

Michael Kane, *Postmodern Time and Space in Fiction and Theory*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, ISBN: 978-3030374488, 204 p.

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Spatiality is one of the most explored topics in literary criticism and theory, gaining more and more popularity as numerous researchers undertake such studies. The tools of spatial studies and the geocritical conceptual framework have begun to develop since 'the spatial turn' emerged, superseding the previous paradigm that regarded temporality as the most significant coordinate in literature due to interest in progress and development (in the post-Enlightenment era). However, this does not imply that matters of time are neglected, yet those of 'space in literature and literature in space' (Franco Moretti) are currently of greatest importance in the postmodern era, which welcomes the so-called 'reassertion of space'. Concepts such as place, mapping and spatial relations have come to the forefront of literary theory since they represent effective and productive instruments for analysing not only works of fiction, but culture in a broader sense, in terms of historiography, anthropology, art history, sociology and so on, geocriticism being an interdisciplinary discipline (Bertrand Westphal).

Michael Kane's new study on *Postmodern Time and Space in Fiction and Theory* aims to be a contribution in spatial literary studies, as an eloquent analysis of space-time aspects starting from modernity and slowly moving towards our 'historical present'. Kane's work seems to be one that manifests the inter- and transdisciplinarity of geocriticism, which was mentioned above, as it surely is applicable in fiction and theory, as well as in wider cultural and sociological aspects. Not seldom would his hypotheses claim examples referencing cinematography, photography, science, (geo)philosophy etc., proving that one of his intentions would be that of comprehending the postmodern condition and the dynamics of our contemporaneity. By not being devoted to a one-dimensional critical analysis of certain texts, this collection of essays succeeds to gather

various theoretical discussions and to encapsulate the theoretical framework of spatial studies, even though not in an exhaustive manner.

As the author states right at the beginning of the introductory section, ‘this book is an attempt to make some sense of the present’ (1) in a postmodern context which, according to Kane, maintains some sort of ‘continuity’ with modernity or is, to some extent, decipherable through the agency of ‘Western Modernity and its cultural, literary, theoretical legacy’ (1). That being the core of this study, its methodology rearticulates previous interpretations of space and time in a postmodern manner, using its new theoretical tools. The stratigraphic analysis and the multifocal view enable a geocritical approach (as it is delineated by Bertrand Westphal, even though the author doesn’t mention him or his methodology). Also mentioned in the *Introduction* is the effort of carrying out a critical analysis of numerous works of literature (most of them representative for modernism) by using the ideas of thinkers such as Paul Virilio, Fredric Jameson, Jacques Rancière, Zygmunt Bauman, to name a few. Moreover, geocritical and spatial interpretations represent the pivot on which Kane’s thesis revolves. It is through addressing our ‘sense of space and time’ (3) that the author tries to explain the great transformation in our perception of the world.

In terms of structure, the volume is divided in seven thematic chapters. The volume comprises a collection of essays, therefore advancing plenty of hypotheses and theoretical paths. At the same time, the content proceeds to follow a broadening motion, as it starts from considerations on the idea of nature, moves towards presenting the urban experience, and ends with an investigation of tourism. All these while following the modern-postmodern timeline.

As previously stated, the first chapter presents ‘the space of nature’, the comprehension of the idea of nature throughout Western history. The four main interpretations of the natural world are labeled as *post-something*, which signifies four main historical transformations: *Post-Romantic*, *Post-Darwinian*, *Post-Christian* (or *Post-Extractivist*) and *Post-Human* (or *Post-Natural*). To summarize, humanity shifted from regarding nature as something superior next to our modest existence to viewing it as a unnecessary element of life (some of Baudrillard’s ideas were mentioned here, in order to explain the meaning of *simulacra and simulations*). Postmodern means post-natural and, by that, it can be positioned at the other end of the spectrum: ‘if, once upon

a time, humanity almost realized that nature was the stuff it was made *of*, nowadays nature seems increasingly to be the stuff made *by* humans' (42).

