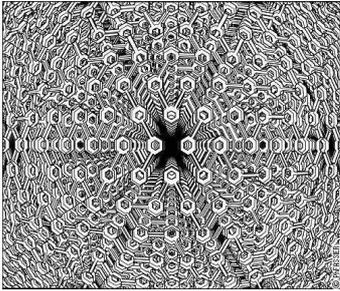# Place, Space, and Displacement

The first task that confronts a group of academics forming a research cluster is the definition of the area of research they focus on. In the case of "Place, Space, and Displacement" there is no univocal and universally accepted meaning for the terms under discussion. Instead, they are open to a variety and diversity of approaches and interpretations which lend them their complexity, ambiguity, fascination, and richness.  It is essential to retain the plurality of views, and recognize that "place", "space" and "displacement" may mean different things to people in different contexts and at different times.  This approach enables us to catch the first crucial element about notions of place, space and displacement, that fact, that is, that they are inherently dynamic concepts, constantly changing and developing.  By the same token, the very plurality of the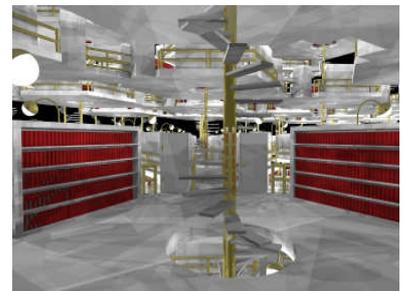 perspectives and backgrounds that we bring to bear on place, space, and displacement allow us to scrutinize them through a contrastive and comparative fashion and bring to the fore of investigation similarities and differences, both geographical and aesthetic.

If place and space change in time, and are the result of social and cultural shifts, they are also in a constant relation between present and past, and with the mediation that they generate through memory and recollection.  Memory is not only remembering, it is also rebuilding the present through the past.  This process of reconstruction often - although not exclusively - passes and is aided through language.  Of course, this is the language of architecture, urban planning but also the language of literature, of art, as well as the language of oral history, and traditions.  For instance, in Gaelic culture land becomes place through memory and enactment, and people animate place through play, performance, song and story.  More generally, spatial contexts impinge on the way we make meanings, whether in terms of our identity, our sense of self, the ways in which we strive to change the world, the impact we have on the spaces and places in which we live.  These aspects of human spatiality are often thematised in literary works, or are present as features of those works, serving to imaginatively "locate" us in a verbally-evoked universe.

Space and place are also sites of conflicts, either territorial or social.  If on the one hand they unite, they also separate, exclude, marginalize, leading to process of colonization and displacement in which identity and belonging assume characteristics that are often used to discriminate and separate.  Perhaps the real and pressing challenge for present and future communities will precisely be that of rethinking notions of identity and belonging in the context of place through a visionary revaluation of multilingualism and cosmopolitanism, not so much in the sense of universalizing and abstracts categories as in that of concrete experiences of exchange in which the "other" is none other than the potential "I".

The research cluster on "Place, Space, and Displacement" comprises scholars from French, Gaeilge, German, Italian, and Spanish, whose work intersects and responds directly to some of the issues illustrated above.  Our intention is to develop our work collegially and in collaboration with local and international scholars, community groups, and government bodies through the organization of workshops, symposia, publications, and research projects.

More information about individual research and interests is available by clicking on the name of the selected academic.  Further definitions of place, space and displacement can also be accessed by following the same process.

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