

# Historical space as narrative medium: on the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites

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**Abstract** This paper examines how narratives of history are organized spatially at historical sites and memorial spaces, especially in urban settings and in places invested with a sense of collective memory. Much recent research has focused on landscape, memory, and place and how relationships of political and social power influence the representation of historical events in public spaces. Although the meaning of such sites may be hotly contested for long periods of time, we focus here on narrative theory and the related, but unexplored, issue of how such historical stories are configured on the ground at actual historical sites. We identify a number of narrative strategies which are frequently used to configure historical stories in space. Declamatory strategies using markers presenting a snapshot of an event are common, but sequential and non-sequential linear strategies are also used, as are thematic strategies that cross-cut space and time to present complex historical stories at various spatial scales. Examples are drawn from a range of historical sites in North America, Europe and Israel.

**Keywords** Narrative medium · Commemoration · Public memory · Spatial narrative · Storytelling

## Introduction

Historical sites are dedicated to the cultural production of their pasts. Such cultural productions, whatever their ideological suppositions, take advantage of the common perception of history as being an intrinsic quality of the local landscape. According to Western cultural convention, historical sites provide a tangible link to the past that they evoke. In this sense, the presentation of history on-site only makes explicit that which is implicit in the local landscape. Cultural productions of the past employ the agency of display to create an interpretive interface that mediates and thereby transforms that which is shown into a vision of history.

Much recent research has focused on landscape, memory, and place and the ways in which relationships of political and social power influence the representation of historical events in public spaces and historical shrines (Foote and Azaryahu 2007). While the politics of representation are important to understanding the social construction of public history and the ideological dimension of public memory, we wish to draw attention to a related, but hitherto unexplored, issue that pertains to the poetics of presentation: how historical stories and the temporal

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sequences that underlie them are arranged and configured in space. We do not discount the debates which occur over the meaning of such sites, but wish to focus here on the spatio-rhetorical elements of the resulting stories.

Students of narrative theory have drawn attention to the narrative structures afforded by different media such as the novel, film, photograph and even computer games and music. Based on the notion of historical space as a narrative medium, our concern is related to, but differs somewhat from, the pioneering study of Potteiger and Purinton (1998) on ways in which storytelling can be incorporated into landscape design. Our interest also diverges slightly from studies concerned primarily with how these spaces and places are imagined, described, and portrayed in autobiography, literature, travelogues, film and others forms. Instead, we are interested in the *spatial configuration* of history—the way historical stories are arranged to be told in space to produce what we term ‘spatial narratives’ of history. Notwithstanding the stories they tell and the ideological suppositions on which they are based, such spatial narratives entail a configuration of locations and time in space. In some cases they involve little more than a brief caption on a marker positioned at a historical site (Fig. 1). But often spatial narratives involve a complex configuration of geographic elements including buildings, markers, memorials, and inscriptions positioned with great care to provide a spatial story-line or to capture the key locational and chronological relations of an historical event (Fig. 2).

An important issue is if and how historical time can be transposed onto historical space and the possibility to endow historical space with a sense of chronology. As accounts of past events, histories are often preoccupied with the notion of precise sequentiality and temporal progression. When history is presented in a book or a film, the linear progression of reading or watching often corresponds to historical chronology. However, when history is presented in the landscape, historical chronology needs to be reconfigured onto a set of synchronous spatial features so that the one-dimensional, temporal sequence of historical narrative is, so to speak, ‘draped’ across the spatial dimensions of an actual historical site.

In this paper we examine different modes of investing historical space with narrative structure by

the owners and caretakers of a wide range of historical sites. Our interest in this topic derives from our research into a variety of historical sites in North America, Europe and Israel (Azaryahu 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1997, 1999; Foote 1988, 1990, 2003; Foote et al. 2000). In writing about the social, cultural and political dimensions of historical sites and memorials, we became interested in analyzing the strategies used to spatially configure historical spaces to tell stories. Our focus is on the strategies employed rather than on the stories themselves and the political and cultural circumstances in which they were created, institutionalized, debated and contested. The cases we discuss are illustrative of narrative strategies. They represent both urban and non-urban settings: we aim to show that these strategies extend not only beyond specific political and ideological contexts, but also that their employment is not restricted to specific geographical settings.

Stories can be told anywhere. Events may be told orally at the place where they occurred regardless of the existence of commemorative features in the local scene. Our argument is that the design of spatial story-lines in historical spaces has substantial impact on their narrative structure and properties. By focusing on spatial modes of narrative structure, this paper highlights historical space as a narrative medium and in particular draws attention to the configuration of historical time in historical space.

### Narrative and the issue of time

The proposition that narrative is “anything that tells or presents a story, be it by text, picture, performance, or a combination of these [and] hence novels, plays, films, comic strips, etc. are all narratives” (Jahn 2005) suggests that narratives are stories as presented by certain media. An important issue is the telling order of the story. For narratologists whose main concern is literary narratives, the purpose of a narrative is to “recount events chronologically” (Goodman 1981, p. 115). Temporality is essential: “Only one kind of thing may be narrated: a time thing” (Scholes 1981, p. 205). Prince (quoted in Coste 1989, p. 13) maintains that narrative “may be defined as the representation of real or fictive events and situations in a time sequence.” The linear progression of time can be punctuated and also







forms in space that underlies cycloramas, cartoons, animated art, and comics. Indeed, the terms ‘graphic storytelling’ and ‘visual narrative’ are often used in the critical literature on comics, graphic novels, and *manga* (Eisner 1996; Meadows 2003; Miller 2004). As a configuration of objects in the landscape, spatial narratives of history share some features with such narrative forms, since historical chronology can be enacted by moving from place to place along a route or trail, or by showing sequential images (such as before-and-after photographs or maps) at one place.

