Alenka Koron*

Narrative space in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*: A narratological perspective

<https://doi.org/10.1515/fns-2018-0028>

Abstract: Although the work of Ian McEwan, one of the most important modern British writers, has been quite thoroughly researched, the narrative space was rarely the subject of narratological treatment. This article tackles a close reading of McEwan's novel *Saturday* from a narratological perspective testing the applicability of a series of spatial categories systematized by Marie-Laure Ryan in the already existing narratological tradition and in her own research in narrative space. At the macro level of the story, the circular structure of the novel and the concepts of space as a container and space as a network are being shown and so is the use of local names. In the foreground there is a discussion of the five fundamental levels of narrative space (spatial frames, setting, story space and spaces of intertextuality, storyworld, narrative universe), followed by the treatment of textualization at the micro level (perspectivism and aperspectivism, map, and tour, and the lived experience of space). The analysis of space representation in *Saturday* eventually makes it possible to conclude that McEwan promotes the conception of space that became prominent within the spatial turn in postmodern humanities.

Keywords: Marie-Laure Ryan, postmodernism, spatial turn

Ian McEwan is considered one of the most important contemporary British writers. His work has attracted widespread scholarly interest both with its thematic diversity and the author's mastery of the adopted literary techniques and strategies. This can also be said of the novel *Saturday*, which, on 280 pages, records 24 hours in the life of its central character, with the focus remaining on the protagonist's consciousness and his interactions with the world, in spite of a number of incidents and occasional dramatic action. Literary critics have highlighted some important elements in *Saturday*, which is regarded as a mature work

*Corresponding author: Alenka Koron, Institute of Slovene Literature and Literary Studies at the ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana (Research Centre of Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts, Slovenia),
E-Mail: koron@zrc-sazu.si

that “provides the most affirmative ending of McEwan’s novels” (Möller 2011: 190): Dominic Head, for example, made reference to a “global political context that will surely endure” (Head 2007: 180), but also analysed other key themes in the text (the Two Cultures Debate, the issue of literature and science), as well as its stylistic and technical features (Head 2007: 184–208); in her article “Ian McEwan’s Modernist Time”, Laura Marcus reflected on time and the experience of temporality, while Sebastian Groes interpreted the author’s representation of a modern metropolis as a complex “meditation on the state of the world in the early 21st century” (Groes 2009: 99); Swantje Möller found the author’s novels, including *Saturday*, to be “fictional expressions of an ethics of alterity” (Möller 2011: 187); in her paper “Ian McEwan’s Neurological Novel”, Jane F. Thraikill interpreted *Saturday* as a neurological novel; having adopted narratological analysis in her study “Narrative Temporality and Slowed Scene: The Interaction of Event and Thought Representation in Ian McEwan’s Fiction”, Hannah Courtney demonstrated the presence and use of *slowed scene* in *Saturday*, as well as in certain other works; Marco Caracciolo treated the effectiveness of the phenomenological metaphor in communicating the character’s experiences to the readers; finally, in *Beyond the Archive; Memory, Narrative and the Autobiographical Process* (Caracciolo 2013: 129–169), Jens Brockmeier investigated *Saturday* as a model example of an alternative memory model that he called an autobiographical process.

This list of scholarly treatments of *Saturday* by literary critics is, of course, by no means exhaustive. Initial exposure is even given to the problem of space and spatiality in the novel (see Shen & Cheng 2016; Lin 2013), a topic that has generally been neglected when compared to the treatment of time in narrative (Buchholz & Jahn 2005: 551). The secondary position taken by analyses of narrative space relative to analyses of time is somewhat surprising given that space and time, as a priori forms of perception, are the two basic categories that structure human experience in Kant’s philosophy. And according to Monika Fludernik (1996), experience is at the heart of each and every narrative. However, narrative space, as an umbrella term for settings, interiors and exteriors, cities, landscapes and the natural environment, was long regarded primarily as a backdrop for literary characters and their actions, which is why literary scholarship has not developed as many categories for spatial analysis as for representations of time (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 16–7). Nonetheless, in literary criticism in general and narratology in particular, space has not been completely overlooked (Dennerlein 2009: 13–47, 210–17). The foundations for the analysis of space and its representations were established by immanent interpretation, the investigation of topoi, and thematology, which, inter alia, treated nature motifs in Romanticism and the history of spatial matter and motifs, tradition-related allusions to natural processes, *locus amoenus*, etc. The tradition was further developed by

semiotics, in particular, and by various phenomenological approaches (see Nünning 2004), some of which also inspired narratology.

Narrative space is a polysemic phenomenon (see Parker 2012/2014) and is not easily defined, as it quickly leads to metaphorical or excessively abstract interpretations. However, it does seem that the following frequently cited definition has succeeded in avoiding this pitfall: “Narrative space is the environment in which story-internal characters move and live” (Buchholz & Jahn 2005: 552; Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 7). Space as the physical environment of narrative has attracted the most attention in narratology, which has addressed its textual aspects – the question of how narrative tools are used to guide the reader to the perception of space – as well as the symbolic and functional aspects of space that affect its role in plot. Space involves the following features of fictional settings (which can also exhibit features of real-world referents) and the placement of characters in individual scenes: location, position, arrangement, distance, direction, orientation and movement. The notion of place, which denotes settings transformed by human activity and existence, is also in use, as is the related concept of sense of place, which refers to the emotional bonds that people develop in relation to certain locations, cities or wider (social) environments.

