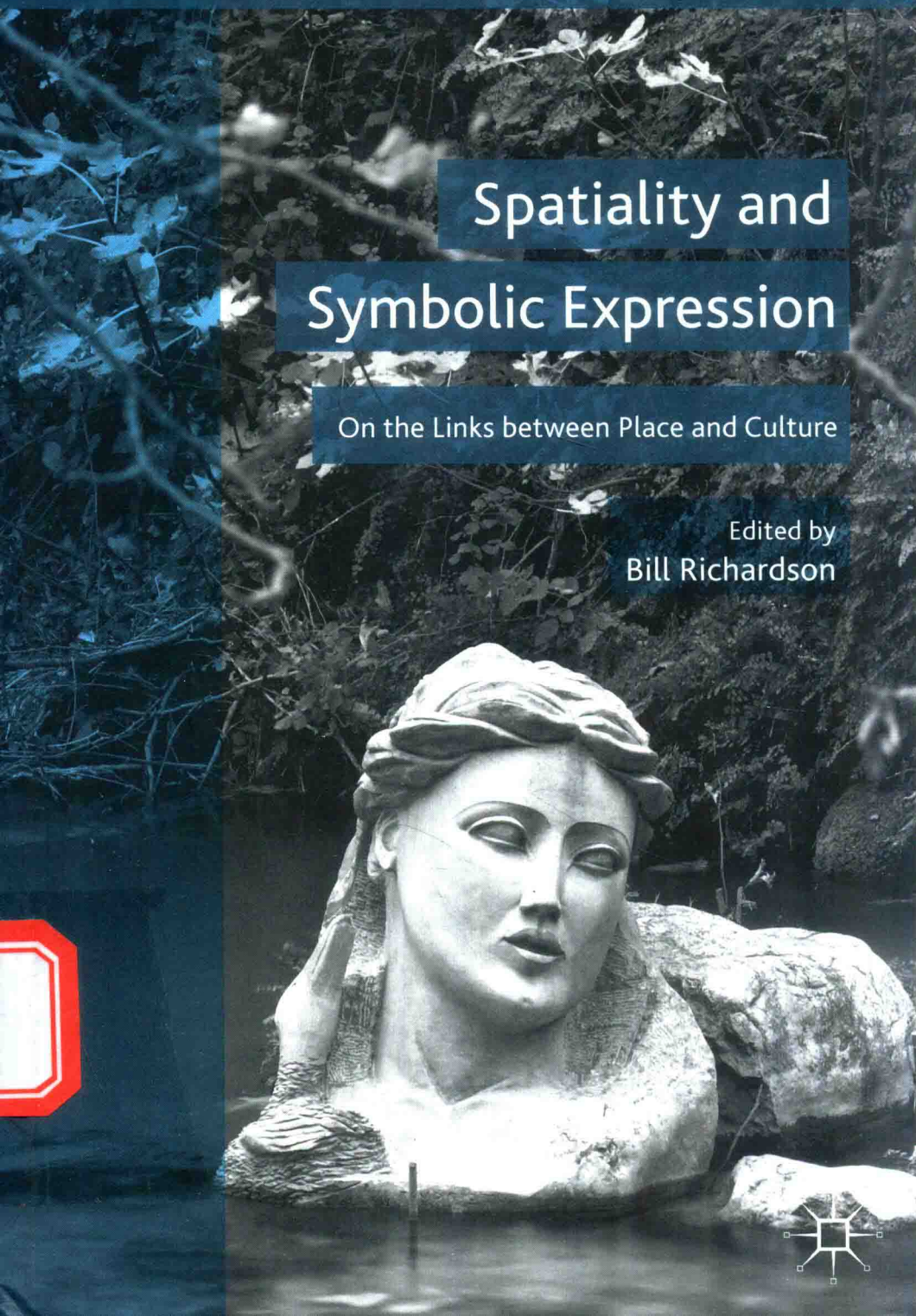
Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies

Spatiality and Symbolic Expression

On the Links between Place and Culture

Edited by
Bill Richardson



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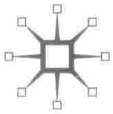

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Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies

Series Editor:
ROBERT T. TALLY JR., Texas State University

Series description:
Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies is a new book series focusing on the dynamic relations among space, place, and literature. The spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences has occasioned an explosion of innovative, multidisciplinary scholarship in recent years, and geocriticism, broadly conceived, has been among the more promising developments in spatially oriented literary studies. Whether focused on literary geography, cartography, geopoetics, or the spatial humanities more generally, geocritical approaches enable readers to reflect upon the representation of space and place, both in imaginary universes and in those zones where fiction meets reality. Titles in the series include both monographs and collections of essays devoted to literary criticism, theory, and history, often in association with other arts and sciences. Drawing on diverse critical and theoretical traditions, books in the *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* series disclose, analyze, and explore the significance of space, place, and mapping in literature and in the world.

