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Space and its Cultural Representations

Abstract

The text concerns the consequences of the appearance in the humanities of a phenomenon called the “spatial turn”, which is one of the aspects of the cultural turn. It is a subject of unwavering interest amongst researchers and is broadly understood as an experience of space inhabited and traversed, close and distant, familiar and foreign, open and closed, real and imagined, visually and remembered. Problems related to recording such an experience and its interpretation have prompted those practicing such reflection to look for new methodologies within interdisciplinary studies developed at the intersection of literary studies, cultural studies, geography, history and sociology. The consequence of such attempts is the emergence of new subdisciplines within various humanities. Such as, for example: geopoetics, geoaesthetics, humanistic and cultural geography, autogeobiography and topocentric history. The article also draws attention to the relationship between scientific research in this field and creative practice, mainly literary practice. A large part of the text is devoted to a review of the texts included in this issue of “The Problems of Literary Genres”/“Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” and how they fit into the theoretical reflection under the sign of the spatial turn. The thematic scope here is wide and is not limited only to analyses of literary works. Several articles have been devoted to, for example, spatial film contexts.

the spatial turn; geopoetics; geoaesthetics; humanistic and cultural geography; autogeobiography;
topocentric history

As an essential aspect of the cultural turn in the humanities, the spatial turn is characterized by the presence of reflection on the ways of experiencing space and the forms of representations of this experience in cultural texts, which have been noticeable for over a quarter of a century. A subject of unwavering interest by researchers and broadly understood as an experience of space inhabited and traversed, close and distant, familiar and foreign, open and closed, real and imagined, visually and remembered. Problems related to recording such an experience and its interpretation have prompted those practicing such reflection to look for new methodologies within interdisciplinary studies developed at the intersection of literary studies, cultural studies, geography, history and sociology. Space research has, therefore, become part of numerous discourses, such as those relating to travel, postcolonial studies, anthropological, urban, memory studies, identity and affective discourse. As a result of those interdisciplinary attempts to understand human spatial experiences, new sub-disciplines have emerged, for example, geopoetics, geoaesthetics, humanistic and cultural geography, and topocentric history, which in fact, constitute the core of spatial humanities.

Geopoetics — understood by Kenneth White as a poetic inhabitation of the world (White 2010) and derived by him from the poetics of space by Gaston Bachelard, with whom he shared the belief that space shapes human imagination (Bachelard 1975) — was included by Elżbieta Rybicka in the discourse cultural literary theory as a discipline describing the relationship between literature and geography. The interpretation tools developed by the researcher allow for the analysis of literature on the experience of a specific geographical space, a space with cultural, historical, sensory and aesthetic characteristics. An important issue addressed within geopoetics is also a reflection on the presence of literature in space. This presence has the power to introduce changes and thus confirms the performative nature of literature (Rybicka 2014). The proposal to consider literature in the context of geography is complemented by the concept of autobiographical places, included in the framework of geopoetics by Małgorzata Czermińska, and thus expanding the framework of the discipline to include the autogeobiographic aspect of research (Czermińska 2011).

From the dialogue of literature and geography, research perspectives that are important for spatial studies have emerged, i.e., literary geography (Rybicka 2015) and humanistic geography. Literary geography — understood both as the geography of the writer and the geography of literary life — examines the impact of spatial autobiographical experiences on the

creative process and the geographical conditions of processes related to the social functioning and circulation of literature. Humanistic geography, which emerged as a result of the humanistic turn in geography, was initiated by Yi-Fu Tuan, who was convinced that the main interest of geography should be the relationship between humans, space and the environment (Tuan 1987). He also stated that these relationships are best expressed in broadly understood cultural texts, with particular emphasis on literature. Thus, the interpretation of spatial experiences recorded in texts was included in the research tools of new geographers.

The spatial turn in historiography resulted in the emergence of a discipline such as topocentric history, proposed by Karl Schlögel as a method of spatializing the past, or “reading time in space.” The researcher, assuming that history takes place not only in time but also in space, developed tools for a new historical narrative that enables the study of human history as spatially conditioned (Schlögel 2009).

Unlike the research proposals mentioned above, in which space and place are defined anthropologically and historically, Marc Augé’s concept of non-places is situated at the opposite extreme. Non-places — supermarkets, means of transport, stations, airports, hotels, highways, the Internet — the same everywhere, devoid of a specific, local character, give those staying there the feeling of being everywhere and nowhere at the same time (Augé 2010).

