experience, knowledge and practice (the future)" (15) must have compelled an audience struggling with a profound loss of familiarity, with finding new ways of doing and making while facing a structurally uncertain future. There is no need to venture further into these well-known accounts to grasp how unanimously they insist on the novel's *functional* relation to modern life. For all of them, the new genre springs from a heightened sense of

37 See Benjamin, "The Storyteller." To cite two iconic passages from the essay's well-known argument: "The earliest symptom of a process whose end is the decline of storytelling is the rise of the novel at the beginning of modern times [*Neuzeit* in the German original]. What distinguishes the novel from the story (and from the epic in the narrower sense) is its essential dependence on the book. The dissemination of the novel became possible only with the invention of printing. […] The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others." (363). Respectively, the model situation of oral storytelling is a pre-modern, artisan workplace that becomes extinct in the modern age: "The resident master craftsman and the traveling journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been a traveling journeyman before he settled down in his home town or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. In it was combined the lore of far away places, such as a much-traveled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of a place" (364-65).

instability, which it sutures by means of its extraordinarily amendable capacities of narrative form-giving. A mechanically facilitated printing process, the rise of an aspiring class of professional writers, and a fiction-hungry (largely bourgeois and often female) audience paved the novel's road to success, soon turning its comparatively unrefined, long form of storytelling into the most popular literary genre of the modern age. There were, however, initial suspicions against the seductive power on which the rise of the novel to become the first modern mass medium thrived. Heated debates revolved around the unpredictable effects that reading novels might have on the imagination—which had until then been strictly synonymous with mere illusion, just as fiction (which meant mostly sentimental fiction at the time) had the reputation of transporting its readers to make-believe worlds with the looming threat of forever corrupting their sense of morals and reality. Now these assumptions became porous, and novelists had their share in overhauling them.

In the transatlantic world, a small yet influential group of writers—among them Mary Wollstonecraft, William Goodwin, Thomas Holcraft, Robert Bage, Helen Maria Williams, and, in America, Charles Brockden Brown—began to claim that fiction harbored, precisely because of the imaginative power that it invoked, vital capacities for creating a better society.[38] The reformist ambitions of these writers were inspired by contemporary efforts to rethink the human mind, particularly those of John Locke and David Hume, who began to envision an autonomous psychic realm with new "demands" for the imagination. A fundamental rift (uncomfortable for Locke, insurmountable for Hume) was now assumed to separate an individual's inner and outer worlds, and the imagination seemed perfectly suited to bridge this gap: to correlate perceptions (sensory data stemming from the outer world) with memories (sensory data stemming from the inner world) and to mediate present and past experience.[39] I read the the parallel success stories of the

38 The early phase of the American novel in the crossfire of these debates is discussed in Davidson, *Revolution of the Word*, and Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*. For the abovenamed writers, new ideas about the imagination and its relation to sentiment served as a touchstone for a reformist literature. Strong emotion, they came to believe, could encourage moral behavior, and imaginative literature could thus become instrumental in fostering democratic societies. For work on these writers and their beliefs see Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel,* and *English Fiction*; Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel*; Shapiro, *Culture and Commerce*.

39 To briefly rehearse the basic steps of this "remodeling" of the human mind: In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke claims that the human mind does not process innate ideas (as it does for Descartes) but begins its life as a *tabula rasa* on which sensory perceptions leave immediate and lasting imprints. Yet if this shift in thinking about the human mind—from a safely enclosed, self-contained entity to a genuinely vulnerable target of random impressions—corresponds to an uncertain, irritated sense of belonging of the subject to whom this mind belongs, Locke also pairs the mind's new vulnerability with a strong instinct for survival. Not only can the

novel and the imagination as a remarkable token of the era's heightened stakes of orientation—which is, after all, a successful correlation of perceptions and memories. In a situation in which the outer world must have lost much of its familiar appearance (and perceptions were almost by default strange and distorted), the newly designated faculty of the imagination equipped the inner world (and thus the very site where memories and perceptions were to be meaningfully connected) with a powerful yet precarious tool of recovery.