Robert T. Tally Jr. is Associate Professor of English at Texas State University, USA. His work explores the relations among narrative, representation, and social space in American and world literature, criticism, and theory. Tally has been recognized as a leading figure in the emerging fields of geocriticism, spatiality studies, and the spatial humanities. Tally's books include *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism*; *Poe and the Subversion of American Literature: Satire, Fantasy, Critique*; *Utopia in the Age of Globalization: Space, Representation, and the World System*; *Spatiality*; *Kurt Vonnegut and the American Novel: A Postmodern Iconography*; and *Melville, Mapping and Globalization: Literary Cartography in the American Baroque Writer*. The translator of Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Tally is the editor of *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*; *Kurt Vonnegut: Critical Insights*; and *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, and Narrative*.

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By Andrew Hock Soon Ng

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Series Editor's Preface

The spatial turn in the humanities and social sciences has occasioned an explosion of innovative, multidisciplinary scholarship. Spatially oriented literary studies, whether operating under the banner of literary geography, literary cartography, geophilosophy, geopoetics, geocriticism, or the spatial humanities more generally, have helped to reframe or to transform contemporary criticism by focusing attention, in various ways, on the dynamic relations among space, place, and literature. Reflecting upon the representation of space and place, whether in the real world, in imaginary universes, or in those hybrid zones where fiction meets reality, scholars and critics working in spatial literary studies are helping to reorient literary criticism, history, and theory. *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* is a book series presenting new research in this burgeoning field of inquiry.

In exploring such matters as the representation of place in literary works, the relations between literature and geography, the historical transformation of literary and cartographic practices, and the role of space in critical theory, among many others, geocriticism and spatial literary studies have also developed interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary methods and practices, frequently making productive connections to architecture, art history, geography, history, philosophy, politics, social theory, and urban studies, to name but a few. Spatial criticism is not limited to the spaces of the so-called real world, and it sometimes calls into question any too facile distinction between real and imaginary places, as it frequently investigates what Edward Soja has referred to as the "real-and-imagined" places we experience in literature as in life. Indeed, although a great deal of important research has been devoted to the literary representation of certain identifiable and well-known places (e.g., Dickens's London, Baudelaire's Paris, or Joyce's Dublin), spatial critics have also explored the otherworldly spaces of literature, such as those to be found in myth, fantasy, science fiction, video games, and cyberspace. Similarly, such criticism is interested in the relationship between spatiality and such different media or genres as film or television, music, comics, computer programs, and

other forms that may supplement, compete with, and potentially problematize literary representation. Titles in the *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* series include both monographs and collections of essays devoted to literary criticism, theory, and history, often in association with other arts and sciences. Drawing on diverse critical and theoretical traditions, books in the series reveal, analyze, and explore the significance of space, place, and mapping in literature and in the world.

The concepts, practices, or theories implied by the title of this series are to be understood expansively. Although geocriticism and spatial literary studies represent a relatively new area of critical and scholarly investigation, the historical roots of spatial criticism extend well beyond the recent past, informing present and future work. Thanks to a growing critical awareness of spatiality, innovative research into the literary geography of real and imaginary places has helped to shape historical and cultural studies in ancient, medieval, early modern, and modernist literature, while a discourse of spatiality undergirds much of what is still understood as the postmodern condition. The suppression of distance by modern technology, transportation, and telecommunications has only enhanced the sense of place, and of displacement, in the age of globalization. Spatial criticism examines literary representations not only of places themselves but of the experience of place and of displacement, while exploring the interrelations between lived experience and a more abstract or unrepresentable spatial network that subtly or directly shapes it. In sum, the work being done in geocriticism and spatial literary studies, broadly conceived, is diverse and far reaching. Each volume in this series takes seriously the mutually impressive effects of space or place and artistic representation, particularly as these effects manifest themselves in works of literature. By bringing the spatial and geographical concerns to bear on their scholarship, books in the *Geocriticism and Spatial Literary Studies* series seek to make possible different ways of seeing literary and cultural texts, to pose novel questions for criticism and theory, and to offer alternative approaches to literary and cultural studies. In short, the series aims to open up new spaces for critical inquiry.

