

## EDITORIAL

## Urban scapes

The “urban” is a concept which has been much debated upon lately, particularly since it has become, together with the “city”, the episteme (Foucault’s term<sup>1</sup>) of the globalizing age which we, as cultural beings, inhabit. As such, it has been subject to successive reconsideration, reevaluation and reconceptualization, acts that show how deeply various researchers have interpenetrated in and with the study of urban scapes<sup>2</sup>. In spite of the diverse transdisciplinary approaches to *landscape* and *space*, geographers and linguists, cultural and discourse theorists, architects, urban designers and anthropologists, ethnographers, semioticians, historians, or socio-environmentalists have shown that *urban scaping* is a cultural phenomenon, which means that it shapes its cultural identity through specific discourses, which have their particular semantic and metaphorical levels.

*Urban scapes*, semiotically defined<sup>3</sup> as spaces created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature, are part of a process involving a city’s dwellers while recording their becoming through time.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (*Les mots et les choses*, first published in 1966; transl. into English in 1970) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; trans. into English in 1972).

<sup>2</sup>According to *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, “scape” (first used in 1773) is the back-formation from “landscape”, and it means **1.** a view of scenery of any kind; **2.** also used as the second element of combs, as *sea-scape*, *cloud-scape* etc. For the multiple meanings of *landscape* offered by recent studies, ranging from denotative to connotative dimensions used for “each new subfield labelled by conventional or metaphorical collocational patterns: *cultural landscape*, *rural* or *urban landscape*, *media* or *political landscape* ...” see Antrop (2013: 13).

<sup>3</sup> See Adam Jaworski and Crispin Thurlow’s article “Introducing Semiotic Landscapes” in *Semiotic Landscapes. Language, Image, Space* (2010: 1- 40). Starting from the more general definition of *semiotic landscape* as “any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making” (p.2), we may accept other modes of urban landscape including *sensory landscapes* (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015: 197) such as **city smellscapes** perceived as distinct semiotic objects invoking the contradictions of convivial multiculturalism; or we may construct “imagined new urban worlds”, subject to individual perspectives if taking

Thus, *urban scapes* are *chronotopic* (M. Bakhtin) as they allow to be read as spatio-temporal textual layers that are connected through visual, social and cultural relationships, beside physical/geographical ones. The urban chronotope also sends towards the discourse of “growth”: the *growth* of a city from its “foundation” (with reference to place and time) up to modern times/ the age of consumerism. It also encompasses areas such as urban architectonics (with a centre, which may be a seat of power and authority, be it political, economic, social or religious, and margins, even suburbs); or constantly negotiated categories (Hutchison 2010; Gulliver and Toth 2014), such as:

- *urbanization* (the city growth and expansion depending on the interaction between the city as planned and the natural development of the urban areas);
- *urbanism* as a way of life (whose nature and quality is affected in the city lived as “the site of the other” by social phenomena such as “urban disorder”);
- *urbanity*, a quality or state of the urban dwellers who are expected to be both urban (citified) and urbane (sophisticated) in the city as “a ceremonial stage” (Gulliver and Toth 2014: xvi), that is a ritualized space of cultural practices. In this context, mapping cityscapes raises questions of identity and social status for city residents as they are reacting against labels ascribed to them from the outside during the process of creating new social structures.

Urban scapes belong to what E. Soja<sup>4</sup> defines as *thirdspace*: “the trialectics of spatiality” (with “place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory and geography”) based on the “trialectics of being” (spatiality, historicity and sociality). It is this “being-in-the-world” which foregrounds the discourse of the urban dweller/of the subject as creators of “another mode of thinking about space”, a “thirding of the spatial imagination” (p.11).

---

into account Arjun Appadurai’s “five fluid –scapes: ethno-, techno-, finan-, media- and ideoscapes” (terms developed in his *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> One of Edward Soja’s objectives in his *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* is, as the author asserts in “Introduction/ Itinerary/ Overture”, a “re-engaging with Lefebvre’s journey’s through an alternative reading of *The Production of Space*, arguably the most important book ever written about the social and historical significance of human spatiality and the particular powers of spatial imagination” (1996:8). Henri Lefebvre wrote *La production de l’espace* (1974, transl. into English in 1991), where the *urban* is studied as a conceptual triad: the perceived, conceived and lived space.

