

# Part I

## Broad Trends

The chapters comprising this section consider the ways in which a wide range of contemporary authors have employed narrative fiction to make sense of the set of vast social transformations inaugurated by the steady spread and intensification of neoliberal economic relations over the course of the past generation. While each text under consideration here is grounded, in some manner, in local spatial particularities, each equally evinces an attempt to connect these 'street-level' realities to the broader transnational political-economic currents sweeping across the globe. That is, each text variously places in evidence some of the distinctive localized manners in which the production of space has altered within the neoliberal world system, while also offering thematic appraisals (and often denunciations) of this overarching system and its sundry social ramifications.

In undertaking such an analysis, it is vital to keep in mind some of the complex ways texts relate to the spaces they engage with, from the representation of place at its most local-level phenomenological scale through sensory detail to the thematization of place at its more 'abstract' regional, national, and transnational scales. As pioneering geocritical literary theorist Bertrand Westphal argues, expressive culture does not just enact a pallid second-order copy of the spaces it takes up, but rather orders the experience of space and inflects its further production (103). In her reading of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, Stanka Radovic echoes this sentiment, observing that space is comprised of the interplay between space as experienced in an embodied phenomenological manner, space as it is conceptualized discursively, and space as perceived through these mediating conceptualizations (11). Thus representing a given space is not just a matter of 'utopian fantasy or ideological acquiescence,' rather, 'the literary spatial image

gestures toward a metaphorical reappropriation of space and, at the same time, offers its metaphoricity as a means of reconceptualizing space' (Radovic 12). Taken in this light, the works considered in the following chapters do not simply offer grim testaments to the polarization of material circumstances, widespread immiseration/infrastructural decline, and so forth endemic to neoliberal society, but conceive of their subject spaces in ways that seek to open up within them possibilities of survival, resistance, and change. Above all, these texts should be taken in this manner: as interventions with the potential to impact the future production of disparate spaces within the neoliberal world system, not simply passive jeremiads over its assorted ravages.

A final prefatory note: there is an organizational progression in the grouping of analyses of selected texts' manner of engaging with neoliberalism that comprises this section. The first chapter study here focuses on North American texts that confine their narratives almost exclusively within the geographic boundaries of the center of the neoliberal world system.<sup>1</sup> These novels and short stories manifest a particular interest in the erosion of the American middle class, which is only fitting, given the intertwined historical emergence, proliferation, and perhaps incipient decline of this social class and genre of writing in the evolution of world capitalism. From there, the following chapter considers texts that in the years leading up to and immediately following the 2008 economic collapse have sought to come to terms with the role of finance in shaping the contemporary United States and world, taking on a necessarily more transnational narrative scope in doing so. Lastly, the final chapter of this section analyzes fictional works of peripheral societies that have suffered most markedly from the neoliberal turn due to their geopolitical vulnerability, works that balance a consideration of the local-level ravages of free-marketism with an awareness of how these social realities are the product of transnational lines of neo-imperialist influence and control.

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<sup>1</sup> Though at times they do consider the domestic impact of international relations, particularly of the economic sort.