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Places, Spaces and the Role of the Artist

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When I assumed the helm of the creative works strand of *Ubiquity*, the editorial staff had already selected the theme of this issue of the strand, “Places and Spaces.” I therefore came with no preconceived notions as to what “places and spaces” might be. What *is* a place, exactly? How has it been defined, historically speaking? The word “place” comes from the Latin *platea*, which meant a courtyard; in Greek a similar word, πλατεία, meant a broad street (Place, n.d.). Thus words such as *plaza* (through the Spanish language) come from the same source; hence “place” once referred to something that was quite concrete and exterior to the self, as opposed to its very theoretical meaning today. Recently, I have noticed that people say, “He’s coming from a place of...” when they mean something like, “The origin of his feelings on this is...” Or, “I’m in a very lonely place right now.” This is to reify one’s feelings as having an actual locus, a “place.” Perhaps in relating the existence of such a place to others, we wish to fill it with the details and embellishments that make it ours, even if such a place is only in our own minds.

Historically, spaces have been broader than places. “Space” has meant, at least since c.1300, an “area, extent, expanse, lapse of time,” and is from the Latin *spatium*, which meant very nearly the same thing (Space, n. d.). Of course, space has several very common meanings today; its use in the sense of what fills the universe beyond the earth, or to refer to “stellar depths” dates from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (as cited in Morris, 2011). The astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle has wittily pointed out that what counts as “space” in the sense of where we find shuttles, orbiters, astronauts and the like is really not that far away from us. He quipped, “Space isn’t remote at all. It’s only an hour’s drive away if your car could go straight upwards” (as cited in Andrews, 1987, p.282). Hoyle was rather accurate; if one’s automobile could go straight up at speeds that we use on our highways (say 60-65 mph), we would indeed reach what many international bodies, including the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, (FAI) consider to be

outer space (Jenkins, 2005) in about one hour, in that we would be 62 miles above the surface of the earth. This is what is called the Kármán Line (de Córdoba, 2012) that delineates, for the purposes of treaties, what outer space is.

But Theodore von Kármán relied on essentially arbitrary – if consistent - measures to define “outer” space. He could have used another metric. For example, the antecedent agency to National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA), settled on a definition for space as the point at which the atmosphere reached one pound per square foot, which happens at around 50 miles up. Prior to that, it had been the relatively low 15,000 feet – about the level at which humans can no longer breathe without artificial assistance (Jenkins, 2005).

It should be clear, then, that having an idea of what space is – whether outer or inner - is completely dependent upon one’s perspective. Therefore, whenever any of us thinks of places and spaces, these will be unique to our own understanding. They are where we make them. We all have favorite places in our daily lives, and spaces in which we breathe, think, and in which we interact with others. Artists are no different. They exist in interpersonal worlds that their minds continuously interpret. Their art is not merely the product of their unaided selves; it is strongly influenced – perhaps mandated - by the physical circumstances in which they find themselves. And, as our editor in chief tells us in her editorial on this inaugural issue, the arts are ubiquitous and sempiternal; from the caves of Altamira, to the virtual sculpture that has its existence only in the ones and zeroes of a computer program, the arts are, and have truly been everywhere that humans have trodden (Dutton, 2010), in their comparatively short time on earth.

The arts are also multifarious, and sometimes in an intentional way. In the Creative Works strand of *Ubiquity*, we encouraged artists to present multimodally, and you will see pieces that do not confine themselves to one genre.

You will find Michael Angelotti's presentation termed "*Apple on a plate in process: a paint-write in 3 parts abc*," which (at least to me) is part drawing, part recipe, and part poem. And you know what? Literature can be. Angelotti is represented a second time with a gripping super-short story, "Pier Fishing Off Alligator Point." In just a few paragraphs, he explores a favorite place and the relationships that tie relatives to it.

Be sure also to view Peggy Albers' "Reaching Ascent," which features sumptuous yet simple photography of her own ceramic art. Although for obvious reasons *Ubiquity* cannot present her physical piece itself, we can at least display the photos of it from different angles and focal lengths, which reveal some of its beauty to us.

Also, look in on the pictures of Kaleigh Mya Lee, a five year old girl from San Jose, California. Her collection, called "The First Art Adventure: 'I Can Really Draw Mommy!'" features colored drawings of, among other things, the Golden Gate Bridge and is not to be missed. An artist friend of mine observed that while maturity in both art techniques and in life is generally a good thing, a child has an absolutely unblemished eye for art: he or she draws exactly what she sees, how the thing "is" to her. It is only later on that we "correct" what we see to conform to what we presume others want us to render or depict.

Poet Theron Montgomery makes a very personal impact with "Before She Died," which explores Montgomery's last moments with his mother and "An Old Monk's View," which explores sex from a very unusual viewpoint and drolly makes desire a spell woven by monsters.

William Krape shows us that traditionalism is still alive with his lyrical, sonorous organ piece (as played by the composer), “Jesus the Very Thought of Thee.” The author has graciously included the complete score, for those who would like to play the piece at home, and has also provided his own commentary on the origin of this musical piece.

Jeff Spanke’s “Plots of Land (And Those Who Write Them)” is a sad but wonderful piece told from a young boy’s point of view about his friendship with a janitor. Pre-teens often describe their world with devastating economy and incisiveness, and Spanke captures that language.

We think we have put together a Creative Works strand that will appeal to many tastes. Although we are proud of our collection, really all of the credit should go to our artists, composers and authors, those who go to the trouble of helping us understand our complicated world and its many places and spaces.

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