Spatial media vary considerably in their narrative potential and properties. Paintings, sculptures and photographs cannot easily narrate an entire story, but can highlight key moments in the action that encapsulate, embody, symbolize and otherwise call to mind an entire plot (Lessing 1962, pp. 23, 78; Ryan 2005). Such significant moments in a narrative progression are the ones “most suggestive and from which the preceding and the succeeding are most easily comprehensible” (Lessing 1962, p. 78) and are therefore suffused with narrative meaning.

The contrast between what can and cannot easily be achieved in spatial forms of historical presentation is apparent in the case of commemorative street names. The historical referents co-exist simultaneously in the cityscape, but with no linear thread of chronological order connecting them, temporality yields to synchronicity. Commemorative street names refer to both national and local narratives of history and may be woven into narratives of the city, but as a presentation of history, their narrativity is limited to their commemorative capacity to evoke ‘significant moments’ or ‘significant heroes’ of history (Alderman 2002, 2003; Azaryahu 1996a, 1997; Berg and Kearns 1996; Stump 1988; Yeoh 1992, 1996). Moreover, the spatial arrangement of commemorative street names can be based on a thematic principle of order like grouping together writers, famous battles or heroes of a particular chapter of national history. In such a case the presentation of history, though lacking chronological order, still possesses a measure of coherence.

### Strategies of spatial narrative

A distinctive feature of how spatial narratives of history are structured is the way they are anchored in

and even constrained by events and places. The events presented may last anywhere from seconds to centuries and occupy spaces of a few square meters or span hundreds of kilometers. A single, well-defined event that occurs over hours in a small area may offer different narrative possibilities than one extending over years and a large area.

We argue below, however, that these possibilities fall into three broad categories which revolve, in part, around the spatial and temporal scale of the events themselves (Table 1). The first are strategies that involve narrating an event from a single point or place with a marker and are most commonly employed for events that are constrained spatially and temporally. The second category includes linear and sequential chronologies linking time and space along routes and paths. These are frequently used for events of intermediate temporal and spatial scales. The final category encompasses events involving complex spatial and temporal sequences over large areas or long periods of time. Spatial narratives of this category are often difficult to create and are typically simplified so that they are told in terms of a straight-forward geographical progression, a purely chronological order, or some sort of thematic relationship that highlights key moments, people, and places.

### Declaiming history from a single point or place

A common strategy for organizing a spatial narrative is to tell a story from a single point like the recitation of an epic poem or the delivery of a soliloquy. Such narratives are declamatory in the sense of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as, “A public speech or address of rhetorical character ... expressing strong feelings and addressed to the passions of the hearers,” and often involve formal devices of rhetorical elocution. Events are reduced to brief inscriptions often in formulaic prose. Historical sites of this sort are frequently framed by a fence or wall, with gates sometimes used to separate the narrative space from the surrounding area.

Declamatory strategies are common because many events can be localized to single, easily marked places (Fig. 1). Typical of these are assassination and death sites such as those of Huey Long in the Louisiana State House in Baton Rouge; Prime

**Table 1** Strategies of spatial narrative*(1) Narratives positioned at single points or places*

Events are localized and described from single, easily marked places. Examples: roadside markers, assassination and death sites.

*(2) Narratives arranged as linear or sequential paths, routes or trails*

(a) Time and space linked in an order specific to a particular event

Example: Mormon Trail across Iowa

(b) Sequential narratives are used to associate places which do not otherwise share any obvious chronological sequence

Example: Philadelphia's Walking in the Steps of Benjamin Franklin

*(3) Narratives depicting complex spatial and temporal sequences over large areas or spanning long time periods*

(a) Key places described in linear or non-linear narrative

Example: Masada National Park in Israel

(b) Key moments of event described in linear or non-linear narrative

Example: Driving tour of Gettysburg National Military Park

(c) Complex stories are divided and narrated around component themes and sub-themes

Examples: Women's Rights National Historical Park in upstate New York; Buchenwald concentration camp

*(4) Hybrid narrative strategies using combinations of the previous types*

Examples: Arlington National Cemetery; Boston Women's Heritage Trail; Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum

Minister Rabin in Tel Aviv; or Olof Palme in Stockholm. Declamatory strategies are also used for events extending over larger areas when these areas can be viewed easily from a single vantage point. Sometimes these are convenient vista points. In other cases the point of declamation holds significance in the telling of the story. In Scotland, the memorial to the national hero William Wallace was built on Abbey Craig, the high ground assumed to have been his command post during the battle against English forces at Stirling Bridge in 1297 (Edensor 1997; Gold and Gold 1995). In the case of the memorial to the victims of the Ludlow massacre of strikers and their families during the 1914 coal 'war' in southern Colorado, it is the death pit where the worst loss of life occurred that is marked (Saitta et al. 2006).

Declamatory strategies positioned at a single point can also be effective when events extend across areas too large to be viewed at once or are inaccessible. Examples of the latter are maritime disasters in which stories are told from nearby vantage points such as the sinking of the Empress of Ireland in the St. Lawrence River in 1914 and marked at Pointe-au-Père Québec (Site historique maritime de la Pointe-au-Père 2007). Although it sometimes seems obvious in retrospect why such events are marked as they are, the process often involves a wide range of contested issues (Foote and Azaryahu 2007).

**Linear and sequential chronologies linking space and time**

Time and space are sometimes narrated linearly along trails or paths with clear starting and ending points and a chronological progression from point-to-point along the way. Gates are sometimes used to indicate the start and end of the spatial narrative and fences, paths and borders help maintain sequence. Some sites invite visitors to begin anywhere along a route, others have a single entry point and fixed order. Choices about the flexibility of routes are integral to the spatial narrative itself. If, for example, visitors are free to visit sites nonsequentially or to skip sections of spatial narrative, then repetition or overlap of content is needed from site-to-site. Rigid control of visitors is nearly impossible over larger sites.

