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**JOYCE STUDIES IN ITALY**

**22**

**JOYSPACE**  
**JAMES JOYCE AND SPACE**

*Edited by*  
*Roberto Baronti Marchiò*

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**ancia**

*Volume pubblicato con il contributo  
di The James Joyce Italian Foundation*

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ROBERTO BARONTI MARCHIÒ

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JOYCE PAYS, JOYCEPACE (OR JOYCE AND SPACE):  
AN INTRODUCTION

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*Why all this fuss and bother about the mystery of the unconscious?  
— ‘What about the mystery of the conscious?’  
J. Joyce to F. Budgen*

To be in places is an extremely common human experience. They are everywhere around us. We may feel "out of place", "displaced" or "misplaced", but in any case, our life "takes place". We live and dwell in places, as much as we live in time and in our culture.

In the past few decades, the so-called “spatial turn” in the arts, humanities and social sciences has been marked both by a radical alteration in the ways space is perceived, and by a deep awareness of the significance of space, place, mapping, and spatial relations. Rather than functioning as an empty container or a backdrop, space has been shown to have an active and productive presence in society and culture as well as in various art forms.

This has not always been the case in the past, and the history of the human perception of time and space appears to be a succession of conflicting periods, each asserting the pre-eminence of one dimension over the other. For instance – as Michel Foucault put it – the temporal dimension became “the great obsession of the nineteenth century” (Foucault 1986: 22). It is with the advent of Cartesian logic that space became the dominant dimension and entered – as Henri Lefebvre remarks in the opening page of his influential *The Production of Space* – “the realm of the absolute”. As

Object opposed to Subject, as *res extensa* opposed to, and present to, *res cogitans*, spatiality became “an order immanent to the totality of what existed” (Lefebvre 1991: 1), a dimension containing and thus dominating “all senses and all bodies”.

Contrary to Descartes’s absolute space in which things are contained and situated, Kant revived the Aristotelian approach and space “albeit a tool of knowledge, a means of classifying phenomena, was yet quite clearly separated (along with time) from the empirical sphere: it belonged to the a priori realm of consciousness (i.e. of the ‘subject’), and partook of that realm’s internal, ideal – and hence transcendental and essentially ungraspable – structure” (Lefebvre 1991: 2). Thus, space became a transcendently separate and independent category of human cognition and, consequently, the world could be perceived only as a mental and personal construction: “*Space is not something objective and real*, nor is it a substance, nor an accident, nor a relation; it is, rather, subjective and ideal; it issues from the nature of the mind in accordance with a stable law as a scheme, as it were, for co-ordinating everything sensed externally” (Kant 1992: 397).

The diminished importance of spatiality had the effect of reducing space to a mere backdrop behind any significant phenomena and therefore temporality took on greater relevance bringing to the front the importance of historical processes and of gradual movements in time. Indeed, a concern with time is intrinsic to the internal logic of modernity, so much so that nowadays it seems unavoidable to associate the beginning of the twentieth century with various technological innovations and human practices that suppressed distances and had a considerable influence on the ways time and space were understood, experienced, and represented.

Modernist aesthetic considered temporality the dominant dimension because it could reveal the reality of private time or the inner workings of the mind, as in William James’s idea of consciousness as a continuous flux, Marcel Proust’s sense of the past or Henri Bergson’s philosophy of time and memory. Personal identity and selfhood were mainly considered as rooted in temporality, and mental life was thought not to extend in space but in time. Thus, an opposition was implicitly established between the status of space and the status of the ‘subject’, between the thinking ‘I’ and the object thought about. Although the real spaces were undoubtedly still

“out there” beyond one’s self, they were not of primary concern in many modernist works: “In such a narrative, it makes sense that space would appear less important than time, for in the fluvial metaphor, the individual’s psychological being is caught up in the flow of time, as it is figuratively embodied in, for example, a stream-of-consciousness narration” (Tally 2013: 36).

The spatial dimension, however, continued to be present in art and literature. The Cubists, through their use of multiple perspective, broke up the homogeneity of visual space and rendered both the interior and exterior of objects from a variety of perspectives on a single canvas. Besides, in his *Time and Western Man* (1927) Wyndham Lewis launched a savage attack against those philosophers and writers – including his former friends Ezra Pound and James Joyce – who had contributed to what he called the time-cult. According to Lewis, the modernists were obsessed with temporality, and their representational assumptions were based upon a faulty ontology that accepted flux as the source and end of being. Against this time-obsessed *Zeitgeist*, Lewis proposed himself as the champion of a “space philosophy” most suited to the modern world and, more important, most productive for the arts.