Through their multicomplexity, *urban scapes* may be apprehended as *heterotopic sites* (M.Foucault) as well, regarded as representations of a cultural order which is “simultaneously contested and reversed”. Such *scapes* invite to an exercise of revisiting and regaining a city’s/community’s history, as if making a palimpsestic urban map, circumscribing, through vertical layeredness, **a**) the natural setting/geographical location; b) the history of the city; c) the dwellers as makers of culture; d) man-made/dweller-made representations (institutions, places of worship, theatres, memorial houses etc.<sup>5</sup>), which may be symbolically rendered through various artistic strategies (see different arts, such as, literature, architecture, painting etc.).

*Urban scapes* imply limits and possibilities, which depend on the way its inhabitants (be they residents, or visitors, migrants, tourists etc.) perceive and understand the significations of the city’s symbolic and metaphorical language; they also create boundaries between worlds: for example, between the city and the village; or, between the public (the street) and the private spaces<sup>6</sup>.

The identity of urban spaces is shaped through the act of naming (the linguistic landscape of a town may consist of street signs, advertisements, shop names - Pennycook and Otsuji 2015: 198), location, delineation of territory, horizontal and vertical stratification, cultural practices, functionality (e.g. some are industrial, academic, religious, commercial etc.), the tracing of its becoming (*memory* of a city’s past; the experiencing of the *present* through what a city’s inhabitants do; the *vision* of the city’s future).

The papers of this issue point at the enduring or emerging symbolic meanings and cultural practices associated with physical landscape (e.g. the terminology of monument revitalisation) and social cityscapes (e.g. the morphology of private spaces within living places, the discursive construction of urban social types and stereotypes). Moreover, they encompass specific aspects of linguistic landscapes (i.e. the language of intimacy) along with emotional and spiritual scapes of urban dwellers (the urban quest for identity of uprooted expats, the influence of literary religious poetry on children’s mindscapes).

**Doina Cmeciu**  
**Nadia-Nicoleta Morărașu**

---

<sup>5</sup> See D. Cmeciu’s preface to *Bacău’s History, Culture and Tradition within a European Context*, [www.europedirectbacau.ro](http://www.europedirectbacau.ro).

<sup>6</sup> With the latter, there may be observed another difference, that between *to have* (eg., *a house*) and *to be/feel* (*at home*), each developing its own discourse.

**(Selected) Bibliography**

- Antorp, M. (2013): "A Brief History of Landscape Research", in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies* (editors: Peter Howard, Ian Thompson and Emma Waterton), London and New York: Routledge, pp. 12-22, available on <https://www.natur.cuni.cz/geografie/socialni-geografie-a-regionalni-rozvoj/studium/doktorske-studium/kolokvium/kolokvium-2013-2014-materialy/2013-antrop-2013.pdf>, accessed on 12 October 2016.
- Appadurai, Arjun (1996): *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail ([1973]/ 1981): *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, Austin: U of Texas Press.
- Barthes, R. ([1988]/1994): *The Semiotic Challenge*, translated by Richard Howard, University of California Press.
- Cmeci D. (2011): "Representing Space in Cultural Discourse", paper delivered during the International Conference *Cultural Spaces. Identity within/beyond Borders*, organised by "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, Romania, Atatürk University, Erzurum, Turkey, Cultural Spaces Research Group, Interstud Research Centre, CETAL Research Centre, 6-7 May 2011, Bacău, Romania.
- Cmeci D. (coord.), Ceuca M., Manolache M., Tomescu, I. (2014): *Bacau's History, Culture and Tradition within a European Context*, Iasi: Ed. PIM, available on [www.europedirectbacau.ro](http://www.europedirectbacau.ro).
- Foucault, M. ([1967]/October 1984): "Of Other Spaces. Heterotopias", in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, pp.46-49.
- Gulliver, K. and Tóth, H. (eds.) (2014): *Cityscapes in History: Creating the Urban Experience*, Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Jaworski, A. and Thurlow, C. (eds.) (2010): *Semiotic Landscapes. Language, Image, Space*, London and New York: Continuum Press.
- Lotman, Y.M. (2001): *Universe of the Mind. A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, with Introduction by Umberto Eco, trans. by Ann Shukman, New York NY: I. B. Tauris & Co LTD.
- Pennycook, Alastair and Otsuji, Emi (2015): "Making scents of the landscape", *Linguistic Landscape* 1:3 (2015), 191-212, John Benjamins Publishing Company, available on [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286408936\\_Making\\_scents\\_of\\_the\\_landscape](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286408936_Making_scents_of_the_landscape) (accessed, November 2016).
- Soja, Edward, W. (1996): *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tarasti, Eero (2000): *Existential Semiotics*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.