The prototype for many sequential spatial narratives is the pilgrimage. In many religious traditions, pilgrimage is a journey of moral significance in which the pilgrim visits sites or shrines associated with prophets or martyrs as a means of reliving the triumphs or tragedies of the prophet or martyr. In many cases, the pilgrimage itself is meant to test the moral strength, physical stamina, or personal courage of the pilgrim. In Christianity, the prototypical pilgrimage route is the Via Dolorosa in the old city of Jerusalem, the path that is said by tradition to be the one Jesus walked from his trial to crucifixion.

Each of the fourteen ‘stations of the cross’ along the path is associated with a particular event recounted in the Gospels. The Via Dolorosa is a prototype for arranging a temporal sequence of events in space that a pilgrim/visitor can re-enact. Even when such prototypes are used for organizing spatial narratives, many variations and complications arise depending on the geographic contingencies and spatial considerations of the sites.

Time and space linked sequentially along a route or trail

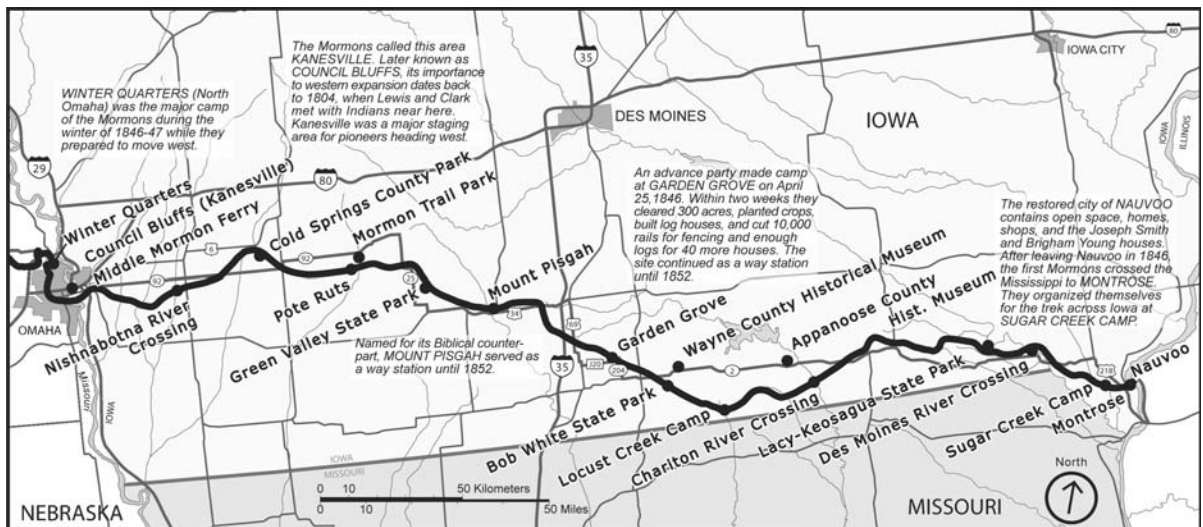
Among the most common instances are those like the ‘stations of the cross’ in Jerusalem in which time and space are linked sequentially in an order specific to a particular event. Some of the best examples are the marking of paths, trails, routes and journeys. The Mormon Trail is an example extending over a larger area and period linking many cities and towns. Established in 1846–1847 by followers of Joseph Smith traveling under the guidance of Brigham Young from Illinois to Utah, the trail is of great importance to the settlement of the western U.S. as the key corridor across the central Great Plains before branching into the Oregon and California trails west

of the continental divide. The route was used by thousands of settlers before the transcontinental railroads assumed importance after 1869. Events along the trail have been marked in considerable detail by local and state authorities, private organizations such as the Oregon-California Trails Association, as well as individuals and families (Berrett 2001, 2005; Brown 2004).

The federal government has also played a role since 1978 when the U.S. National Trails Systems Act was amended to include trails of historic interest, and the Mormon Pioneer Historic Trail was the first marked. As an example of how the narrative has been developed, the leg across Iowa highlights twenty eight sites that relate to the first movement of Mormons in 1846 (Fig. 3). Rather than narrate the story of all subsequent groups, the enabling legislation specified that it was the story of the first year that was to be told along the trail. This decision simplified what might have been a series of overlapping spatial narratives into a single story (National Park Service 2005).

Sequential temporal narratives imposed on space

Sometimes chronological stories are used to link places which are not ordered in strict sequence.