If at the beginning of the Twentieth Century the idea of identity and selfhood was mainly considered as rooted in temporality, in the 1970s the ‘spatial turn’ spearheaded by Henry Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Michel De Certeau represented a paradigm shift in social and humanities theory that dispersed the traditional privileging of time over space. The spatial condition of human existence acquired again a profound relevance and produced changes in the relationship between place, body, mind, memories and emotions

Places can be conceived and experienced in a variety of ways: through fleeting yet intense bodily perceptions, mental and memory constructions, or as the result of cultural and literary inventions, so much so that distinctive places are not only defined by scientifically verifiable geographical coordinates, but are regarded as the product of deeply felt links between people and the places they live in. Alongside a geographical "reality" deemed objective and invariable, there is “another” geography

that takes shape in the minds of the individuals, because places are also an interpretation, and the geographical reality is rooted in our individual subjectivity and in our symbolic world. We ourselves define and give meaning to a place, and this, in turn, in some way defines us and actively shapes us, nourishing our sense of belonging and identity. Places are one of the founding elements of our sense of identity, and with them we establish a continuous and mutual exchange, a dialogic relationship between subjective and objective, because *who we are* is closely linked to *where we are*. «To be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place» as Edward Relph writes in his seminal *Place and Placelessness* [RELPH 1976, p. 1].

Although spatial or geographical considerations have always been part of the literary and critical practice, in literature the significance of space and place has traditionally been overlooked and downplayed as a mere setting, a background in which characters are situated or in which events take place.

Against this traditional conception, space and spatial relations have emerged as an active presence informing if not actually affecting the formation of characters or determining essential elements of the story. More than simply providing a setting, places and localities serve other important if under-explored narrative roles: they can trigger emotional responses, embed within literary texts an exploration of personal, social, or political identity, or foreground the affective and social experience of a place. Thus, through associative resonances between characters and places, literature can translate the experience of a locality into a critique of predominant modes of construction of reality or disclose the ideological or political meaning of any ‘produced’ place.

In Joyce’s novels space and places are constituted, perceived, known, and lived in their physical, social, memorial, textual, cognitive, political, imaginative, or cerebral dimension. Such perceptions – real or imaginary, conscious or unaware – contribute to building the identities of places and of individuals, in a continuous exchange between subjective and objective, between *embodied mind* and places.

In *Dubliners*, as in *Ulysses*, Joyce, for most part, referenced real places within and with respect to which, characters construct or deconstruct their subjectivity. The structure of their subjectivity is given in and through the structure of the places they inhabit as in “A Little Cloud” or in “The Dead” when Gabriel Conroy becomes part and is identified with the surrounding world: “His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling”.

As Valérie Bénéjam and John Bishop write in *Making Space in the Works of James Joyce* (2011) Joyce’s concern for space “be it urban, geographic, stellar, geometrical, or optical – obviously appear[s] a central and idiosyncratic feature of his work” (Bénéjam and Bishop 2011: 3). For example, in the first chapter of the *Portrait* Stephen writes on his geography textbook his position in space, according to his personal cosmology and implicitly inscribing his subjectivity within the political reality of Ireland.

*Stephen Dedalus*  
*Class of Elements*  
*Clongowes Wood College*  
*Sallins*  
*County Kildare*  
*Ireland*  
*Europe*  
*The World*  
*The Universe (P 15)*

In *Ulysses* the perception of places is firstly lived through bodily sensations as the body is the centre of the characters lived experience of the world. Conscious perceptions, not rationally elaborated sensations or even unnoticed “atmospheres” mediate between the outside world and the mind, even when such perceptions are forced upon the psyche through involuntary sensory impressions, as in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode of *Ulysses*: “Space: what you damn well have to see” (*U* 9.86) or the many sensory sights and smells that intrude on Bloom’s interior subjectivity.

There is an important ontological dimension to such bodily sensibilities for, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, having a body is what enables us to understand the space, because the experience of the space – the only

way of approaching it – relies on the body<sup>1</sup>: “The possession of a body implies the ability to change levels and to ‘understand’ space just as the possession of a voice implies the ability to change key” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 251). Joyce himself notoriously defined *Ulysses* “the epic of the human body” undelying that “the body lives in and moves through space and is the home of a full human personality” (Budgen: 1972: 21).