The topographic turn also aroused the interest of creators and recipients in specific geographical places, places with historical or cultural potential, and autobiographical ones. This interest concerns not only the artistic representations of these places but also the impact of these representations on the changes that the presented places may undergo. The performative turn emphasizes the causative role of cultural texts, which, having the power to create and transform places, should shape a sense of responsibility, especially for those subordinated or marginalized. Olga Tokarczuk writes about the performative power of stories creating a place:

Or maybe writers should be given some space to tell their stories? They would then be the perfect embodiment of the mythical Antaeus, who drew his strength from touching Mother Earth. They could take infinitely much from it, but also give a lot: a story that builds sense and significance, taming what is strange and incomprehensible, turning barren land into a house ready to live in. (Tokarczuk 2012: 132)

In this issue of “The Problems of Literary Genres,” the category of space appears in almost all of the above-mentioned understandings and contexts. For example, Olga Pańkowska’s article on the prose of Zbigniew Żakiewicz fits perfectly into the mainstream of studies in the field of literary geography. Here, the author reconstructs the mythologizing strategies used by the author to recall not so much the places of childhood but to treat the time of childhood as the equivalent of places: home and even more broadly, homeland. Therefore, we are dealing here with “reading space in time,” to paraphrase Schlögel’s phrase already mentioned. At the same time, as the author proves, only the mentally existing space recalled in memory determines the identity of the autobiographically constructed narrator.

This aspect of space — as an inalienable element of identity narrative — is described by Andrzej Juchniewicz in his essay on the work of Martin Pollack. The author of the article mainly analyzes two texts by the Austrian writer: *Contaminated Landscapes* and *Death in the Bunker*. He defines the story constructed there as auto/bio/geo/graphy, to use Elżbieta Rybicka’s term (Rybicka 2013). It is a narrative reconstructing the history of the writer’s

family in post-genocide spaces. Pollack discovers the history of his own family as embedded in violence subordinated to the dictate of “land and blood,” and traces it in the landscapes left “after,” places “depopulated” in the literal sense of the word.

In turn, in her analysis of Olga Tokarczuk’s work, Karolina Korcz uses a different methodological context, namely Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope, considered one of the most frequently invoked and functionalized in the area of literary studies regarding the categories of time and space. According to the author of the article, in the Nobel Prize winner’s work this space-time is not only an aspect of the presented world, becoming, for example in the *Primeval Age and other times* or in *Empusion*, an independent hero of these stories. The chronotope largely determines the interpretation of Tokarczuk’s works and also becomes their axiological foundation. It also resonates with the motif of metamorphosis, so emphasized in Bakhtin, often present in folk stories to which *Empusion* clearly refers. This transformation is very important for the novel, determining, according to the Russian literary scholar, the vitality of this only constantly evolving literary genre (Bakhtin 1977: 185).

Olga Tokarczuk’s work is also the subject of Agnieszka Czyżak’s analysis in her essay devoted to the spa space. The author of the article considers the specificity of these places with limited space and special status, establishing a fluid identity of the people staying there (temporarily). These are places that “cast” visitors in specific roles, and by appearing as an element of the presented world, they constitute, like labyrinths, their characters. And, again like labyrinthine spaces, they have autotherapeutic and even initiatory power.

The space of Milan represented in twentieth-century Italian poetry is the heroine of Patrycja Polanowska’s article. The author recalls its representations in the works of Vittorio Sereni and Milo De Angelis. The city, as reconstructed by the author, is a liminal space, oscillating around the category of “non-place” by Marc Augé (Augé 2010), labile, devoid of a clear identity, and at the same time palimpsest-like and directed towards the single existence of the entities experiencing it.

The city and the representation of its space is also the subject of an article devoted to the songs of Paweł Sołtys, performing as Pablopavo. Kamila Czaja analyzes the story constructed by the singer, making the space of Warsaw, with its palimpsest entanglement in the past, present and what will come, a vital element of this story. Once again, the unique component of reality described here takes on an identity dimension, defining the person who tells this story.

