

Györke, Á. and Bülgözdí, I. (eds.): *Geographies of Affect in Contemporary Literature and Visual Culture: Central Europe and the West*. Leiden, Brill, 2020. 234 p.

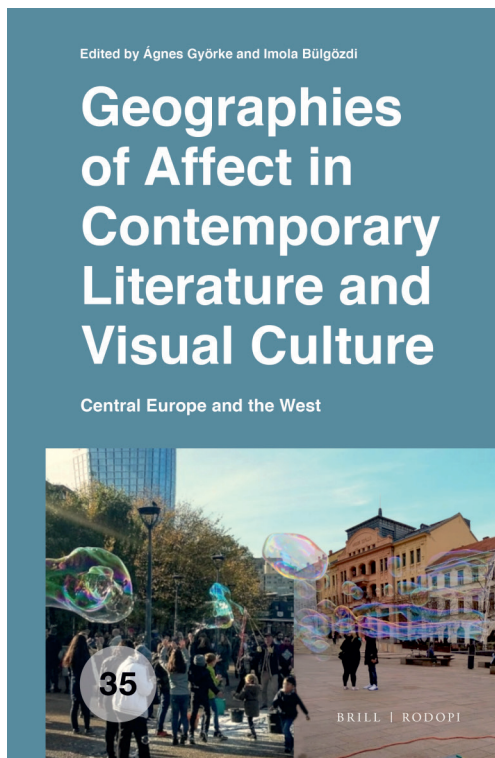
The concept of ‘affect’ has influenced research in everyday geography for over two decades. Affect is often used as almost a synonym to emotion in geography, but other times, more-than-representational-theorists in particular (THRIFT, N. 2008) emphasise the embodied, spatial, more immediate, even tactile and not-only-human experience that makes affect different from emotion (DAVIDSON, J. *et al.* 2005; PILE, S. 2010; FABÓK, M. and BERKI M. 2018). However, apart from a few examples, when affect was mentioned (CZIRFUSZ, M. 2014), geographers in Hungary have not engaged with this concept. This is one of the reasons it is particularly exciting to hold this book edited by GYÖRKE and BÜLGÖZDI, professors of Literature, English and American Studies and Cultural Studies – hopefully inspiring more geographers too to engage with ‘affect’ and its relation to space.

Throughout its twelve chapters, this book, a variety of literary and filmic works produced in Central and Eastern Europe and in the Anglophone world are analysed, focusing on the relationship between geographies and affect, while ‘translocality’ provides with

and extra conceptual frame. Drawing on BRICKELL, K. and DATTA, A. (2011), GYÖRKE and BÜLGÖZDI chose ‘translocality’ as an analytical compass to “overcome the blind spots of popular theories of globalization and transnationalism; it ‘emerged from a concern over the disembodied understanding of transnational networks’” (p. 23). Moving beyond the elusiveness of nation states and globalisation as well as the dichotomies they often lead to (i.e. core-periphery / East–West discourses), the use of translocality in this volume enabled the analysis to happen on an everyday scale, while also considering geopolitical processes. At the same time, it also enabled contributors to “re-think the significance” of the Central and Eastern European region; “in other words, the volume investigates the significance of localities and subjectivities within the context of global flows” (p. 4).

The book starts with a helpful introduction by the editors, Ágnes GYÖRKE and Imola BÜLGÖZDI, that sets the agenda of the book – as summarised above –, followed by 12 chapters structured into 5 sections. Among others, this book features the works of scholars of the University of Debrecen, and it is the result of a collaboration between thirteen scholars, eight of whom have been members of the *Gender, Translocality and the City Research Group*.

In Part 1 (*Edgy Feelings: Translocality, Trauma, and Disengagement*) the contributors focus on pieces that are capable of “surpassing personal emotion and creating a transpersonal affective community” (p. 10). Through the analysis of two contemporary New York novels, VERMEULEN, P. highlights the “the power of literary affect to cut across the borders between established constituencies and groups (and even individuals)” (p. 22), and localities. In his analysis of *Open City* and *10:04* he explains the differences between affect and emotion by highlighting that emotion is more codifiable. Using these two novels he showcases literary strategies that generate unruly affective dynamics, and mobilise unpredictable affects that move beyond personal emotions, through impersonal affect to transpersonal community (VERMEULEN, P., Chapter 1, p. 26). In the following chapter, we see a similar process through a theatrical performance based on the memories of Éva FAHIDI, a Holocaust survivor, aiding our learning about what it means to performatively create an affect-based community. The act and the observer’s affect rely on the uniqueness of a theatre as a context for story-telling – in terms time and space – that is reinforced by piano music and a dancer. “Theatre performances can function as media to stage traumas for a twofold reason. First, trauma can be defined as a kind of memory written into the body [as ASSMANN 2012 argues], and second, trauma, just like the space itself, is



of an extra-temporal nature” (TAKÁCS, M., Chapter 2, p. 36). Lisa ROBERTSON’s experimental poetry in her volume *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* explores urban space in Vancouver “as resonating with an array of affects that are not owned and are often historical, yet call for change” (PÁLINKÁS, K., Chapter 3, p. 54).