Robert T. Tally Jr.

Acknowledgments

Most of the chapters in this book started life as papers delivered at a workshop titled "Spatiality and Symbolic Expression," organized by the *Space, Place and Identity* research cluster at the National University of Ireland Galway in November 2012. These included papers by Paolo Bartoloni, Catherine Emerson, Conn Holohan, Lillis Ó Laoire, Felix Ó Murchadha, and Bill Richardson, and, in a different form, the keynote address by Paul Carter. Thanks to all who participated in that workshop and who contributed to the rich discussions that took place at that time and subsequently. We are grateful for financial assistance received from the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies, the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, and the Moore Institute, at NUI Galway.

The figures appearing in the Introduction on pages 4 and 5 are reproduced here by kind permission of Peter Lang Ltd, having first appeared in Bill Richardson, *Borges and Space* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012). Thanks to Tim Davies and Gustav Deutsch for generously assisting in the production of Chapter 3, by answering questions and allowing their works to be used in the chapter. The text of the song "Bádaí na dTrí Seoil" ("The Three-Sailed Boats") is reproduced in Chapter 4 by kind permission of the family of Éamonn Ghráinne Mac Ruairí.

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My own contributions to this book are dedicated to Marion.

B. R.

Contents

Introduction

The "Spatio-Cultural Dimension": Overview and a Proposed Framework

Bill Richardson

The aim of this volume is to explore some of the ways in which notions of space and place inform cultural products and processes, as well as symbolic expression more generally. We do this by examining the links between a selection of those phenomena and a variety of aspects of human spatiality. Underpinning the study is an approach to the relationship between spatiality and symbolic expression that seeks to identify and make explicit the main elements of that relationship. We believe this affords an opportunity to focus on those elements in ways that bring to the fore the most salient characteristics of each. Despite the much vaunted "spatial turn" witnessed in humanities research in recent decades, there is still a tendency to elide discussion of this element of symbolic expression, or to offer only superficial interpretations of its significance in the discussion of topics such as those addressed here.

A focus on the spatial can help elucidate important facets of symbolic expression and cultural production, whether we are exploring literary texts, music, dance, film, the plastic arts, the meanings associated with iconic figures or even pedagogical practice, or the more general phenomenon of human language itself. Our sense of self, our view of others, the position we adopt with respect to the national or geographical parameters within which we live, the interpretations we

place on historical events, not to mention the ways in which we see power being enacted around us, are all imbued with an awareness of, and, frequently, an attempt to manipulate or transform, the spatial contexts within which such phenomena and events exist. To say that "we are where we are" is true not just in the sense that the challenge of achieving an adequate understanding of such phenomena requires us to take cognizance of the spatial (and temporal) context in which we are currently located, it is also true in terms of the latent human desire to, in Henri Lefebvre's terms, *produce* space,[1] to create a reality in which our aspirations can come to fruition, in which dreams can be enacted. We are "situated" beings, so that a large part of whatever meanings we establish for ourselves has to do with our "being in the world," and objects and entities—including the living beings that we are—do not just exist "in space" but, *qua* Heidegger, constitute space itself and are inconceivable without space; furthermore, we are aware of this facet of our existence and are often self-conscious about it. Thus, no account of our capacity to express ourselves symbolically can avoid addressing the multiple ways in which spatiality informs our relationships with others.

In this volume, experts from a diverse range of fields within the humanities address their chosen topics in a way that positions them with regard to the issue of how to devise a framework—a "map" in at least some sense of that word—that could capture the diversity mentioned above, while also allowing us to see the relationships between the various aspects of space that impinge on symbolic and cultural expression. In other words, the assumption underlying this study is that, while we are duly wary of the temptation to produce grand narratives that would strive to offer some kind of "total explanation" of the phenomena being examined, it is worth taking another, focused, look at the fragmentation that characterizes much of the discussion of the spatial dimension of the arts and creative activity, with a view to identifying commonalities and situating these diverse analyses in relation to one another. The way we do this is through the study of eight specific cultural phenomena, relating each one to a conceptual framework that positions them vis-à-vis human spatiality. By this means, we hope to gain a greater sense of how spatial realities inform symbolic expression and of how a variety of forms of symbolic expression and cultural production rely on those spatial realities to achieve their ends.