In the text on litany as a lyrical genre, Witold Sadowski reconstructs the vision of space-time inherent in this genre. It analyzes texts created at different times and at different stages of the evolution of this poetic form. It looks at, for example, the texts of the Italian internet poet Aurelia Tieghi, the Serbian writer Desanka Maksimović, the works of Charles Péguy, the Spaniard Juan-Eduard Cirlot, the Italian poet Giovanni Raboni, referring to François Villon, and finally the litany poems of Anna Kamieńska and the texts of the American feminist Audre Lorde. The author of the article comes to the conclusion that the changes in the concentric space authenticated in the religious order illustrate, on the one hand, a change in the relationship between man and the world, and on the other hand, they show the insurmountable boundaries of the genre, the litany.

In the three texts included in this issue of “The Problems of Literary Genres,” the main theme, i.e., the culturally understood and constructed category of space, appears in a very diverse film context. For example, Robert Birkholc considers the spatial aspect in reflection

on the film adaptation of literary works. The author reflects on the issue of the ability of spatial categories to model the ideological and cultural-social dimensions of literary and film works. Birkholm, illustrating these properties of spatial elements, analyzes Grzegorz Królikiewicz's adaptation of Adrian Markowski's short story. The author of the article shows how games with the categories of space used in the film cause a shift in meaning from the literary original. The director, by moving the setting of the story from Warsaw to the Łódź estates surrounding the Poznański Palace (today a museum, commercial and hotel space), makes the subject of the show ghettoization: the peripheries and the social exclusion of their inhabitants. Moreover, in the film story, they gain a synecdochic status — they refer to images of provincial Central and Eastern Europe in a state of decay and civilizational collapse. In the director's approach, space is freed from its mainly mimetic dimension, gaining other, metaphorical meanings.

A completely different aspect of the use of the category of space in film stories is presented by Tomasz Adamski in a text presenting the space of discomfort created in the work of the Swedish director Ruben Östlund. The author of the text analyzes the effects of claustrophobia obtained thanks to the way of framing, and also draws attention to the confrontation in the films of the author of *The Tourist* with special aspects of the relationship between nature and culture in stories set both in Alpine landscapes and in urban space, sometimes reduced to the interior of a bus. Adamski notes that all these spaces function as heterotopias, constituting the receptive "discomfort" inherent in Östlund's narratives.

Finally, in a completely different way, Anna Michalska's article fits into this film context, collecting statements about the space of the Feature Film Studio in Łódź, a place that gains the dimension of a mythical paradise in these stories. From the accounts collected by the author, an image emerges of both home space and a place conducive to the exchange of professional experiences, making friends, but also creating the magic of cinema. In the narratives quoted here, the Łódź WFF appears as a place that shapes the people who come into contact with it, a place with many and multi-faceted influences that go beyond the physical boundaries of buildings. This is also an example of a quite obvious phenomenon in which a specific space, existing physically, gains the value of a "state of mind" and becomes a mental "paradise lost."

In an article devoted to Filip Springer's reportages, Szymon Kamiński emphasizes the performative power of literature that is able to influence the space surrounding people, transform it, and take responsibility for it. Kamiński reconstructs the play of the author of *Bathtub with a Colonnade* with the modernist construct of a *flâneur* wandering through urban spaces, uninvolved and leisurely observing them. It shows how this figure is transformed, equipped with the awareness that in a space inevitably modified by humans, what is aesthetic becomes obviously ethical. Kamiński talks about how Springer's *flâneur* goes beyond the city space and engages in activities aimed at saving nature and the planet from the homicidal and suicidal instincts of our species.

As we wrote at the beginning of this text, space as experienced, traversed, inhabited or abandoned, constructed as close or distant, foreign or familiar, domestic, shown as open and closed, real and imagined, created and creating, visualized and remembered, is the subject of unwavering interest many researchers practicing various fields of science. Due to the breadth of the subject of this reflection, and therefore the multitude of texts analyzing the special context of various areas of culture, when editing the following issue

of “The Problems of Literary Genres,” we did not have the ambition to collect texts that would exhaust even a small section of the topics that could be discussed here. What we hope to have achieved is to show the extensive methodological and thematic contexts into which analyzes of space representations can be placed. We also hope that issues omitted or overlooked in this collection, those that readers consider not described clearly enough, will become an impulse for the creation of further texts. Because the topic discussed here concerns one of the most important elements of both human existence and the communities we create: inscribing their existence in space.

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