The second chapter views urban space as 'the modern substitute of nature'. The most representative figure for *the space of the city* is the *flâneur*. The author traces its history and different types of *flâneurism* in literature, starting from E.A. Poe's 'man of the crowd' to Baudelaire's modern man, and reaching Walter Benjamin's theory. This chapter might be the most literature-oriented, but it also mentions a few theoretical ideas, such as 'the end of geography' (Paul Virilio), in view of defining the 'increasingly carceral city' (59). Chapter 4 offers some nuances on the idea of time, using literary examples (James Joyce, Franz Kafka), as well as cinematographic contexts regarding temporality, describing specific scenes from *Metropolis* (1927) or *Modern Times* (1936). These two chapters seem to be overfilled with references and examples, which is not effective in making the essay more illustrative, but rather too dense and concentrated. The following chapter, which attempts to address Walter Benjamin's theory about 'the work of art in the age of digital reproduction', seems disjointed with regard to geocriticism. Although it comprises, on one hand, a coherent analysis of the notion of art as it was perceived in modernity and a theory on the production of art nowadays, on the other, it contains very few geography/space-related arguments, going against the initially expressed scope of the volume.

The apparent lack of spatial considerations at this point in the volume is balanced out by the last chapter, *Travel: from Modernity to...?*, which exclusively covers the initial argumentative efforts. The contextualising section – about the act of travelling throughout history and especially in modernity – is concise and purely methodical, becoming truly relevant only as it starts to analyse the contemporary situation regarding travelling. Moreover, travelling is a subject of interest in spatial studies, since it accurately unfolds the most popular representation of human-space relations. The author illustrates the historical comprehension of the idea of travel as a switch from religious needs to leisure needs. It would be around the 1950s when humanity began to truly embrace tourism as we presently understand it. The idea of tourism as 'dislocation' is also contemporary with the modern practice of travel made for pleasure, but the most detailed form of travelling in this chapter is that initiated by the postmodern man, who, according to Zygmund Bauman, is 'darting all over the place'(138). If pre-postmodern

travelling was quite limited in frequency and in destinations, it is no surprise that ‘to be a modern human means to be always preflight: waiting and ready for an airport trip to come’ (139). This quote by Christopher Schaberg prefigures Kane’s argument on switching from trains to airplanes (the first being a great symbol of mobility in modernity, while the second is emblematic for postmodernity). The author carries on by explaining the geocritical term of ‘non-places’, created by Marc Augè. A non-place is ‘a space devoid of the symbolic expressions of identity, relations and history’ (140). Marc Augè’s term for the age of non-places (contemporaneity) is ‘supermodernity’, when spaces like hotel rooms, stores, public transportation vehicles are all overused, strictly functional, while also free of ontological meaning (or of meaning at all). Kane goes back to literature by using Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Platform* as an example of *airportness* (139). This notion signifies the uniformity, familiarity and universality typical for the contemporary practices of travel. Continuing the argument, postmodern society could be divided in tourists and non-tourists, since tourism seems to be such a prevalent activity, as the author argues. But this dichotomy would also be accurate for parting society in rich and poor people. It is true that Kane mentions the ‘involuntary travellers’, such as ‘refugees, migrants and deportees’ (152), but this ‘dark shadow’ of our present is, unfortunately, poorly developed in this volume. The author stated that this study focuses on ‘Western modernity’, but isn’t it true that Western modernity itself started to be concerned about such aspects, even though they are not directly applicable to it? Moreover, postcolonial and decolonial studies are, in fact, precisely postmodern matters and, at the same time, theories that actually regard spatiality. They are intensely discussed in fiction and theory, however this volume seems to ignore their importance. It can be considered a low effort to only mention such problem and not bring it to light where the opportunity of discussing it was already created.

To conclude, Michael Kane’s work is a collection of essays regarding space and time relations throughout modernity (since the author seems to acknowledge postmodernism as partaking in it). With the help of abundant references to literature, as well as literary or cultural theory, this study offers a great volume of information which is well-organized in thematic chapters. *Postmodern Time and Space in Fiction and Theory* is, indeed, relevant in geocritical and spatial literary studies, even though its

hypothesis is not future-oriented, as it regards the past and the so-called 'historical present'.