

The Logos of Space as Cultural Paradigm in the Thinking of Life: The Landscape of Thinking

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It has been said that history has ended. A new era of money has begun and the twenty-first century will be a century of manipulation. In old Europe one speaks of 'the end of geography'. Despite this, some kind of force resists this development and listens to stories told. The narrative addresses the individual. Not only moral, but also gnosiological responsibility develops – we know, we discover (but do we understand?). We know that different people exist, that they are thinking. The life story is a thinking process, but thinking provides the infrastructure for culture. What are you like when you are thinking? And how is it even possible to think through your life? The life story has always seemed to me to be an apologetic form of revealing oneself. And still... How can one portray one's life through words? Relating the experience is not the same as acquiring the experience itself.

But, if the logos of space is central to the thinking process, then history has not ended, nor has geography.

French philosopher Régis Debray writes: 'people think with their feet... thinking isn't the subjective mode only. It has the objective materiality of an organising process. And in order to know how human thinking is constituted, it is necessary to look at the ground that they step on.' (Debray 1987: 158.)

In Latvia, from the official reports of the eighteenth century to a few centuries later in 1987, with the letters and declarations of Latvians writing to protest the construction of a hydroelectric plant in Daugavpils, it seemed that what once could not be said publicly was in fact a part of public discourse. The story was alive and could be retold. That was a story about attitudes and relationships, or *attitudinal history*. It was a story about one's people, but it was told in the discourse of **environment** and **place**, using spatial qualities and place as an iconographic value. In Latvia this was a familiar form of comprehension among the populace.

In sum, **the sense of place** is a characteristic of mentality. In the past ten years, many life stories remind and convince us of this, not only in Latvia but also, as far as I know, outside Latvia.

My own 'verbal ritual' regarding life stories has grown out of these observations. Building on the work of Dan Sperber, the key here is the sum of personal attitudes that provides insight into a kind of *cultural network* (Sperber 1985: 33) as well as a greater understanding of one's own and others' human experience (Sperber 1985: 34). This cultural network is influenced by life stories. It is possible that more is created than revealed. This is a form of communication based on contrasting experiences. The life story is not made but is rather drawn out.

I will not provide long quotations from life story texts because, in my opinion, they must be given only in their entirety, they must be evaluated as a whole, and those interested must listen to them themselves. It is difficult also to translate the texts from Latvian.

The essence of my definition of 'the landscape of thinking' is structured by the modification of space as a ritual. A large part of this is a legacy with contemporary possibilities, when *space* and *time* do not compete with each other, but rather form *spatial time*. I am speaking of environment, place, landscape, event, home/house, district, region and city as sociotopos. With and through these concepts I am trying to translate (as far as possible) daily life into academic research, in order to understand it. The question is less one of 'where', as it may seem, than of 'why'. In this way the iconography of comprehension and psychological topography that is revealed in life stories is developed. This provides an opportunity to look for answers not only in corresponding life spheres and plots but also in the ways communication about these spheres develop. These also include the component of space. The narrative itself speaks of space, when it uses the words birthplace, home and region. And the story also shapes the place and the structure that does not allow location to disappear. The life story is a person's ethos-space. The past has its roots in a certain environment.

The concept of space has a rich history. It is a resource to describe a society and the landscape of culture. For Latvia and Latvians it is one of the meta-structures that shape our comprehension of why things are the way they are. This plays a role when we are forming an understanding of what we already know.

Relying on the spatial (in the broadest sense), it is possible to speak of the 'here and now' even though in fact the story one is telling happened ten years ago.

Attitude, mood, and spirituality are at work. 'Where', in the description, couples both the abstract and the factual.

The life story of a woman from Nica (a region in Western Latvia, Kurzeme) offers an insight into this relationship between space, time and identity. At the end of the war, German soldiers had dug trenches in the yard of her home. To protect the trenches from the rain, the soldiers had covered them with bright, full, long skirts of the traditional Nica folk costume. In a few sentences, by focusing simply on a *spatial* description, the narrator has in fact organised her relationship/attitude toward history as well as her sense of identity.

Space provides the ability to evaluate and express respect (morality is connected to this, for morality foresees making a choice). Space provides the opportunity for successors to come and at the same time there is a space that began with one person. Here there are certain parallels with the idea that the life story is solipsistic. The life story itself contains the author. The text may not for a second be read without the context of the author and his/her personality. The author experiences her/himself through language. The author is in the space of the life story. The *author* of the life story never dies. At the same time, however, it is a story which not only the participants in the story seek to understand, but also the person who later listens, reads and lives 'after' the author.

The speaker and listener form a union. Subjectivity becomes objectified (distanced) and is applied to people as a subject that collects thousands of stories.

Continuity is a characteristic of culture and the history of values. The story is full of places, the names of places and situations in those places. In addition, emotional events connected to the earth's crust, which I understand to be home, district and region, describe a person's geo-mental 'landscape of thinking' and identity as guiding principles.