In what follows, the present study considers space in McEwan's *Saturday* from the narratological perspective, drawing mainly on Marie-Laure Ryan's article “Space” in the *Handbook of Narratology*, and on Chapter 2 of the collective monograph *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative*, which is also largely Ryan's work (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 15). In both contributions, Ryan relied on her own research on the theory of possible worlds and a close reading of Joyce's *Eveline*, as well as on newly systematised literary and narrative theoretical findings regarding space in narrative. Before undertaking the analysis, a brief summary of the story of the novel is provided.

With mostly internally focused narration, written predominantly in the present tense and in free indirect discourse, *Saturday* depicts the thoughts and actions of its protagonist, the well-off upper-middle-class neurosurgeon Henry Perowne, as he moves through his day from the early morning hours of Saturday, 15 February 2003, to approximately the same time the next day. The story is set in London on the day of the largest protest in British history, in which over a million people marched against the government's planned invasion of Iraq. These “external”, historical events constantly invade Perowne's calm, well-protected “inner” world in various ways, via his own thoughts, media messages and their commentaries, or debates with other characters, disrupting his usual feelings of security. Perowne's day starts before dawn, when he suddenly wakes up in very good spirits but soon after witnesses a burning plane attempting an emergency landing from the bedroom window of his house in Fitzrovia, the image of which is

based on McEwan's private home (Groes 2009: 101). He initially thinks that it might be a terrorist attack, but it later turns out it was just a manageable technical failure on a Russian cargo plane. After chatting with his son Theo, he makes love to his wife Rosalind and plans a relaxed day off with his usual game of squash at the club. On his way through London, however, his usual route is changed due to the anti-war protests and, having driven across a road sealed off for protests, he is involved in a minor car accident. After his game of squash, he pays a visit to his mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's disease and lives in an old people's home, and attends his son's blues band concert. He then returns home for a family gathering at which his daughter Daisy and father-in-law John Grammaticus are also present. The dark presentiments that have haunted Perowne throughout the day as a result of the morning scene with the burning plane and the incidents that followed materialise when Rosalind arrives home. At that point, the whole family is taken hostage by the thug Baxter, the driver of the second car involved in the morning accident, whom Perowne has diagnosed with Huntington's disease. Baxter is aided by his sidekick Nigel. The family successfully defend themselves against the intruders, but just a few hours later Perowne is called in to operate on Baxter, the very man with whom he had got into a conflict that morning and who had threatened his entire family in the evening. After the successful operation, Perowne returns to his sleeping wife in the early hours of next morning. The last pages of the novel are dedicated to his meditation on life, happiness, and the uncertainty of the world.

If we observe the text at the level of the story, the circular structure of an individual's day in a big city is evident. This theme – for which McEwan may have drawn examples from the traditions of two hypercanonical city texts by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf: *Ulysses* (1922) and *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) (Marcus 2009: 85) – is in fact indicated already in the introductory epigraph from Saul Bellow's *Herzog* (1964). If we focus on space representation, however, we can see that, at the macro level of the general organisation of the text, it is a case of a "tour" – "a description of space from the point of view of a moving observer who visits location in a temporal sequence" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 8–9) – rather than of a much rarer "map", that is, a representation of space "as seen from a fixed, elevated point of view that affords the observer a totalizing, simultaneous perception of the relations between objects" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 9). The text is divided into five sections, each of which is further subdivided into between five and seven subchapters, delineated by spacing. It can be observed that almost every subchapter begins or ends with spatial movement or the motion of one of the characters.

Following Ryan, it is possible to treat two additional conceptions of space at the macro level: space as a container and space as a network. "[T]he container

metaphor presents space as a bounded environment that encloses the subject", which is why it can "stand either for security and attachment to one's surroundings, or for passivity and entrapment" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 19). This is in opposition to space as a network, which is a "dynamic system of relations that allows movement" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 19) and is often actively created by the subject, the city being its typical realisation. The dramatic tension of the plot in *Saturday* can be related to the interplay between the Newtonian cosmology-based container conception of space and the Leibnizian relational, space-as-network conception: while the emotionally fulfilling sense of space implied by the container metaphor is associated with the security of Perowne's London home and the manageability of his routine interiors (such as his squash club, the silver Mercedes that takes him around the city, the old people's home where he visits his mother), while the protest-ridden urban environment and the thugs invading his home relate to the city incidents threatening his daily routine and breaking down the established order. Nevertheless, this juxtaposition of the home and the city, and of the various conceptions of space, is not black and white; Perowne is filled with pleasant emotions when he wakes up unexpectedly and catches an early morning glimpse of the city:

