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Heise, Ursula K., *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet. The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), viii+250 pp.

In the two years since its publication, Ursula Heise's *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* has quickly advanced to become one of the crucial works in ecocriticism, frequently referenced in conference papers and classes on environmental literature. Undoubtedly, the book owes its fame at least partially to the wide-ranging scope of the analyses it comprises and to the many possible applications the analyses allow for. By means of various theoretical overviews and, eventually, readings of texts from the German and the Anglophone world, Heise not only improves our awareness of a theoretical impasse in cultural and/or environmental studies concerned with ecology as a global and local phenomenon as well as a cultural challenge - she also convincingly hints at possible solutions.

By focussing on environmentalist discourse from the 1960s onwards, Heise identifies theorisations of place and space as well as locality and globality as pivotal elements of this very discourse. She then reviews the respective concepts and approaches to the spatial by means of comparative analyses. In the first chapter, she reviews different forms of aesthetic representation of our imagined planetary home, focusing on the technical devices which have always altered and framed these perceptions, with "Google Earth" being only the latest development. Heise provides a chronology of changing perceptions, which starts with the famous photographs of the earth as "Blue Planet" (in the 1960s) and as "marble earth," taken by Apollo 17 in 1972, and describes how the experience of seeing the world from a distance (culminating today in Google's zooming into and out of the world on the web) has, on the one hand, resulted in a certain awareness of the planet as a whole which has led to rhetorical analogies such as that of "spaceship earth". On the other hand, the new modes of perception induced a sense of fragmentation and a strenuous simultaneity which has been met in narratives by means of experimental modes such as collage and complex allegorical rewritings. Heise places these developments in a theoretical context, and her close readings in chapters two and three - the former focussing on the *topos* of overpopulation and the latter on the idea of wilderness in connection with a global society - impressively prove her argument by pointing to the aesthetic forms by means of which the respective developments are culturally addressed.

In the second part of her book, Heise gives special emphasis to contemporary theoretical concepts of risk - Ulrich Beck's famous description of the "risk society" (as he identifies late modern civilisation) being only one of the many concepts whose relevance to ecocritical topics Heise successfully

demonstrates. In this section, Heise points to the connection between the idea of globality and global risk perceptions, as both are perceptual frames that lie at the basis of any attempt at imagining the global from an environmentalist perspective. Thus, introducing risk as an indispensable element of theories of a "sense of place/planet" is Heise's venture in this second part. Here again, the introductory theoretical section is followed by two applications. The first deals with a selection of American novels concerned with "toxic bodies and corporate poisons", as the title suggests; the second shifts the focus to Germany, presenting two readings of texts concerned with the reality of nuclear catastrophe. By reading texts that deal with the factual threat of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, Heise not only links theoretical discourse and notions of an altered *imagination* of the global with historical fact, thereby stressing the urgency and necessity of cultural analyses in the field of environmental criticism. She furthermore exemplifies the tension between concepts such as an ethics of proximity etc. as they have hitherto dominated theories of locality, and the challenge of experiencing global phenomena as they actually become local phenomena, as well. Thus, adding to the impressively broad theoretical scope upon which Heise grounds her observation, the literary examples demonstrate the tensions inherent in any notion of space as opposed to place.

All these tensions are addressed by Heise in a way that will arguably make her discussions of the very theoretical aporia of any environmentalist "sense of place" the most challenging and interesting contribution for many readers: Finding that "the global" has been theorised as being both threatening (for local identities and 'situated knowledge') and empowering (in terms of an overcoming of nationalism by means of a new holism) at the same time, Heise takes this as the starting point for her outline of a "sense of planet" that reassesses processes of deterritorialisation with regard to an "ecological cosmopolitanism". The acute analysis of the theoretical impasse that theories of globalisation and locality, diaspora, cosmopolitanism, hybridity and the question of the role of national communities have led to persuasively suggests her proposal for such an eco-cosmopolitanism to be a theoretically informed negotiation of the notion of place, space, risk and cultural mediation. Her study impressively reveals her profound understanding of the theories she contrasts and reads against each other. Thus, the book offers various opportunities to start thinking about these matters from quite different perspectives which all revolve around the idea that "what is crucial for ecological awareness and environmental ethics is arguably not so much a sense of place as a sense of planet" (55).