The theoretical model underpinning the current discussion is based on our observations of the approaches adopted by a wide range of scholars in these fields, which have led us to conclude that there are certain fundamental concerns in operation in such discussions, and

that these are amenable to a kind of abstract "mapping" that may be helpful in order to move such discussions forward. Among the topics that scholarly work on spatial matters in cultural contexts has focused on we find social concerns, including issues of social-class divisions and their relationship to space. We also find philosophical concerns, including ways of articulating an appreciation of the diverse roles that place can play in myriad forms of artistic expression, or linguistic practices and their links to boundary demarcations, or formal aspects of the use of space in cultural production. We can also identify concerns such as the need to come to grips with human loss, with frustrated ambition, or emotional trauma, whether individual or collective, and how this relates to a sense of shared identity or the spatial zones within which we are capable of coping with those vicissitudes. All of the above themes have featured in such studies; what we contend is that, underlying this diversity, there is a pattern of analysis and reflection amenable to incorporation into a conceptual model. This will situate those varying concerns in relation to one another and allow us both to appreciate the ways in which they vary and to better understand how they relate to each other.

Arising out of an appreciation of these diverse concerns within "spatio-cultural" studies, we posit a theoretical framework or model based on the intersection of two conceptual "axes," the abstract/concrete axis and the individual/collective axis. These axes represent an attempt to identify certain fundamental parameters—of human existence and of the relationship between space and culture—that underpin a wide variety of ways of looking at the world and of articulating spatio-cultural concerns. The first axis goes from an extreme of "abstraction" to an opposite extreme of "concreteness"; the second goes from an extreme sense of "individuality" to an emphasis on the "collective."

With reference to the first axis, "abstraction" here refers to philosophical concerns about space; it attempts to conceptualize the nature of human spatiality or to relate spatial concerns with the widest and broadest dimensions of space and place—such as time, for example—that are (or can be conceived as being) most removed from the "concrete" spatial realities of our "grounded" existence as physical entities. On the other hand, the dimension we call "concreteness" emphasizes those aspects associated with the facts of physical existence, with the spatial presence of the entities and objects that surround us, and with what comes from living in particular places.

The second axis we are positing goes from "individual" to "collective," from the notion of the self qua individual to the idea of

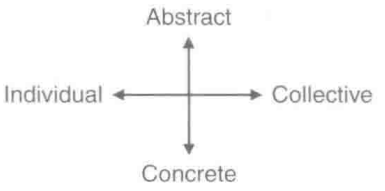

Figure I.1 Two intersecting axes: Abstract/Concrete and Individual/Collective[2]

humans as social beings. This allows us to contrast individual realities with social realities: the spatiality that is linked to persons as separate, "isolated" human beings, on the one hand, and that which is linked, on the other hand, to the shared, collective spatialities of the social realm. In relation to the latter, we might think, for instance, of aspects of cultural or national identity or the spatial element that is central to an understanding of social power and the lack of power, or of other manifestations of a sense of shared ownership and identity within a range of causes, interests, geographical territories, and so on.

These axes may be represented as intersecting, as shown in figure I.1.

Based on such a schema, we may talk about the four zones of human spatial experience sketched out by the intersecting axes, each one characterized by a combination of the features that are highlighted by those axes. These zones are as follows: (1) Abstract-Individual, (2) Concrete-Individual, (3) Abstract-Collective, and (4) Concrete-Collective.

The zones may be mapped as in figure I.2.

Each zone is associated with two predominant features or aspects of spatiality that characterize it. This is not to suggest that such features adhere exclusively to one or another zone; there is an inherent fuzziness about the boundaries between all of the zones, but the contention here is that drawing the various features referred to together as illustrated below and, conversely, separating them using the axes provided here can assist with the task of highlighting the diverse range of ways in which spatiality impinges on symbolic expression. Let us consider each of the resulting zones in turn.