At the same time, however, *Ulysses* is notoriously the novel of urban spatiality. Stephen and Bloom move around the city and travel the topography of Dublin. A substantial part of Joycean scholarship focused on place and urban spaces has read the city as a social, cultural, or political space, or reconstructed the detailed intricacies of Dublin and its urban landscapes. The contextual and literary importance for Joyce of maps, measures and directions directly drawn from the concrete reality of the city is deeply implicated in the narrative structure of *Ulysses*, and Joyce, as well as Bloom, would accompany “narrations by constant consultation of a geographical map” (*U* 17.1909).

In *Finnegans Wake* as well, the way in which place functions has attracted much scholarly attention. The “locative enigma” (*FW* 135.26), the need to know one's location, is a central concern in the novel: “Where are we at all? And whenabouts in the name of space?” (*FW* 558.33). However, here places make a drastic departure from any realist convention and more than sensations they cause associations. Dublin (often revealingly spelled “doubling”) has many imagined transmutations, it is like a layered archaeological or geological site where dreamed, remembered, imagined or perceived extensions of the tangible city are stratified. It is puzzling to determine the “whereabouts exactly” of anyone or of any place. “Transmuted into all kinds of different cities” (Bénéjam and Bishop 2011: 3) Dublin is like a palimpsest text, and as with the palimpsest nothing, potentially, is lost; all may be brought to light.

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<sup>1</sup> In the ‘Cyclops’ episode, Bloom, significantly, is described as a “distinguished phenomenologist” (*U* 12.1822); he is certainly interested in phenomena, in things as they are apprehended through immediate sensory experience.

The papers collected in this book investigate several aspects of Joyce's spatial imagination from various viewpoints. Drawing on the classical perspective of Joseph Frank's concept of spatial form Irakli Tskhvediani's essay aims at analysing the spatiotemporal dimension of the 'Nausicaa' episode showing how Joyce breaks up the temporal sequence and juxtaposes elements in space rather than unrolling them in time. Zoe Miller, instead, focuses on what she metaphorically calls 'holes, piers and canyons' within the 'Circe' and 'Ithaca' episodes. These 'gaps' are 'empty spaces' in the text that encourage readers to produce new reading practices, and personal readerly responses. Likewise concerned with metaphorical places, Sonja Đurić's essay offers an original interpretation of the "Ivory Tower". Here the Tower is the place full of memories and desires Molly Bloom builds in her daydreams and to which she flees whenever she wants to escapes from the real world.

Focused on Joyce's use of maritime spatial language is Duncan Foster's compelling essay that through a close analysis of nautical and sea terminology considers the Joycean exploration of possible interconnectedness and of his position in the global setting.

Drawing upon a philosophical-psychoanalytic perspective Laura Diamanti investigates the concept of "the text" as a signifying practice of the speaking subject's positing, whereas the comparative article by Mina Đurić explores how Borislav Pekić and Orhan Pamuk engage in a creative dialogue with Joyce's works and why, according to certain characteristics, *Ulysses* is deemed the forerunner of the novel of urban heterotopia.

In her fascinating essay Carla Vaglio examines *Finnegans Wake* in search for maps, charts and other geographic or topographic depictions that Joyce refers to in order to scan the invisible and build up his personal "paperspace". Blending material and immaterial elements Joyce progressively expands his universe trying to shape the unknown and the "immarginable". Likewise concerned with textual space is Annalisa Federici's contribution which analyses the serialisation of *Ulysses* in *The Little Review* as a challenge to the cultural politics of high modernism and the traditional identification of the little magazine as epitome of high modernist publishing space

Following a consolidated practice, the final section, "Joycean Gleanings", is open to essays not necessarily in harmony with the main

theme of the volume. If Chiara Valcelli explores the relationship between Joyce and Dante scrutinising the many references to Dante's *Inferno* in *Dubliners*, Jonathan McCreedy investigates the topic of *Finnegans Wake*'s apparent ability to predict future events almost as if it were a divination book, in this way opening up to "unintentionalist" readings of the Joycean text. What McCreedy is looking for are possible references to President Donald J. Trump and to the events that followed the 2020 Presidential election. McCreedy raises serious hermeneutical problems as he demonstrates that the possibilities of interpretation in *Finnegans Wake* can be extreme and virtually infinite.

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