When the novel emerged as the preferred food for the imagination at right around this time, it populated these inner worlds with a sheer endless roundel of characters in search for something that might give meaning and mooring to their troubled lives. And as we move through the nineteenth century and beyond, ever-new genres and sub-genres, artistic forms and devices emerged, with visual storytelling (in both still and moving images) becoming an increasingly pertinent and creative force of narrative production. That many of the new forms were serialized bears an obvious attraction in light of the continuous need for narrative that is a staple of modern needs to belong. Scholars have recently stressed the distinct forms of purpose and use afforded by serial narrative (Kelleter, *Serial Narrative*), and the serial publication of novels in popular magazines that often preceded their book publication underscores this point. In one of the texts considered here, Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, serial publication had a feasible impact on the shifting form of the tale (it first appeared in a magazine, then as a book, then in a number of editions, all with different chapter numbers and arrangements). *Pointed Firs* is indeed an especially interesting case for this study, for it brings into view how profoundly these material and medial aspects change the terms of the narrative use. More importantly, however, the new narrative forms were all children of the novel: They responded to the amplification and pluralization of modern needs to belong with a proliferation of narrative form. Ever since the novel's modern inception in the eighteenth century, its structurally unrefined, endlessly malleable form (for Lukács, its "normative being of becoming," for Bakhtin the

mind repeat the simple ideas that it derives from sense perception but it also has the capacity (albeit still quite mechanical) to rearrange, alter, and fuse the separate elements that it receives almost infinitely. Assessing the same set of problems a generation later in his *Treatise of Human Understanding*, Hume dismisses the stability of the external world, which was the last resort of certainty in Locke's model. The mind now responds to experiencing the world so strongly according to its *own* fears and desires that any certainty about it is rendered intangible. The "inner world," now the crucial site of gaining a sense of belonging, is assumed to have no rigid barriers, and the most significant mental activity occurred when "reason" and "passion"—stimulated by the imagination—mix so thoroughly that distinguishing them became impossible. As this quintessential enabler of mental life, the imagination could never *not* be part of human understanding, but its tendencies to exaggerate or tone down the emotional effect on an idea made it potentially treacherous. For further reading see Engell, *Creative Imagination*; Iser, *Fictive*.

contagious effect of "novelization") turned out so conducive to engaging with concerns with belonging that it became the main provider of the narrative frames and patterns that modern individuals use to stay orientated and emplaced in the world.

The history of the novel in the U.S. is an especially fascinating case. Perhaps it was because the New World contained so little that was familiar for its colonizers that not the novel but the more speculative genre of the romance was long viewed as the paradigmatic form in American literature.[40] Whether one agrees with this judgement or not, the romance-typical quest for elusive goals sought in unknown territories, the resulting move beyond everyday experience, paired with celebrations of common sense are emblematic of a life-world in which ways of doing and making (including the ways of doing and making literature) depended more than elsewhere on their capacity to creatively adapt and improvise in the face of the radically unfamiliar.[41] The romance, in its generic endorsement of the unknown, amplifies precisely those imaginative capacities to cope with change that, for Bakhtin, define the novel—with one crucial difference: In the American context, the "novelization" of narrative art in which romance and novel participated side by side was *not* engaged with a world that had shed itself from a previous state of cultural deafness and social isolation as it was the case in Europe. It was engaged with the vastly heterogeneous and genuinely modern contact zone opened up by colonizing the "world island" of the Americas.

The novels to which I turn in the following chapters all spring from disruptive moments in the social fabric that was the outcome of the encounters occurring at this site. A site that, from the moment of its inception existed both as spatial reality and as a mythical construct, with the nexus of belonging and narrative fueling the production of both. With novels that take us across four centuries and to four iconic sites in the cultural geography of this contact zone—the gothic frontier, the enchanted region, the immigrant ghetto, the Midwestern homeland—I aim to show how the searching form of the novel and the ever-shifting need to belong have shaped each other in and through this series of proto-modern settings. Specifically, I aim to show how the four novels assembled here are paradigmatic in

40 An important part of these claims was the assumption that the romance was a distinctively *American* literary form and thus a proper foundation for a non-derivative national literature. See Chase; Trilling.

41 Without downplaying the injustices of settler colonialism, Breen insists that "[t]he tale of peopling the New World is one of human creativity" (195). And while many settlers aspired to reproduce the life they had known, once removed from the "rich particularity of the past" (216), the familial ideals and communal norms were anything but well-worn traditions. In Europe, the advent of *Neuzeit* seemed to threaten a familiar and predictable world from the outside; in the American context, such an external threat was only conceivable for the indigenous population while all other groups were facing a radically unfamiliar world. For the corresponding situation in Europe see Kittler 153-68; Gebhardt, Geisler and Schröter 13-18.

their ways of exposing and transgressing contemporary limits of belonging in and through their artistic practice. Tracing the staged agency of the letter, the tactile agency of the sketch, the cyclical agency of the found object, and the networking agency of the brain-as-storytelling-machine within and beyond the storyworlds of the four novels is key to this aim. And it is key to making palpable how the need to belong operates as both a driving force of literary production and as an eminent, shape-shifting touchstone of narrative use.