



Judit Pieldner and Zsuzsanna Ajtony, eds.
Discourses of Space.

Newcastle Upon Tyne:
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Review by Tünde NAGY

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Miercurea Ciuc, Romania)
Department of Humanities
ngtunde@gmail.com

Over the past few decades a ‘spatial turn’ has made its ways across the humanities and social sciences, sparking renewed interest in the study of space as a constitutive part of cognitive processes and cultural, social practices. In March 2012, the Department of Humanities in Miercurea Ciuc of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania hosted an international conference entitled “Discourses of Space”, offering researchers, scholars and scientists the possibility of analysing space and spatial relations in a variety of literary, cinematic and artistic works. This volume, containing the essays presented in the conference and also a few additional articles, dwells on this topic from several perspectives.

Consisting of three main parts, entitled *Shakespeare and the Poetics of Space*; *Space and Identity*, *Space and Inter(Mediality)*; and *Space and Culture, Cultural Geography*, respectively, the book touches upon many aspects of space (intercultural space, linguistic space, textual space, cultural geography, geographical space, cyberspace, relational spaces, spatial-temporal relations, the relation between culture and nature, inter-art relations and intermediality, spatial metaphors, etc.) and also gives an overview of space constructing specificities of the theatre, literature and film. The topics range from the relationship between literary texts and space to the medial and intermedial spatial relations involving literature, film and theatre, showing how the different artistic representations interact and intermingle with each other. Considering the variety of topics covered, I would wish to highlight only some of the points discussed in the essays, aspects not mentioned being nevertheless equally significant.

With respect to the understanding of space and spatial relations, the essays offer an overview of space interpretations of the Western tradition of philosophy (Plato, Kant, Heidegger, Foucault, etc.) pointing to the great importance they bear

on the theories of space today. Several definitions of space can be found throughout the book: space is seen as a construct, not always ontologically given but often created by discursive and corporeal practices, closely interwoven with time, characterized by duality (it can play both an integrative and a disintegrative role), heterogeneity, a medium that allows things to be positioned, creating relations that become spatial. While place and space can concur (e.g. *Sinistra District* in Ádám Bodor's novel can be considered both a place and a space: a place, since it is localisable, but also a space, being a place of transit, where the characters are in constant movement), these two concepts describe distinct phenomena. Different from place which is specific, concrete and localisable, space is expandable and constantly changing. Spaces are created and re-created as the discourse of action unfolds, resulting in additional spaces that are in close interaction with each other and also with the reader/spectator. Created by different values, ideologies, narratives, beliefs, symbols, phantasms and cultural maps, spaces are culturally embedded. They can have both a symbolic/abstract and a realistic dimension that often get superimposed, giving rise to simultaneously present spaces (such is the case with realistic spaces rendering symbolic meanings).

The space-creating techniques in the different forms of art receive considerable attention throughout the book. The space creating modalities of the narrative (by the space constructing potential of language), theatre and film and their specific characteristics (the absence of realistic illusion of the Elizabethan emblematic theatre, the creation of simultaneous spaces, of symbolic and realistic spaces in film, together with the possibility of horizontal and vertical space division) create different perspectives and various modes of interpretation. The different representations may interact with each other and result in a dialogue between the narrative and the language of film or that of the theatre.

The relation between space, identity and identification is a recurrent topic in the essays. The quest for identity often happens through travelling which stands either for the attempt of breaking free, a quest for freedom or for recapturing the deserted, the place that was left behind (the image of the man arriving in the homeland intending to recapture a well-known land expresses a colonial point of view, where the relationship between the own and the other is transformed into the otherness of the own). Travelling means a wandering to and fro, a horizontal displacement which brings about a correlational relation between the subject and the object (the observer and the observed, the covered distance and the observed road). As a spatial movement from certainty to uncertainty, travelling makes the continuous observation and reconsideration of the Self and of the Other possible. This implies an encounter with the stranger but also with the Other in us, enabling the interrelation between the Self and the Other inherent in the harbour situated at the intersection of nature and culture or in heterotopic places like the zoo, the museum, the flea-market, etc.

The continuous dislocations and displacements often result in a heterotopic spatial experience, characterized by the juxtaposition and co-existence in a single real place of various spaces, intermediary spaces, in-betweenness (also cultural in-betweenness) and placelessness. Under such circumstances, identity itself becomes non-fixable. Since identification is a continuous process, the formation of a fully developed and coherent identity becomes impossible, and so does the formation of a collective cultural identity. Instead, the in-betweenness of space as the intercultural border-space leads to the formation of border identities.

Also, the juxtaposition of several perspectives in filmic representations, the shift between different modes of representation and, at the same time, their deconstruction can result in a hybrid mode of perception, and, in consequence, in the duality of identification and reflection. This, in turn, leads to the creation of an aesthetic distance (e.g. Omer Fast's video entitled *Spielberg's List* shows how the continuous switch between two points of view (that of the insider and of the outsider) creates a delicate balance between different modes of perception). Regarding filmic representations, from the point of view of cultural geography, the question arises as to how films make transportable the historical image of a culture and if they can be evaluated aesthetically, irrespective of culture and geography and of any ideological expectation. The interaction between space as a physical, geographical entity and as a cultural and ethnic construct is addressed in the book as well. There are several studies that deal with this topic (among others the verbal representations of Britain and Britishness in G. B. Shaw's plays, the comparison of the British cultural space with the French one and the stereotype of Britishness from an ironical perspective in the works of Julian Barnes, the image of the African space from different angles, and also the cultural representation of Central Eastern Europe and the Balkans). The book also touches upon the delicate relationship between geographical space and cyberspace, characterized by the opposition of space/spacelessness, place/placelessness, private space/public space and by the presence of a cultural dimension (two women coming from different cultural backgrounds communicate in cyberspace by the cultural references they both share).

Overall, the book offers a very interesting account of space constructing techniques and space interpretation in an intertextual and intermedial context. It raises many relevant issues and though it calls for supplementary reading because of the wide range of topics, it also inspires further research regarding space and spatiality. The stills from the movies and also the illustrations facilitate the understanding and make the essays more enjoyable.