An acute consciousness is expressed in these life stories. From the beginning of time, Latvians have practically had no history of their own, but they have had their own geography. The uniting 'fact' becomes local geography. Their identity was shaped in this way. The place has power. In addition to this, this power does not depersonalise the relationship, as happens with political power.

The place is a reminder that events have occurred. More importantly, life stories often are constructed through places. One can agree with the statement – if people had no ties to a place, there would be no culture.

In philosophy there is a term, *informative identity*. This concept is understood

as an identity that a person acquires through the activity of informing.

Building on the permanent and the variable in the life story, identity itself appears as a paradoxical relationship – between that which is similar (to something) and, in other aspects, that which differs. Events of the past are placed in the context of having discovered the different, the particular (changes in place, for example).

Regional identity, which must be based on individuals, is also expressed as the unity of *being* and *becoming*.

Space is the agent of individual identity. A sense of spatial identity allows one to realise one's personal identity. Identity is an individual's task. Space is used in searching for a meaningful identity (Skultāne 1998). Life *develops* in a space, that is, it becomes life through acquiring a space and vice versa – as life develops so does space.

It is also the case, however, that one is aware of identity as individual, regional and human qualities. One thinks this identity is clear until someone asks one to articulate: what is identity? Nevertheless, the principle still applies that there are things that one can understand through a *third identity*: something meaningful including district, parish and region, that is, through spatial awareness.

In Latvia even today a person's strong sense of regional identity exists. In relation to this I am referring to two central terms that appear in the literature on different cultural experiences, *spatial culture* and *temporal culture*. Life stories that are told in Latvia express spatial culture. The characteristics of space, the significance, the spatial articulation is the most important factor that shapes other aspects of life structures, thinking, and individual behaviour, and determines social heritage. In contrast to the situation in the United States, in Latvian life stories one does not find a feeling of atrophied geography.

Space remains amnesiac and speaks to one's identity. A person's identity fosters the rebirth of place. The life story reveals the self-creating quality of place.

Latvians have tended to create their historical and logical identity with/through space in both the material and immaterial senses. Time spent in a place does not determine the meaning of place, but rather the intensity of the person's experience in the place. Environment here is taken to mean the spatial structures of a person's relationship to events. Environment here is close in meaning to milieu.

The most stable and long-lasting comprehension schemas are those that are based on universal spatial ideas both historically and logically.

Space is connection. Space has three-dimensional time: past, present, and future. Space is the reality through which we identify ourselves in order to fit into larger connections – to see the personal life as narrative. Spatial information is the context and background information. It means that space bears a message. It is especially significant when the lack of grand narratives precludes a person from becoming a part of something bigger than himself. Space carries the immanence of the human out of the person. Then it is possible to return to that which Is.

Life stories also indicate – even though this may seem paradoxical – that space as environment is more easily discredited and unravelled and destroyed, but at the same time in daily life one has less control over space than over time. Considering the political situation of Latvia in the twentieth century, this fact appears starkly in life stories. One life story author said that nature and environment helped one's soul. Yes, space is alive with its semantics and dramaturgy, with its *small geography and large history*, in the case of Latvia. The life story is a component of this, where space develops. History becomes topical. 'Daily thinking' (for us) is topical. The reaction to space occurs through the cultivation of environment as space.

At the same time, it has been said that history is not truth: that truth is only in the retelling.

Political history is kept in the private sphere. It takes place in space (concrete, functional) as place and region, and the internalised is contextualised with one's 'small history'. A sense of synchronised territoriality of course can be valued as an archaic expression, because the unit of social time is influenced by space. But let us not rush to judgment, especially when the so-called culture wars are becoming more and more significant in the world – the battle for space, landscape and environment, with all its consequences, which will influence and will determine the world's characteristics.

The existence, even today, of the social aspect of space, the social aspect of place as a *locus* (e.g. the phenomenal meaning of the Latvian city of Liepāja) and the *genius locus* (e.g. the story of the destruction of Staburags, a cliff on the shores of the Daugava River) is a spiritual feeling rather than the observation of an object. The issue is the riches found in nature, which were methodically destroyed under the Soviet regime through the flooding of territories caused by the building of hydroelectric stations.

Space for an individual is not only material size, but also the concept of space

itself, that is, realised space and perceived space. District and region are not significant as geographical, but rather as moral categories (people protect historically and culturally important places, sacred buildings, churches, etc.)

In life stories, one can find the semantics of territoriality and the person's motivations in life, the person's presence 'here' or 'there', as well as the ideas of environmental history, social engagement and time in space. It has been said, as structures are built, so are one's notions about all things.

When Latvian survivors of deportation and prison camps are asked what helped them survive, they answer: their desire to return to Latvia, to meet their loved ones there, to see the landscape, Latvia's birch trees – nature helped them survive. But there is almost no expressed need to talk publicly about their experience, which, however, is so characteristic of Holocaust survivors.