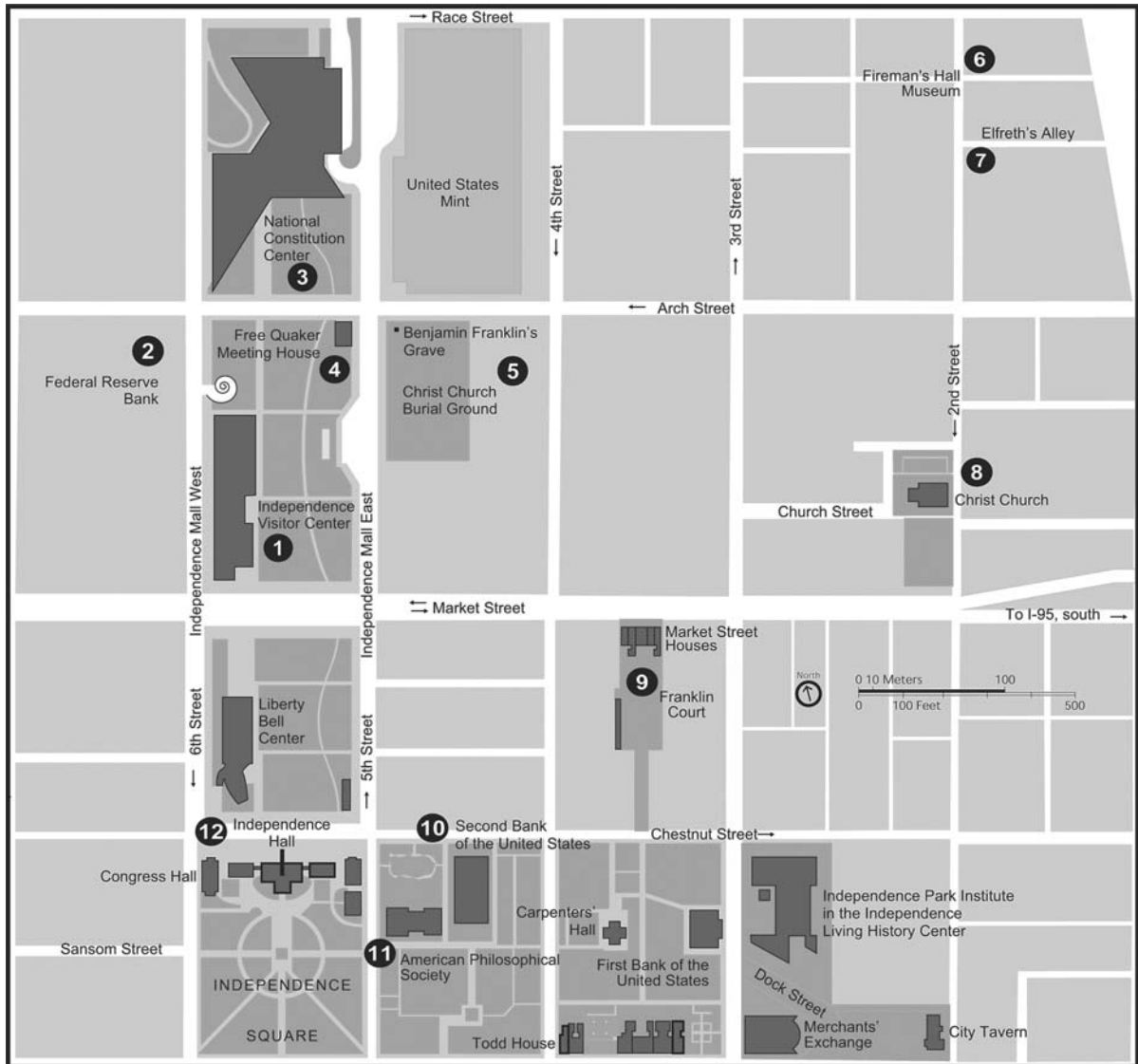


**Fig. 3** The Mormon Trail across Iowa, an example of a sequential narrative arranged spatially over a large area. This narrative has had to be simplified to tell the story of the first wave of Mormon immigrants, rather than later waves of settlers. The map highlights the sites of camps, farms, settlements, and river crossings important in 1846 as the first

Mormon pioneers left Nauvoo, Illinois (right) for Winter Quarters, Nebraska (left), not arriving in Utah until 1847. The sites and narrative are the work of many groups and are maintained by the LDS Church; state and local government; and private associations. Map by K. E. Foote using National Park Service (2007) digital base maps

Perhaps the most common examples of this type of spatial narrative are tours developed around the life and work of famous individuals. In these cases, the chronology of the individual's life provides the basic structure of the spatial narrative, usually punctuated spatially with visits to the sites of important life events including, most commonly, birth, death and burial.

Philadelphia's Walking in the Steps of Benjamin Franklin tour was developed for the Franklin tercentenary celebration of 2006 (Fig. 4). The route recounts Franklin's life, but uses it to also tell the story of Philadelphia and the American Revolution. Anchored by sites associated with Franklin's life, the spatial narrative draws attention to his contributions to the



**Fig. 4** Walking in the Steps of Benjamin Franklin tour in central Philadelphia, an example of a narrative organized around the life of an individual that serves to spatially connect a range of otherwise largely unrelated places. In this case, the route is anchored by three key sites directly associated with Franklin's life: the site of his home and print shop (now called Franklin Court which includes a postal museum honoring

Franklin's service as first postmaster general); the Christ Church where he and his family worshiped; and the cemetery where he is buried. Connected to this route are sites that mark Franklin's contributions to a range of institutions and events of local and national significance. Map by K. E. Foote using National Park Service (2007) digital base maps and Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (2005)



history of Philadelphia and the United States by including stops at the Federal Reserve Bank, the Second Bank of the United States, the Constitution Center on Independence Mall, and the oldest continuously inhabited street in the U.S., Elfreth's Alley (Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation 2005).

Another possibility is to connect existing shrines to represent a larger historical sequence. The Linking Trail Walk in Jerusalem that leads from Yad Va'Shem holocaust memorial to Mount Herzl, Israel's national cemetery, was opened in April 2004. As Israel's primary national shrines, Yad Va'Shem and Mount Herzl tell, respectively, the story of the Holocaust and national independence (Yad Va'Shem 2007). The trail that connects the two adjacent national shrines tells the progression from Holocaust to independence that underlies Israel's national narrative (Rehabilitation Department Unit for the Commemoration of Fallen Soldiers 2003, 2004). The narrative function of the trail is enhanced by local topography; Mount Herzl is topographically dominant and the trail entails its ascent, underscoring the symbolism of the trail but also emphasizing a notion of temporal progression.

### Complex sequences over large areas or long periods

Among the most difficult sites to interpret are those involving actions over large areas or long periods of time; a large number of simultaneous events over wide areas; and complex spatial and temporal interactions within the overall event. These are stories that revolve around large battles and military campaigns or major social, economic, political and cultural transformations like the rise and fall of U.S. slavery. In all of these cases, no one point, path or trail provides an effective spatial perspective for narrating the story. Great simplification is often required—time or space is shortened, concatenated, compressed, lengthened, embellished, straightened, or smoothed.