Part 2 (*East-Central Europe as a Translocal Space: Gendering the “Periphery”*) has been particularly interesting for me with its gendered analysis of the city and attention to private-public relations from late-state-socialism until contemporary Central and East European urban spaces. The private-public, Budapest-countryside, inside-outside relations, borders and boundaries are the spatial-affective dimensions of the documentary and feature-films analysed by the authors in this section. KALMÁR’s chapter focuses on non-hegemonic masculinities in – what he names – retreat films: *Taxidermia* (2006), *Delta* (2008), and *Land of Storms* (2014). In these Hungarian retreat films, where identity politics plays a central role, the disappointed male protagonists return to their home country with “disillusionment about their formal dreams about the urban, hyper-modern lifestyle associated with *the West*” (p. 71). The imagined dichotomous relations are well illustrated in the chapter. The return to the “Othered” Eastern European context means to leave behind a more public sphere associated with masculinity, also leading to a crisis of identity (KALMÁR, Gy., Chapter 4). Continuing with the perspective of four women in four movies – *Fagyöngyök* (*Mistletoes*, 1978), *Családi tűzfészek* (*Family Fire-trap*, 1979), *Panelkapcsolat* (*The Prefab People*, 1982), and *Falfúró* (*Wall Driller*, 1985) –, another genre, named “housing movies”, is conceptualised. GyÖRI argues, by drawing on the concept of architectural patriarchy, that contrary to the socialist promise of an equal society, pronatalist policies along with high-rise blocks, in fact, fed into gender inequality. As he writes “the collaboration between the paternalistic and the patriarchal regimes, most evident in the subordination of welfare policies to national economic considerations that privilege male control and ensure female subordination in the home” (GyÖRI, Zs., Chapter 5, p. 95). In *Queer Sex and the City – Affective Places of Queerness in Contemporary Hungarian Cinema*, FELDMANN contrasts mainstream depictions of queer spaces – where “shame” is the emphasised affect in relation to queer spaces – and more productive, queer historiographic documentaries, in which a sense of belonging is emphasised that leads to a more fulfilled queer spatial experience. The chapter focuses on state-socialist and post-socialist Budapest (FELDMANN, F., Chapter 6).

Part 3 (*Translocality, Border Thinking and Restlessness*), moving away from the Central and East European context, also unfolds affects evoked on the borderlands, this time in the United States and Iran. Translocality is a bodily experience for the migrating protagonists

of these chapters who bear traces of local and global histories. The chapter by BÜLGÖZDI unfolds ‘fascination’ as the main affect that defines translocal experience of the Southern African American migrant arriving to Harlem during the 1920s in the novel by Toni MORRISON. As explained contradictory emotions are aroused by this specific urban context that also have a strong identity forming power for the lead character, defined by race, gender, fear and spatial experience (BÜLGÖZDI, I., Chapter 7). In the following chapter, KÖRÖSI discusses Marjane SATRAPI’s *Persepolis Books*. While hard to compare, in the autobiographical graphic novel, the Iranian female protagonist’s act of moving to Vienna is also characterised by disappointment in the West and by a struggle with hegemonic masculinity. But unlike the male characters of Chapter 4, Marjane’s experience and double critique (of her two homes) – KÖRÖSI argues – is defined by oppressive patriarchal regimes both in the Islamic state and Western Europe as well as her racialised experience in the later (KÖRÖSI, M., Chapter 8).

