

Knut Brynhildsvoll. *Der literarische Raum: Konzeptionen und Entwürfe*. Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 1993. [=Beiträge zur Skandinavistik; Bd. 11] 359 s. (ill.). Pris: sFr. 79,- ISBN 3-631-45698-0.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in literary studies concerned with the determination of the typological features of literature, as well as the description of the differences between the arts in general terms. This is by no means a novelty. This topic, the definition of the specific subject-matter of the different art forms, is often triggered by rapid developments in the artistic media themselves. At present, the developments in cyberspace and related multi-media areas are much in the public eye. However, in *Der literarische Raum* attention is drawn to the relationship between literature and the pictorial arts.

Of course, the importance of this matter can simply be brushed aside by claiming that the only spatial aspect of a text is the book - i.e. the material manifestation - itself. This view is of limited importance in the context of this work, as it turns out, Brynhildsvoll's main concern is the idea that spatiality in fiction is a cognitive activity which takes place in the course of reception of a text. And, as we all know, some texts appear to be more 'spatial' than others. The reasons for this is what Brynhildsvoll's discusses in the present volume.

The problem of defining the substance of literature as an art form in relation to other artistic modes of expression is not a mere trend or scholarly *hype* in contemporary literary studies and critical theory, nor is it a mere replay of the formalist quest for the enigmatic notion of *literarity*. This discussion has a long history in formal rhetoric and iconography. Traditionally, phenomena such as ekphrasis, concretism, and the frame narrative, are regarded as clear examples of the interplay between space and time in fiction. In modern history, the debate is strongly influenced by G.E. Lessing's epoch-making essay, *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766). Lessing made a distinction between space-arts and time-arts, a differentiation that has dominated - and obscured - the scholarly debate for a long time. According to Lessing, space-arts (*Raumkünste*) are painting, sculpture and architecture. Fundamentally, those forms of artistic expression have in common, that all the signs of a particular work of art, are present at the

same time (simultaneity), whereas time-arts (*Zeitkünste*) are characterized by the fact that their presence is a matter of realizing the signs in temporal order. One of their peculiarities is, that the entire work of art can not be present at the same time. This happens to be the case in music as well as in literature. But, as developments in modern art have shown, these definitions are no longer valid. *Der literarische Raum* is entirely dedicated to the investigation and critical discussion of Lessing's axiom of the difference between the arts. It looks at the interrelation between pictorial arts and literature, centered around the question of the depiction of time and space in (modern) fiction.

The main criterium for the corpus that Brynhildsvoll deals with is whether or not the text - in one way or another - crosses the borderline between literature and the pictorial arts. Of course, both space and time are used in many different ways in literature. Spatial elements - e.g. landscape - are often used to accompany and explain acts and thoughts of the characters in the text. Brynhildsvoll is more interested in cases in which the boundaries between inner and outer world are blurred and have become problematic and where space is incoherent. In such cases, spatial elements transgress into a metaphoric, symbolic order, often on a mythical level. Although fragmentation, alienation, and so on, have become clichés, it still is a fact that the spatial modelling which occurs in modern(ist) literature concurs with changes in modern society and the way people perceive themselves. Another fact is that many writers have tried to let the reader experience the lack of coherence and the ideological multiplicity they feel in modern existence, by developing new narrative modes. These modes favour especially simultaneity instead of more traditional, straight-forward, linear storytelling. This trend was notably vivid in the modernist era between the two world-wars, maybe due to the radical expansion of new media. Writers such as Franz Kafka, John Dos Passos, James Joyce and Alfred Döblin come to mind.

In science and philosophy, the idea of space and time as basically objective categories had been questioned and remodelled by people like Bergson, Einstein and Bohr. In our century, a new consciousness of time and space as 'relative' coordinates and not as fixed points became more and more dominant and have eventually become the prevailing theoretical model.

These aspects of 'modernity' required also adjustments in the realm of literature, and thus writers - as well as cubist painters and atonal composers - experimented in an effort to find modes of expression that would fit to these new general concepts of time and space. In modern literature, certain abstract

and metaphorical spatial forms, such as the labyrinth, became very popular. The spatial form of the labyrinth became synonymous with the experience of metropolitan chaos (e.g. in Joyce, Kafka and Borges).

The spatial aspects of modern fiction become more tangible when they are part of an effort to reduce the importance of temporality in the same text. Examples of this can be found all over nineteenth and twentieth century literature, but especially in impressionist writing, when time, so to speak, was brought to a halt and a more or less 'timeless temporality' takes over. Then again, discourse often expresses a sense of waiting, boredom, humdrum, decadence, repetition, and recurrence. This phenomenon of 'eternal *durée*', often happens in combination with the topic of the 'living dead' and claustrophobic modern city-scapes, demonstrating the loss of authentic human qualities in urban and industrialized surroundings. Very often these narratives are no longer told from a central point of view.

It looks as if spatial forms, such as the labyrinth, are more appropriate to grasp and express modern consciousness than other metaphors, but it is still unclear how spatiality is represented in narratives (i.e. texts composed of linguistic material). One of Brynhildsvoll's most interesting hypotheses is also that a multitude of different forms of discourse in a single text enhances its spatial character. The more so when the different fragments of discourse in the text refer to much larger speech-registers outside the text. Brynhildsvoll puts it this way:

Ein literarischer Text ist, - so könnte man es etwas zugespitzt formulieren, - um so "räumlicher" strukturiert, je vielfältiger seine Teiltex te miteinander vernetzt sind [...] (p. 99).

Another of the central space-defining features in modern literary discourse is its tendency towards self-reflection. This implies narrative modes where the story-telling is part of the narrative itself. Again, this kind of self-reflection aims at changing and re-directing the chronological, progressive order of a story and limits the straightforward identification between the reader and the text. At the same time that spatiality becomes so overtly important for modern fiction, temporality loses part of its importance. Historical, chronological time is replaced by a less-clearly defined temporality, which may be called *mythical* time. In avantgarde fiction, the play with space and time has become one of its central typological characteristics.

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One of the scholarly solutions to Brynhildsvoll's 'problem' is offered by Bachtin's concept of the chronotope. With respect to the chronotope as an analytical tool, Brynhildsvoll gives a number of highly interesting examples, which he nevertheless could have pursued a little further. Among them are, for example, remarks on the rôle of space and time in Ibsen's dramas.

One of the charming aspects of *Der literarische Raum* is that it does not exclusively focus on contemporary fiction, but that it also deals with the interplay between space and time in modern pictorial art forms, especially in futurism and cubism, and also takes older - predominantly Scandinavian - literary texts into account. In general, Brynhildsvoll's examples are diversified, as the range goes all the way from *Laxdæla Saga*, *Grettis Saga* *Ásmundarsonar* to Strindberg and Ibsen, to Svend Åge Madsen, Lars Gustafsson and, last but not least, Jan Kjærstad. Notably Kjærstad, who is also a critic himself and clearly interested in the problems that Brynhildsvoll explores in this book, is offered a lot of attention.

In Scandinavia, one of the scholars who has tenaciously pursued this topic over the last decades is Hans Lund.<sup>2</sup> After many years of relative obscurity, the time for these interdisciplinary attempts, that often were labelled as 'inter-art studies' or 'cross-media studies', seems to have come to conquer the heart of contemporary literary theory. It is a sign of the times that quite a few collections of essays on this and closely related topics, have recently appeared in the northern countries.<sup>3</sup> Clearly Brynhildsvoll's book is a welcome contribution to the reconnaissance of this relatively unexplored field of scholarly interest.

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