#### Geographical point-to-point narrative of significant places

By geographical, we mean a story told from a series of vista or vantage points, with one element of a story told at each point, but not in strict chronological

order. Geographical narrative offers several advantages for telling complex stories. It permits a simplification of spatial and temporal complexity—particularly the problem of narrating simultaneous events—by presenting their highlights. In movies, novels and non-fiction narrative it is possible to simulate simultaneity through cutaways, flashbacks and a variety of literary devices. At historical sites that same effect can best be accomplished by picking certain locations—a particularly noteworthy site or path—and explaining the action that transpired in its vicinity.

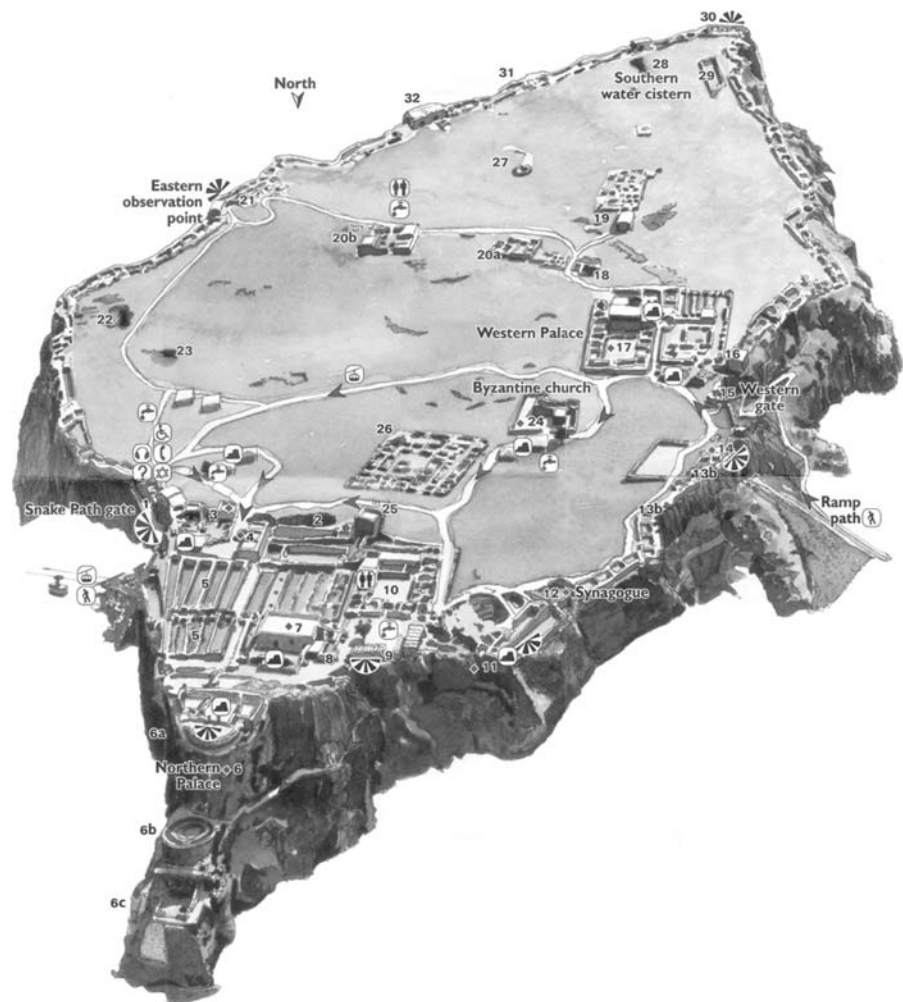
Geographical narratives of this sort are common at archeological sites where they are often associated with the 'discovery tours' that facilitate spatial exploration. An example is the geographical narrative that underlies the spatial exploration of the Masada National Park in Israel (Fig. 5). The story of Masada is a dyadic construct that combines its building as a magnificent desert fortress by Herod the Great in late first century BCE and the last stand of Jewish rebels besieged by the Roman army in 73 CE (Azaryahu and Kellerman 1999; Ben-Yehuda 1995; Zerubavel 1995). The buildings and artifacts are layered spatially and archeologically in ways that would make a strict chronological narrative confusing to visitors. As presented at the site, history unfolds as a concatenation of archeological remains and locations that constitute the significant elements of the local topography (Stiebel 2000). The points narrated by tourist guides have been carefully selected to highlight key periods, events, and structures for their individual significance and for the ways they relate to others.

#### Chronological narrative of significant moments

Just as geographical narrative allows a story to be simplified by moving from place-to-place, chronological narrative simplifies temporal and spatial complexity by presenting a chronological sequence of an event's highlights and significant moments along a trail (Hawthorne 1988).

An example from the American Civil War is the Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania. The battle of 1–3 July 1863 involved combined armies of approximately 163,000 soldiers fighting over an area of approximately 40–50 km<sup>2</sup>, of which just under 2400 ha are now part of the military park. The size, length and complexity of the battle make it

**Fig. 5** Masada National Park in Israel, an example of how geographical, point-to-point narrative can be used in a situation where the complexity of an archeological site makes a chronological strategy difficult to employ. The high ground of Masada includes a fortress built under Herod the Great, the remains of the last stand of a group of Jewish rebels besieged by the Roman army in 73 CE, and other archeological remains. These stories are told from the vantage point of positions in the ruins which allow visitors to see this interlayering of stories. Source: Stiebel (2000)