Since Heise not only lucidly describes the various and even contradictory approaches that understand place, space, locality, and globality as the keys for meeting the challenges of the current crisis of the world, she also emphatically seeks to convince her readership of the epistemological problem of space as such: contemporary environmentalism is a discourse which is marked by "an

antitechnological rhetoric relying on an image produced by advanced technology" (23). Thus, the antiscientific discourse of environmentalism has been made possible through the very scientific devices it rejects. Ecocriticism as a discipline that is genuinely concerned with the environment as well as its representation seems a promising paradigm for an approach that seeks to reconsider questions of such interrelations. Heise's own thorough analyses, together with her in-depth reviews of contemporary schools of thought, covering the already mentioned theories of globalization, diaspora, cosmopolitanism etc., constitute a great vantage point from which scholarly desiderata, shortcomings, and conflicts can be surveyed.

The trenchancy and intellectual range of Heise's critique ensures that even those who disagree with her stand to benefit from her book, as do scholars in adjacent fields. One may think of the growing interest in spatial poetics, i.e. approaches that have been developed as narratologists have realised how theories of narrative have always privileged time over space. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* undoubtedly offers a great number of texts and theoretical statements that invite further investigation – be it from a comparative, narratological, or postcolonial perspective. Heise convincingly invites us to approach all kinds of theoretical impasses and offers numerous departures by means of which ecocriticism can be placed on more secure theoretical grounds. It is partly owing to Heise's lucid and convincing style and argument that this task appears to be somewhat more within reach, for despite the tremendous theoretical resources she has at her disposal, she writes clearly and unpretentiously, thus making the read enjoyable and profitable.

Eventually, by showing how "new risk perceptions are shaped by already existing cultural tropes and narrative templates" (13), and by focussing on the cultural representations that she understands as both influenced by and influential for other, scientific as well as socio-political discourses, Heise outlines potential future projects in cultural studies concerning the environment. For such studies to be valuable, knowledge of the scientific and scholarly notions by means of which the earth *and* our discourses of it are shaped is as important as is the understanding of formal narrative devices that govern the establishment of complex cultural patters, from conservationist rhetoric to the interpretation of scientific data from genetics. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* is an example of such informed and enlightening writing. The "environmental praxis" Buell stresses with regard to ecocritical exegesis can thus be understood as a practice of literary studies which scrutinises the influence of our perception and in turn may influence larger cultural patterns of representation.¹ Just as ecocriticism has let go of the idea of merely incorporating the scientific method or working hand in hand with

¹ Lawrence Buell. *The Environmental Imagination. Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 430 n20.

an at times obscure notion of ecological science, Heise opens up new theoretical directions; while her close-readings in chapters two and three, which are concerned with urbanity and wilderness and the respective narrative templates, are convincing indeed, Heise's in-depth analysis of sociological theories of risk are even more so. Her discussion of Ulrich Beck's work on the "risk society" is particularly insightful. Heise agrees with many ecocritics that the concept of a "world risk society" is "one of the most important recent ways of imagining the global from an environmentalist perspective" (150) (hence making it a pivotal concept for her own study, of course), but she also analyses the "genuine and deep-seated difference of social vision" between notions of a risk society and common notions of, for instance, Guha's and Martínez-Alier's "environmental justice". This analysis, as well as her idea of an "environmental world citizenship" (10), is most enlightening.

Together with Greg Garrard's brilliant *New Critical Idiom*-introduction to ecocriticism,² *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* can indeed be taken as the perfect *vade-mecum* for ecocritics: it is simultaneously insightful and fascinating for students of ecocriticism and the connection of literature and the environment, and it is thought-provoking, challenging and rewarding for scholars with a particular interest in ecocritical theory.

² Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, New Critical Idiom (London: Routledge, 2004).