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Introduction

“Cities are magical places, however their magic is not evenly distributed”¹—writes Chris Jenks in his general introduction to *Urban Culture: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. As much as we agree with Jenks’s words, we believe that cities, first and foremost, are amazing spaces, and this belief finds reflection in the articles gathered in the present volume. The magic of the cities, together with the meandering urban structure and the journey through the urban landscape are the interweaving aspects discussed in this book. The picture of the city that emerges from the articles contained in *Urban Amazement* is one of an intricate structure, involving an individual—a traveller, an inhabitant, a writer or a simple observer—into a network of images that is never constant or stable, yet always amazing one with its complexity. The number and, most of all, the diversity of themes discussed in the consecutive studies seem to correspond to the multiplicity of impressions that the urban landscape appears to exert on the subjects examined in the presented texts. Moreover, just like the streets of the city constantly intersect, as some of the articles in the volume illustrate, the presented texts tend to converge at many recurrent aspects, such as the city’s labyrinthine structure, anxiety which the authors see as connected with the impenetrability of urban landscape, and the overwhelming sense of amazement

1 Chris Jenks, General introduction to *Urban Culture: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

which—in many of the presented studies—the urban space evokes in its residents and visitors.

The texts in the volume are arranged according to two—chronological and theme—criteria, to allow the readers to follow the characters of the articles along the streets of the described cities. “The City That Is Not: Apophasis and Anglo-Saxon Urbanism”—the opening article of Rafał Borysławski—provides images of two Anglo-Saxon cities that in this study constitute projections or imaginings rather than the actual representations of the existing areas. As the author himself admits, “together, the two visions confirm the Old English metaphysical value of the city that becomes its negative, that is, the city that is formed by absences, lacunae, and vestiges of its past.” Not only does such an image aptly designate the initial point of the timeline along which the whole volume has been organized but, together with the following texts, it also presents the complex structure of any city as being transient and thus liable to be re-imagined ever anew, and looked at from many different perspectives.

Two subsequent texts in the volume regard representations of London city in Victorian literature. First—“A City of Resurrections’ and ‘A City of Nightmares’: London, Female Monstrosity, and the Weird Sublime in Arthur Machen’s “The Great God Pan””—written by Jacek Mydla, presents the readers with the picture of urban reality through Arthur Machen’s Gothic fiction, simultaneously illustrating the concept of sublimity as indissolubly linked with the specific aspects of living in the metropolis. In the second article which depicts the nineteenth-century London space—“The Maze, the Fog, the Mass, the Dog: Sherlock Holmes in London”—Justyna Jajszczok examines the city as perceived with the discerning eyes of Arthur Conan Doyle’s detective Sherlock Holmes who exposes the least attended of its urban sites. The final image of London, though a much more contemporary one, is presented by Sławomir Masłoń whose article “All Eyes in Swinging London: Antonioni’s *Blow-Up* and the Maze of Violence” regards the city depicted in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-up*. As the author himself admits, his observations concentrate around images and representations when he comments on the political aspect of the mid-twentieth-century life in the city.

London, however, is not the only urban space subjected to analyses in the present book. Remaining within the scope of film images, the

volume includes a representation of Lisbon, which—through the prism of Wim Wender’s moving picture—is provided in the article by Sonia Front, “The Portrait of the City in Wim Wenders’s *Lisbon Story*.” In the study, the author claims that, through portraying the city as suspended in time, the director comments on the damaging influence of the global culture on urban space—a process that is also referred to in the article by Agnieszka Podruczna “Walking through (Hi)stories: City and Temporality in Vandana Singh’s ‘Delhi.’” Similarly, this article illustrates the mutual dependence of time and space, yet it focuses on the representation of Dehli, the eponymous Vandana Singh’s short story. Conducting her analysis within the frames of postcolonial theory, the author comments on the particular impact that, as she claims, history has exerted upon the city of Dehli.

The city images that emerge from the two previously introduced articles present an urban area as a multilayered space which one walking along its streets has a chance to gradually uncover. In this respect, the texts intersect with the picture of Moscow that, in turn, appears in the article “Amidst the Wonders of the City: Countenances of Moscow in Barbara Włodarczyk’s *Wide Tracks*” by Monika Kowalczyk-Piaseczna, in which the author analyses the representation of the capital of Russia provided by the *Wide Tracks* reportage cycle of Barbara Włodarczyk. In the analysed series of film reportages the image of Moscow is extremely complex, and its different aspects together compose an intricate city structure.

The consecutive part of the book presents a distinctive depiction of New York featured in Nina Augustynowicz’s “Anorexia and the City: Special Significance of the Urban Environment in Eating Disorder Memoirs.” Discussing the memoirs of individuals affected by anorexia, the author proposes a thesis that the specific aspects of urban existence significantly contribute to the exacerbation of the condition. Having made this assumption, however, she observes that the urban landscape and all the elements connected with living in the city play a significant role in human social life—an argument which the following text in the volume, “Street Lit and Subversion,” seems to aptly support. As Bartosz Stopel claims in his article, fiction depicting urban life, with the special consideration of living in the underworld, not only makes a comment on the social and economic situation in the urban communities, but it

also aspires—though according to the author, not too efficiently—to contribute to the process of introducing certain revision to the urban social structures. The article does not, however, refer to any particular city, which, in turn, opens a way for drawing some more general conclusions.

The next two articles in the volume seem to perform a similar function. In “The Anxious City: The Fears and Apprehensions of Citizens and Tourists in Modern Urban Areas,” analysing the phenomenon of anxiety in the travelling experience, Bożena Kilian claims that urban space, in general, creates a specific environment in which a tourist is especially prone to feel anxious and apprehend the dangers which, in the author’s view, are characteristic to the city area. The last article contained in this book, “Between Architecture and Cultural Studies: Reflections on the Constitution and Devaluation of Urban Public Spaces” by Andrzej Bełdowski and Tomasz Burzyński, constitutes a study in which the authors approach the urban space from yet another—interdisciplinary—angle, simultaneously providing certain intersection for the themes raised in the volume. Thus, it supports the claim which the presented texts have propounded—that urban landscapes, regardless of the specific features of a given city, share certain characteristics which find their reflection in literature, film, and social studies. As the particular examinations featured in this volume illustrate, these urban characteristics include mysteriousness and prospective danger, liberation and reflection of political or economic condition, often resulting in the observer’s simultaneous feelings of anxiety and admiration. Yet, this diversity of urban qualities notwithstanding, the collection of texts presented in the book undoubtedly proves that, primarily and most importantly, the city landscape appears to be an exceedingly inspiring source of amazement.

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