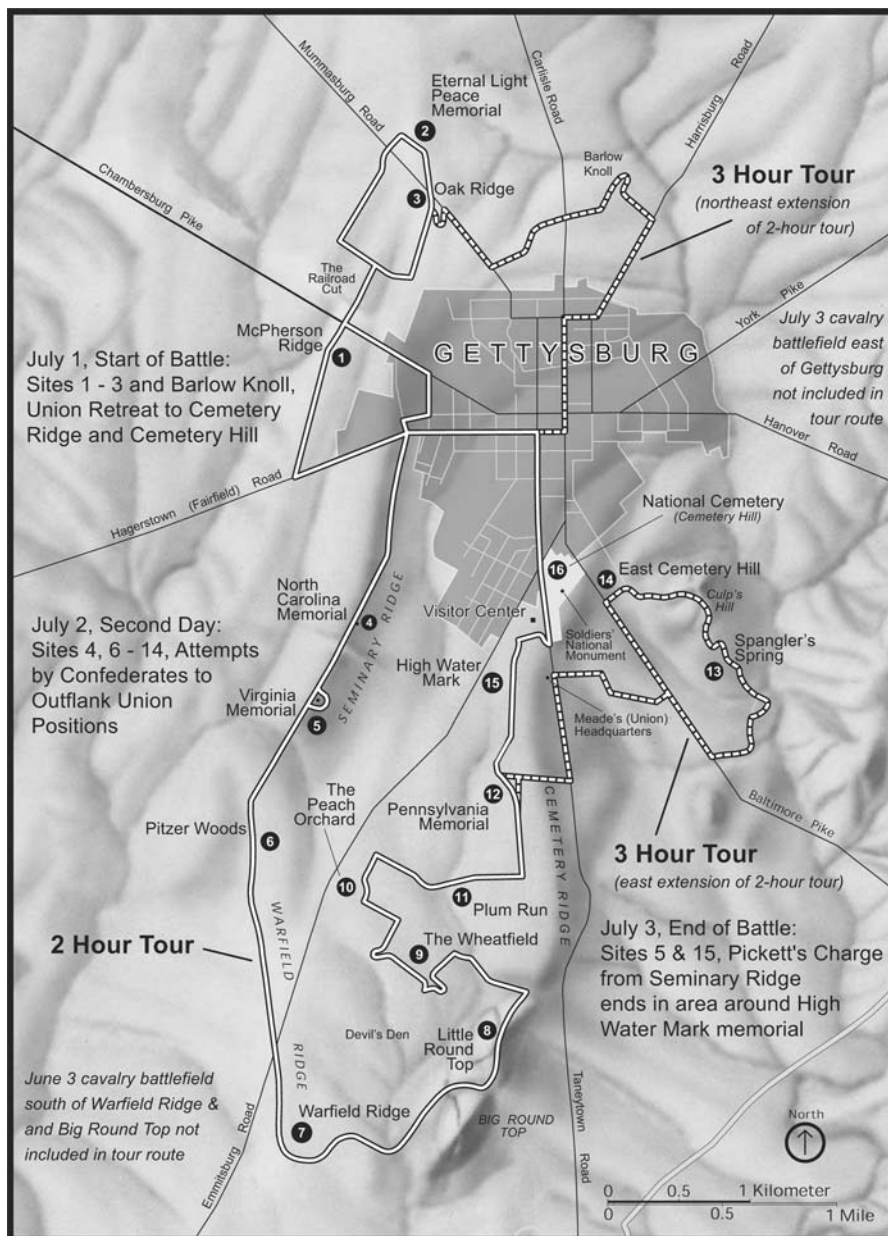
difficult to narrate. However, one of the most popular routes through the battlefield is the self-guided auto tour developed by the National Park Service (2002) offering the option of a 2 or 3-hour excursion (Fig. 6). The full eighteen-mile route claims to be—and generally is—chronological; it begins at McPherson Ridge and ends at the High Water Mark Memorial and National Cemetery. Yet, this chronologically configured narrative involves concatenations. One difference, for example, between the 2- and 3-hour tour is that one key event of the first day (fighting near Barlow Knob) and two from the second (fighting at Spangler's Spring and at East Cemetery Hill) are omitted. One area omitted from both tours is the cavalry battlefield just east of the

main park where Confederate troops tried to outflank the Union forces on the third day.

#### Thematic narratives

A thematic approach to the construction of spatial narratives serves both to highlight and to separate issues, periods and perspectives while maintaining that they belong to one and the same story. Weaving spatial narratives around a theme—the participants, causes, ideas, consequences, periods or lessons—amounts to telling these elements of the story separately in space. This approach does not preclude using geography or chronology as an organizing principle for arranging the spatial narrative, but these are subordinate to the theme (Fig. 7).

**Fig. 6** Two and three-hour auto tour routes of the Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, battlefield, an example of chronological narrative of significant moments developed to tell the story of a complex engagement extending over a large area during 1–3 July, 1863. In a battle of this size and complexity, events which occurred simultaneously are narrated sequentially, particularly the events of the second day (sites 4, 6–14), and some events are left out (the cavalry battles to the east and south on 3 July) or are included only in the 3-hour tour. Map by K. E. Foote using National Park Service (2007) digital base maps