Historical consciousness is expressed in the use of various pasts. They are used existentially, but the pasts are also used commercially. Using the terms of political jargon, spatial memories are not 'hot memories,' that is, memories that become propaganda, provide influential information or even become a commodity. Spatial memories carry strong motivation. They are expressed as: 'here in Latvia', 'at home', 'in the district', 'this place in me', 'in my city', etc. In our society today such expressions are declared unpopular and short-sighted. Yes, in the new American Europe it is said, 'time is money' but no one says 'space is money'. In post-socialist countries, including Latvia in the twentieth century, there is a great deal of social time that has been lost. With the passage of time, time has become distanced. But space is still sacred and there is no recession of time even when, figuratively speaking, God has taken a holiday. We are reminded: love geography while it has not yet become history.

In the language of the life story, place in itself becomes like an event; there is a strong connection to the world. There is no mystification of anything. For example, in the area around Rujiena (Latvia), life story authors speak of their home as a sanctuary and as a world in and of itself. For Latvians space is often a path and the path is a method. Space can offer a method, with which one can process, inspire, and offer inter-subjectivity and, in the end, solidarity. Mood becomes more important than facts. Place offers stimulation (both positive and negative).

The narrative contains information that makes it possible to live in potential space, in the environment in which you are now. The life story brings history into the present; time passes, space remains. Space is not anonymous. It may be that

one could speak of universal citizenship, but this would be another topic to address separately.

Another separate spatial *theme* is the city or town. The theme is old – space as power or power of space – but questions regarding it remain and new questions are posed. This theme is particularly appropriate in Latvia because more and more often the following unofficial phrase appears in Latvian society: ‘Latvians are not only farmers, even if one speaks of *Latin peasant*’. In 2002, at the Oral History conference in Berlin, a presenter described Baltic identity as *agricultural nationalism*. This is the cultural ideal: closeness to nature, ‘space practicing’ and so on.

The city provides an identity even for those who do not define themselves in terms of property. This we see when one addresses city inhabitants of various generations. The meaning of the city becomes a cultural resource that helps shape criteria for one’s actions and the responsibility for these criteria.

Building on these stories, one may speak of a narrative ethic, the archaeology of the environment, and even of *branding of place*, the shaping of a vision of a place, all of which enable one to respond to the given place.

Even though it is difficult to clearly define regional identity, one can determine a joining together of personal and regional identities. There is a reason to believe that, in the globalisation process, regional identity will lose little in the unification of Europe. Regionality is an identity. Globalisation recognises regionality as a basis for communication. Globalisation does not have geography, but locality does. It is through this local identity that globalisation functions.

Space is used in the process to find the essence of reality, for example, when one remembers a father’s home, tends to a garden, builds memorials, tends to a gravestone or fights to preserve the natural landscape. Space is ‘utilised’; both giving and taking occurs. One speaks of the home as reflecting the state of one’s soul. A person knows what it means to keep the keys of your home, even when the home no longer exists. The meaning of home is significant, for the home becomes a part of the individual’s *biographical situation* (Alfred Schutz’s term, see Schutz 1960) and the activity of the soul (Bormane 2002). Life story authors use expressions such as ‘your home is your fate’ and ‘to feel at home’. One may have only a juridical relationship with your *father’s house* but your *father’s home* provides the environment for spiritual contact or milieu. The home as a place of emotional security is important for identity formation.

‘Caring for home’ is caring for identity. For decades, the home provided the

opportunity to express oneself even when political regimes limited freedom of expression. Then spatial structures enabled one to express also ethical and territorial belonging and existence. What some have called a *territorial imperative* was formed when people who lived under totalitarian structures acquired, in the words of Vaclav Havel, *existential experience*. The experience of the existential space is like a philosophical question which may be expressed metaphorically by the following phrases: to be and to belong. The life story portrays this relationship: existence through belonging. In this instance, belonging to a nation, a place, a region, a country.

This becomes apparent in the landscape of thinking, where plotlines, facts, and documentation, while important in life stories, are not as central as the perceptions and principles formed. We find these perceptions and principles in life stories when we are interested not only in the goal, but in the path taken to reach that goal. We forget what we have not long thought about. Thinking about identity is also identity. Identity is an individual's spiritual space.

For example, in exile individuals find themselves outside of space and time. But in internal exile one is able to keep another time and space alive (for example, the Ethnographic Open Air Museum). At the same time, the person continues to live in the present, all the while accepting that neither time nor space is real. Then the individual lives in middle reality, between 'was' and 'will be', but lives now.

In conclusion, I would like to mention Martin Heidegger's *Holzwege* (Heidegger 1980), because the life story is also a methodology, or a path similar to Heidegger's firewood path, which leads nowhere, but which leads only out. But what else could be a path to the roots of the individual, to the nation, to the region and to the roots of identity as the foundation of the human world. This path leads not to possibilities to change but to opportunities to create anew.

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