THE ABSTRACT-INDIVIDUAL ZONE

The first zone combines the idea of "abstraction" with the idea of "individuality," with an emphasis on the notion of *philosophy*. It highlights the *idea* of space, the fact that human experience can be

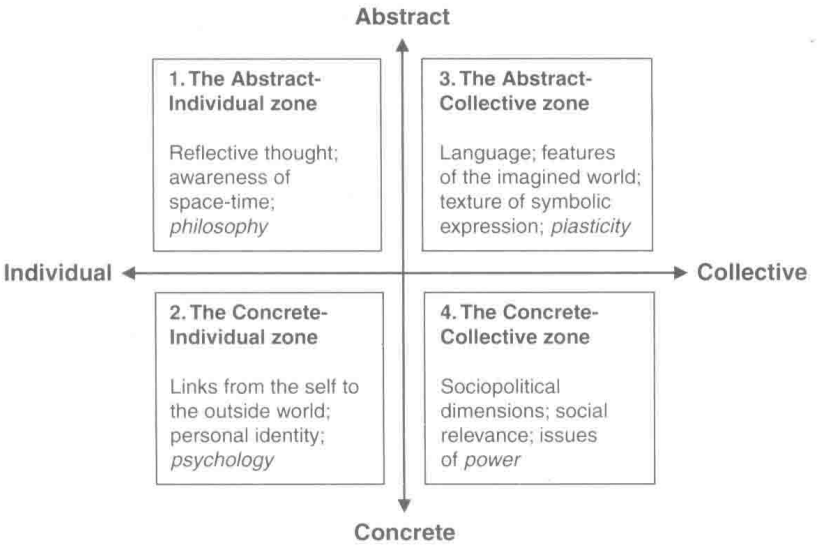

Figure I.2 Four spatio-cultural zones resulting from the two intersecting axes

characterized as existence in space, at least as much as it can be described as existence in time. We are *spatial* creatures, and therefore it is perhaps the Heideggerian account of that spatial "situatedness" that best expresses the fundamentally spatial nature of our being.[3] What the highlighting of this zone suggests is that, while we must acknowledge the truth of Heidegger's frequently quoted assertion that we are essentially "situated" beings, beings "in-the-world," we must also bear in mind our ability to achieve an *abstract* appreciation of that spatiality; thus, this zone is a way of focusing on our capacity to philosophize.[4] While we are never unaware of our spatial situatedness, then, we are also aware of that awareness itself. The self-reflexive dimension of our being entails an appreciation of the dynamic relationship we enter into with the spaces around us: we engage consciously with the spatial parameters of our existence, reflecting on where we are and on our experience of place. We are often acutely aware of the power we exercise in relation to the place we are in, and may devote considerable energy and attention to the exercise of that power—taking steps to alter that place or to change place through movement. We not only rejoice or lament the fact of being, say, in one place rather than another—as happens when the exile succumbs to nostalgia, when the economic migrant ventures into a new country, or when the office worker simply revels in the joys of the tourist location she is due to stay in on her vacation—but we also make decisions, with

a greater or lesser degree of consciousness, about changing location, about transforming the place we occupy, or about controlling it, or renaming it or attempting to change its identity. And the fact of the matter is that we also *know* we can do these things.

There is an intimate link, then, between knowledge and space, between the abstractness of our mental activity and the spatial nature of our existence. The anxieties we self-consciously express about the temporal dimension of our lives—from the proverbial conceit of *tempus fugit*, to Proustian concerns about the recovery of the past, to the reconciliation processes undertaken within "truth commissions"—are matched by the attempts we are capable of making to order and shape our locatedness, to mark, define, and control our spatial environment, while also articulating what we see as its impact and identity. This helps explain why spatial metaphors so often assist with the expression of temporal concepts—"from here on in," "we'll do it in stages," "the other side of midnight,"; "let's put this in historical perspective"—and it may also lie behind some of the uncannily spatial articulations of the human condition we encounter in great art.

This self-conscious reflexivity in relation to spatiality and temporality is an awareness of the intimate connection between the two notions of space and time, neither of which can be conceived of without the other. It is what gives rise to the Bakhtinian notion of the chronotope. Although this term may have multiple meanings within the work of M. M. Bakhtin,[5] its core is the notion of location within time and space, whether what is being referenced is the idea of specific chronotopic figures such as particular journeys that have special significance, or locations that carry precise meanings in communities, or the concept of a literary genre and the way in which each genre represents a kind of demarcation of literary or, more generally, artistic territory and implies a set of assumptions about the formal aspects of various types of cultural production. It constitutes a kind of mapping of temporal and spatial parameters, a world within which particular types of meaning-making can occur. We are here concerned with a cognitive zone that highlights the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships." Within this inseparability of time and space, "time [. . .] thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history."[6]

Instances of this could be cited from many sources and in many artistic forms. One famous literary example is the reflections on the human condition that Hamlet utters when, in the company of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he comments on Denmark and the