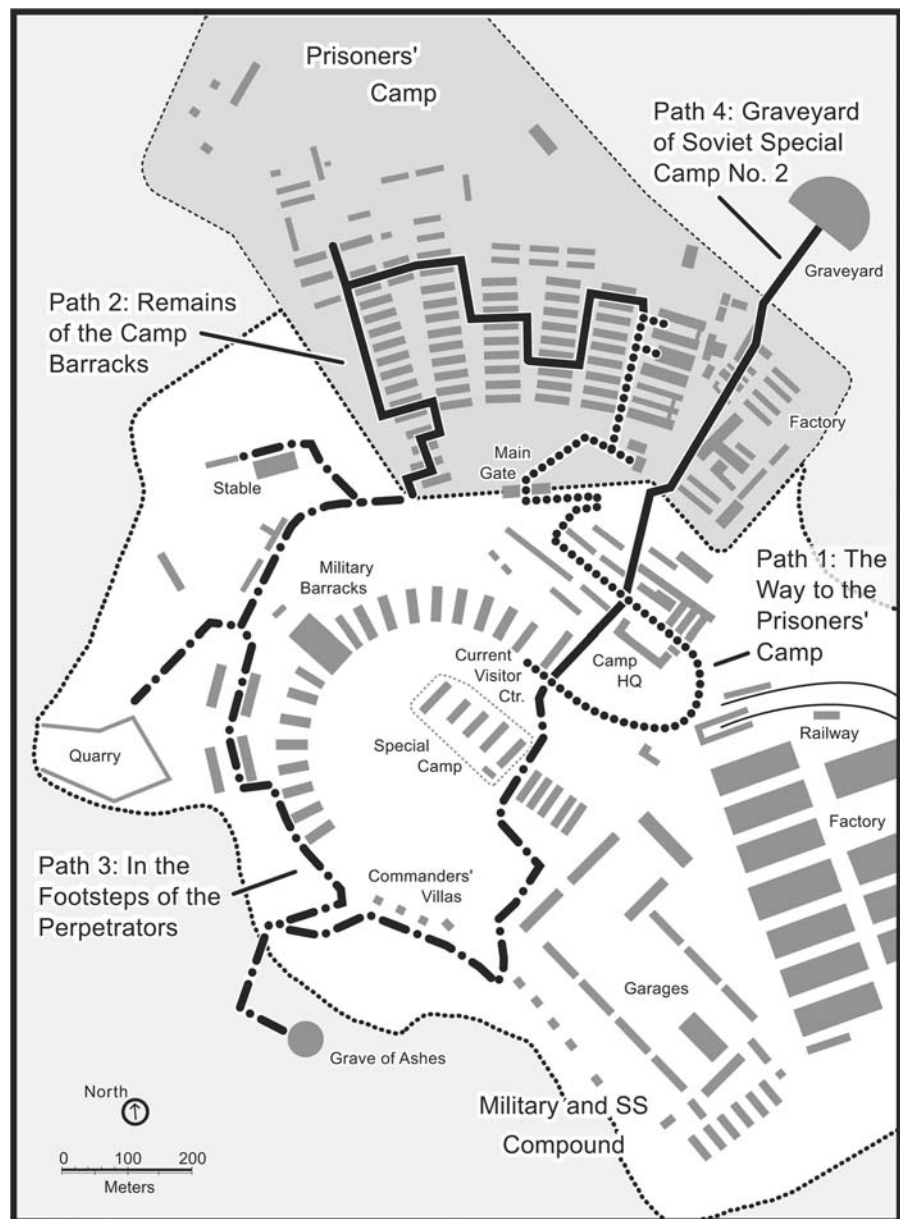


Thematic strategies are useful in the construction of spatial narratives that associate places and their stories that would, in the absence of a unifying theme, represent a miscellany of seemingly unrelated sites. The Women’s Rights National Historical Park in upstate New York is an illustrative example. In Seneca Falls and Waterloo, the story of the suffragette movement is told at the houses and meeting places used by those who authored the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments, a document now viewed as the

start of the U.S. women’s rights movement (National Park Service 2004; Women’s Rights National Historical Park 1997).

When employed, a thematic ordering of routes suggests a sense of coherence. This sense of coherence is augmented when thematic and chronological principles are combined as is the case at the Buchenwald memorial site in Germany. As decided in the early 1990s, the official tour of Buchenwald is divided into three successive periods: the National-

**Fig. 7** Walking tours of the Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, Germany. Visitors may take any of four paths through the complex, each developed around a thematic narrative. The reorganization of Buchenwald's spatial narrative was a main feature of the re-design of the site in the mid-1990s and involved two thematic distinctions. One involved differentiating between the two successive periods in the site history: the Nazi concentration camp (1937–1945) and the Soviet detention camp also known as Special Camp 2 (1945–1950). The other aimed at differentiating between the victims and the perpetrators while emphasizing the perspective of the prisoners. Map by K. E. Foote



Socialist concentration camp (1937–1945); the Soviet detention camp (1945–1950); the East German memorial site (1950–1989). Visitors at Buchenwald are offered four trails and one monument to visit (Stein and Stein 1993). Their titles signify their particular themes and, by implication, their chronology. The National-Socialist camp is presented through three trails: “The Way to the Prisoners’ Camp,” “Remains of the Camp Barracks,” and “In the Footsteps of the Perpetrators.” “Graveyard of Special Camp No. 2” presents the Soviet detention

camp and “The Monument” presents Buchenwald when it served as an East German memorial site.

### Hybrid narrative strategies

Narrative strategies are sometimes used in hybrid combinations, as at Arlington National Cemetery just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. The cemetery’s history and meaning are complex—an estate confiscated at the start of the American Civil



War from confederate general Robert E. Lee and then used as a Union burial ground, but now the major shrine of national heroes. At Arlington, some markers are declamatory—they announce the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine in Havana harbor in 1898 to start the Spanish-American war or the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland in 1988—but others are connected by trails that focus on the cemetery's history and themes (Arlington National Cemetery 2007; Bigler 2005).

The Boston Women's Heritage Trail is a hybrid strategy of a different sort involving a thematic strategy subdivided geographically (Kaufman 2006). The thematic focus honors women who have contributed to Boston, U.S. and world history. But because this involves so many buildings and places spread across most of central Boston, the overall trail has been subdivided geographically into five shorter walks encompassing the sites found in the North End, Back Bay, Downtown, South Cove/Chinatown, and Beacon Hill.

