Judit Pieldner and Zsuzsanna Ajtony, eds.

**Discourses of Space.**


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, phantasm 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 arbour 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-betweeness (also cultural in-betweeness) 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-betweeness 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/placelessness, 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.