Part 4 (*Translocality and Transgression*) also has a major focus on border-crossing and moving across borders to worlds that often seem more different than they are. Combining surreal with realistic fictions the heroes of these stories blur boundaries through wondering across realms and places, creating alternative meanings of home. Drawn upon an array of critical theorists, geographers, feminists, and litterateur, the chapter by KÉRCZY draws on the ethos of Alice in wonderland by Lewis CARROLL while analysing its contemporary reinterpretation by China Miéville *Un Lun Dun* (“UnLondon”), placed in the nonsensical mirror version of London, mostly constructed from the trash discarded by Londoners. This ethos is characterised by the recycles and critique of the idea of the “lost little girl.” KÉRCZY also highlights the way wondering and wandering of Alice challenges masculine geographical discourses, arguing that “Alice’s journey has nothing to do with the masculine appropriation of space, it lacks a conquistador’s colonizing intent, it never aims to reach a final destination, nor does it give account of a teleological development” (KÉRCZY, A., Chapter 9, p. 167). The next chapter, entitled *Translocations of Desire: Urban Topographies of Love in Chimamanda Adichie’s Americanah*, tells a love story of a Nigerian couple, whose blackness, migration, border-crossing, relocation, displacement and home-making result in new spatial and affective experiences (LEETSCH, J., Chapter 10).

Part 5 (*Criminal Affects: Crime and the City*) focuses on the classical themes of fear and crime in the city with the analysis of a noir novel and detective series. Both the novel and the series are explained as stories subverting the original, hegemonic approach of the genre having ethnic minority and female characters as their protagonists and by shifting towards a more affective exploration as opposed to the ‘masculine ra-

tionality’ traditionally associated with the genre. The chapter by BÉNYEI discusses Patrick NEATE’s novel the *City of Tiny Lights*, where again, an alternative London – this time turned into a war zone – provides the scenery, this time for the investigations of the black British war veteran and private detective. The plot is defined by the relationship between local, urban every day and the geopolitics of colonialism. According to the analysis, these overarching translocal agendas are embedded in the spatial experience of the “main characters, whose affective maps, coloured by guilt, fear, and nostalgia, provide alternative visions of the city” (BÉNYEI, T., Chapter 11, p. 14). The Chapter *Inventing History: Katalin Baráth’s Middlebrow Detective Series*, tells a different type of detective story of a female protagonist, Veron DÁVID, an accidental detective. Her struggles due to her gender, class, and rural background, while travelling across early 20<sup>th</sup> century Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, took her on a “quest to carve out a place for herself as a woman and a detective” (HUDÁCSKÓ, B., Chapter 12, p. 222).

I believe that the volume *Geographies of Affect in Contemporary Literature and Visual Culture: Central Europe and the West* contributes to a better understanding of the very complex concept of ‘affect’ – and not only for the Central/Eastern European reader, and not only in this specific context. It highlights the role of space in literary and filmic contexts – where it is often subordinated to time –, promoting a richer, more tactile, and more *affective* experience, when consuming these literary and filmic works. I would like to make just one generic critique that is due to the book’s emphasis on space and geography. I believe that some of the studies would have benefitted from a further geographical literature. Nevertheless, this book is visibly inspired by, and engages with geographers and space theorists such as Doreen MASSEY, Henri LEFEBVRE, Edward SOJA, Liz BONDI, Gillian ROSE and Rachel PAIN and theories such as the production of space and thoughts on the relationship between space and place.

Finally, I would very much recommend this truly interdisciplinary book in particular for all the space theorists and geographers with a hope that it will inspire more researchers in Hungary to incorporate affect and the concept of translocality in their research combining it with geographical scholarly literature, space theories, and empirical methodologies leading to new, interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge production.

MIRJAM SÁGI<sup>1</sup>

## REFERENCES

- BRICKELL, K. and DATTA, A. 2011. *Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections*. Farnham, Ashgate.
- CZIRFUSZ, M. 2014. Érzelmek a gazdaságföldrajzban: Fodor Ferenc vitája a Földrajzi Közleményekben. In *Földrajz és földtudomány az Eötvös Collegiumban*. Ed. GYÓRI, R., Budapest, ELTE Eötvös József Collegium, 143–161.
- DAVIDSON, J., BONDI, L. and SMITH, M. 2005. *Emotional Geographies*. Aldershot, Ashgate.
- FABÓK, M. and BERKI, M. 2018. Új materialista relacionális térelméletek: a reprezentáción túl, a szövevények hálójában. In *Kortárs térelméletek kelet-közép-európai kontextusban*. Ed. FARAGÓ, L., Budapest, Dialóg Campus, 325–348.
- PILE, S. 2010. Emotions and affect in recent human geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35. (1): 5–20.
- THRIFT, N. J. 2008. *Non-representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. London, Routledge.

<sup>1</sup> Institute for Regional Studies, Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Eötvös Loránd Research Network, Békéscsaba, Hungary. E-mail: sagi.mirjam@krtk.hu