The Oklahoma City bombing memorial is another example of a hybrid design (Clark 2005; Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum 2007). It honors the victims, survivors and rescue workers of the 19 April 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building by a terrorist avenging the killings exactly two years earlier at the Branch Davidian compound outside Waco, Texas. The large memorial sites include the area of the Murrah building, a one-block length of N.W. Fifth Street (since closed) where the truck of explosives was parked, and the entire block of properties north of Fifth Street which were damaged or destroyed by the blast. In an instant, the explosion radiated outward to claim and damage hundreds of lives. The memorial design uses massive gates which enclose N.W. Fifth Street and frame the brief instant of the explosion: 9:02 a.m. (Fig. 8). The footprint of the Murrah building is used to honor the 168 adults and children killed in the blast, one remaining wall credits those who survived, while the Rescuers Orchard, Survivor Tree, and Children's Area provide space for contemplation.

## Discussion and conclusion

These strategies for constructing spatial narratives contrast with almost all other forms of narrative,

particularly those forms which have been studied extensively, including literature, film, television, the news media, and drama. Even spatial media which share some similarities, such as the visual arts and museum design, differ from spatial narrative. To configure the narrative involves critical choices of how to arrange the narrative in terms of locations, distances, directions, and movements on the ground at the actual site of the events being recounted. No other narrative media strives to attach stories to place in this way. Some forms of historical re-enactment and performance art do, perhaps, strive toward a high level of locational or geographical verisimilitude, but these are relatively rare, as well as ephemeral.

The need to divide, segment, and pace spatial narratives is common to other forms of storytelling such as a screenplay or libretto, but the act of positioning these scenes locationally presents different challenges to the storyteller. As was discussed above, the characteristics of the event itself—both spatially and temporally—place constraints on the narrative structure that exist in no other media.

One of the most important constraints is the difficulty of sustaining a temporal sequence in space. In almost all other media, the assumption of the storyteller is that the reader, viewer or listener will follow the narrative through to completion. But spatial narratives are not so easily framed. Apart from the declamatory strategy, there can be no assumption that the sightseer/reader will start at a given place, follow a path in a predetermined order, or travel a route from its beginning to end. This means that spatial narratives are configured to use spatial, visual and geographical cues to direct visitors along particular routes. Gates are frequently used to start and end narratives; paths with well-defined borders, curbs and rails are used to keep visitors on track; and significant places and moments are announced with signs and interpretive displays.

Another difference is that spatial narratives are more frequently co-authored than other types of narrative. This does not imply that they are less or more effective than single-authored narratives, but only that the dynamic of their composition—involving writers, artists, architects, historians, politicians and others—is different and largely unstudied. Committee authorship of spatial narratives is common, whereas it is rare in most other narrative media. And, again, there are advantages to committee authorship

The 9:01 and 9:03 Gates, the main east and west entries, frame the moment of the explosion: 9:02 a.m., April 19, 1995.

The Field of Empty Chairs for victims where the Murrah Federal Building once stood



The Reflecting Pool along Fifth Street where bomb was detonated looking west toward 9:03 Gate



The Survivor Tree with inscription: "The spirit of this city and this nation will not be defeated; our deeply rooted faith sustains us."

**Fig. 8** Oklahoma City National Memorial to the bombing of 19 April 1995, an example of a hybrid narrative strategy. In this case, the memorial frames the moment of the explosion at 9:02 a.m. The areas of the memorial honor the victims, survivors and rescuers whose lives were changed or claimed in that instant in time. Small signs identify the meaning of the

which pools knowledge, perspectives and talents as well as disadvantages that can lead to compromise and stalemate in the development of narrative. Spatial narratives are also co-authored in that different individuals, private and public groups, and government agencies at all levels from local to national are often allowed to share narratives of a single event. Sections of the Mormon Trail, for example, are marked by branches of the Mormon church, by local, state, and federal agencies, by individual families who lost members along the trail, and by various hobbyist and historical associations and societies. This means that historical sites sometimes represent

different areas of the memorial. Paths through the memorial and along the reflecting pool allow the visitors to explore the areas in any order from many different perspectives. Photographs by K. E. Foote using base map courtesy of the Oklahoma City National Memorial

an overlap or intersection of narratives that together present almost a collage of stories about a particular event and place.

A final difference between spatial and most other narrative forms is that spatial narratives are often composed and configured over long periods. This means that authorship can extend over decades, generations and centuries as the narrative is restructured. This is a different process than the translation or editing of stories from one language into another, but it means that the configuration of spatial narratives, more than others, can readily be changed as a result of social or political pressures.

Of special interest to this inquiry has been the configuration of spatial narratives of time at historical sites as strategies for projecting historical sequences onto space. As we have argued, some historical events, especially those that conflate linear progression in both space and time, can easily be configured as a spatial narrative of history that dramatizes successive events. However, complex events, such as those that extend over long periods of time or involve multiple, simultaneous movements, are more difficult to configure as a sequential spatial narrative that accords with historical chronology. Subsequently, in such cases, temporal sequences are likely to yield to thematic variations and episodic fragmentation.

We have concentrated here on the configuration of spatial narratives at historical sites, but many other issues remain to be explored. One issue is the susceptibility of different narrative strategies to ideological modulation. It seems that the declamatory strategy, where a brief caption on a marker positioned at a historical site is potentially a key to telling the local story, is especially susceptible to ideological modulation. For instance, references to either ‘battle’ or ‘massacre’ offer two diametrically opposite versions of a historical event.

Another important issue is how the structures of spatial narratives are experienced by visitors and how they affect the visitor’s interest in or understanding of events. Narrative theory points to the important role played by the reader, viewer, or listener in coding and decoding narrative forms. Yet, apart from limited surveys of museum goers, little research has been undertaken on the experience of visitors to historical sites and more is needed. A wealth of research indicates how the social construction of knowledge is shaped and reshaped by experience and perception—especially media and the narrative forms of literature, newspapers, visual art, travelogues, magazines, television, and film. We feel that much can be gained by focusing on how spatial narratives of time intersect with these other narrative forms to shape conceptions of space, place, and history.

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