

Spaces in Text, in Textual Space. Interpretations

Summary

This book comprises texts devoted to various spatial phenomena: sites, communication, symbolism and imagination. The interpretation provided here is based on the analytical tools that have been created for a number of decades, inspired by the topographical turn in cultural studies (usually dating from the late 1970s and early 1980s). This turn did not limit itself merely to the creation of a new methodology and research tools. Instead, it covered a much wider scope, as it allowed conclusions to be drawn not only on cultural discourse but also transformations within other areas of research such as politics, social life and ideology, as well as a change in the processes of establishing the rules of social life. At this point the conviction emerged that insofar as modernity was a period focused on time (history, evolution, progress), post-modernism was, on the other hand, the age of space (simultaneity, constellation, entropy).

The awareness of the extent to which space determines the conditions of existence was directly linked to the perception of human activity as inherently “located”, irrespective of whether it was static continuity in one particular spot or whether it was a dynamic conquest of new spaces. The popularity of spatial metaphors, which define forms of participation in culture and everyday social life and also the scope (extent, range) of the efforts undertaken to conceptualise them, serves as evidence of the inalienable permanence of the effects stemming from ongoing processes of change. The extent to which the perception of space has transformed is also clearly visible, as it ultimately ceased to be seen as merely providing the physical background to human activity or treated as yet another object of cultural study defined in a variety of ways. The growing interest into the spatial dimension of individual and collective experience provides an insight into the issue from an extended perspective, while at the same time the topographical turn contributed to the reformulation of other basic terms, such as: language, subject, culture, literary and artistic practice, and finally, the research and the researcher’s position in its own right.

Spatial categories quickly revealed their particular ‘connectivity’ with other analytic languages, as well as their basic status, i.e. the indispensable inclusion of a variety of other research approaches. The change of perspective in examining the human condition within space was also driven by globalisation processes with an increased

impact on the activity of individuals and societies, coupled with returning to various types and manifestations of pursuing 'locality'. Both these processes were actually not in opposition to each other. Similar importance can also be attributed to the processes of expanding the virtual spaces of communication and knowledge storage. The reality created as a result of digital activity and the methods of appropriating human imagination are more and more frequently perceived as an indispensable (and even 'tangible') sphere of everyday life. The tools used for 'navigating' the new media are seen as prosthetics facilitating access to the virtual world, whereas the language created as a result of the need to name the activities undertaken within the Internet reality leans towards spatial metaphors, in this way allowing for this new type of experience to be familiarised and included in the traditional set of representations.

Despite all these abrupt changes, or rather in parallel with them, it is possible to observe a constant productivity of the category of place, albeit sometimes perceived as old-fashioned, and the interpretational usefulness of its opposing variants, i.e. places that are one's own vs. somebody else's, beautiful vs. horrible, open vs. closed, friendly vs. hostile and, obviously, the fundamental opposition of place vs. non-place. The anthropological perspective founded on the fundamental objective of analysing the relations between the human race and the world enables one to relate and interpret various forms human activity with reference to the determining feature of space. On the other hand, the category of autobiographical place opens up the field to contributions from literary historians who wish to engage in these discourse transformations. The representations and myths related to particular places that have been processed within literature and culture gained special importance in the modern era, starting from the Romantic period, and proceeded in the consecutive variants towards the relationship between the place and the cognizing individual/subject subjectifying its inspection.

The unending fashion for travel (also related to the growing accessibility of travel to a wider public in most societies), followed by turning the experience into cultural texts, has led to a peculiar overrepresentation of texts devoted to particular places. Travel and all its variety of forms, such as subversive roaming and commercial tourism, can trigger the illusion of having control over space, overcoming borders and freeing oneself from the tight constraints of everyday life. It is also important to stress that every peregrination inevitably leans towards a metaphorical image of life as a journey (as well as, or perhaps predominantly, in the colloquial sense) and therefore analysing its cultural images (also those produced for personal use) leads to self-discovery and enables a distance to be built up towards the rules of existence. On the other hand, all the manifestations of 'otherness' of the reality under scrutiny always pose a challenge that demands expression. The experience of contact with otherness still stretches between the two still not thoroughly researched extremes, i.e. the voluntary and usually pleasant exposure to the exotic nature of the unknown place, and the destructive feeling of being trapped in the non-human space. An encounter with enclosed, hostile and alien spaces inevitably transforms the way one perceives the relationship between the human and the world and changes the way the human condition is perceived.

On the one hand, space sets painful limitations, and on the other hand, breaks up and becomes loose. However, it not only demands attempts to describe it, but also

compels one to act in a way that helps to familiarise, comprehend and conquer it. The city invariably remains at the core of research on space. The reason for this is not just the mere fact that most of the population of the globe are city dwellers. It is rather the specific nature of the city as a heterogeneous formation with a high degree of complexity (on all levels of collective existence) and its multi-faceted role as a factor determining individuals' lives. Moreover, the city is the kind of space where all the most important theoretical discourses intersect and come together. This is because the 'omnipresence' of the city manifests itself in various ways and can be analysed with the use of a variety of tools. A city that is experienced and lived through turns into a city that is being created for personal use of the individual's existence. As contemporary researchers unanimously confirm, modern-day city dwellers usually do not feel the need for an in-depth exploration of the city space and its complex nature or traces of the palimpsest past. Instead, they search for a way to turn it into their own space.

Part One of this volume, entitled *City prospects*, is devoted to an interpretation of texts by Julian Tuwim, Tadeusz Różewicz, Piotr Paziński, Barbara Piórkowska and Piotr Sommer. Part Two, *Within Textual Space*, contains analyses of works by Marek Bieńczyk, Ignacy Karpowicz, Paweł Potoroczyn, Inga Iwasiów, Aleksander Jurewicz, Szczepan Twardoch, Darek Foks, Marta Podgórnik, Andrzej Sosnowski. The final part, entitled *Borders and Maps*, comprises analytical works whose main aim is to reflect on the creative output of Aleksander Wat, Jurij Andruchowycz, Swietłana Aleksijewicz, Andrzej Stasiuk, Krzysztof Varga and Elif Shafak. All the interpretations confirm the need for ongoing reflections on the spatial categories and constant engagement in the process of the transformation of spatial discourses.

Translated by Aleksandra Oszmiańska-Pagett