Standing here, as immune to the cold as a marble statue, gazing towards Charlotte Street, towards a foreshortened jumble of façades, scaffolding and pitched roofs, Henry thinks the city is a success, a brilliant invention, a biological masterpiece – millions teeming around the accumulated and layered achievements of the centuries, as though around a coral reef, sleeping, working, entertaining themselves, harmonious for the most part, nearly everyone wanting it to work. And the Perownes' own corner, a triumph of congruent proportion; the perfect square laid out by Robert Adam enclosing a perfect circle of garden – an eighteenth-century dream bathed and embraced by modernity, by street light from above, and from below by fibre-optic cables, and cool fresh water coursing down pipes, and sewage borne away in an instant of forgetting. (McEwan 2005: 5)

When, at the end of the novel, Perowne is again looking out of the window, his mood is changed and he has a presentiment of a future terrorist attack. Indeed, the city evokes a sense of place completely different from the initial enthusiasm. Taking everything into account, his sense of anxiety is not only a result of the memory of the burning plane he had seen in the sky early that morning, but also of the other events that had unfolded in the course of the day: "London, his small part of it, lies wide open, impossible to defend, waiting for its bomb, like a hundred other cities. Rush hour will be convenient time. It might resemble the Paddington crash – twisted rails, buckled, upraised commuter coaches, stretchers handed out through broken windows, the hospital's Emergency Plan in action. Berlin, Paris, Lisbon. The authorities agree, an attack's inevitable. He lives in different times – because the newspapers say so doesn't mean it isn't true. But

from the top of his day, this is a future that's harder to read, a horizon indistinct with possibilities" (McEwan 2005: 276).

The use of place names, streets and squares in the novel is in opposition to the abstract spatial locations and conceptions mentioned so far. Place names (Fitzrovia, Charlotte Street, Euston Road, Warren Street, Tottenham Court Road, Cleveland Street, etc.) are borrowed from real-world geography and imply the placement of the story in a specific setting: London. Although not explicitly named at the beginning of the novel, the setting is alluded to by the cover, which features a house in Fitzrovia, a well-known London neighbourhood, with the Post Office Tower in the background. Many other place names are explicitly referred to in the story, such as Trieste, Oakland, Hamburg, Val d'Isère, the Pyrenees, Bilbao, Rome, Newcastle, New York, the United States, Florida, Iraq, Israel, China, Palestine, etc. Ryan assumes that all such names enter the story with their referents by the principle of minimal departure, that is, a principle that "urges readers to build their mental representations of fictional worlds on the basis of their life experience and knowledge of the world as long as this knowledge is not contradicted by the text" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 20). When the story world combines real-world locations and imaginary locations, readers imagine the latter as undetermined areas of real-world geography, which, nevertheless, remains unchanged.

Ryan has systematised five basic levels of narrative space, which can also be observed in *Saturday*. The first of the suggested levels is spatial frames, defined as "the immediate surroundings of the characters", as "shifting scenes of action" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 24): when characters move, spatial frames can also change, flowing one into another. While spatial frames are organised in a hierarchical way based on the relation of subsumption (e.g., the bedroom, the kitchen and the library are subspaces of the house, the street and the square are a sub-site of the cityscape), the borders between them can be clear-cut (the spaces in the house are separated from one another by a staircase) or fuzzy (as characters move through the cityscape it can slowly change). An interesting example of the fuzzy mixing of spatial frames occurring as a result of the inner focalisation of the narrative is the following passage describing Perowne's drive through London streets while he listens to pleasant music; the view from the car conjures up a transformation of the inner city streets, which is followed by a switch to Perowne's mental world and an insight into how he feels:

Shamelessly, he always enjoys the city from inside his car where the air is filtered and hi-fi music confers pathos on the humblest details – a Schubert string trio is dignifying the narrow street he's slipping down now. He's heading a couple of blocs south in order to loop eastwards across the Tottenham Court Road. Cleveland Street used to be known for garment sweatshops

and prostitutes. Now it has Greek, Turkish and Italian restaurants – the local sort that never get mentioned in the guides – with terraces where people eat out in summer. There's a man who repairs old computers, a fabric shop, a cobbler's and further down, a wig emporium, much visited by transvestites. This is the fair embodiment of an inner city byway – diverse, self-confident, obscure. And it's at this point he remembers the source of his vague sense of shame or embarrassment: his readiness to be persuaded that the world has changed beyond recall, that harmless streets like this and the tolerant life they embody can be destroyed by the new enemy – well-organised, tentacular, full of hatred and focused zeal. (McEwan 2005: 76)

In general, *Saturday* seems to be characterised by an absence of abrupt spatial cuts in the narrative, provided we disregard the frequent shifts into the explicitly mental, associative, memory-related, cognitive and emotional register introduced in the final paragraph as: “And it's at this point he remembers ...”. The movement of characters in space – both interior and exterior – is indeed well documented. Thus a reader who knows London well or who uses a city map can trace the characters' movement in the city traffic, which is so crucially affected by the historic protest campaign against the war in Iraq.

The next level of narrative space is setting, which, in contrast to spatial frames that often change, is defined as a “relatively stable socio-historico-geographic category that embraces the entire text” (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 24). In line with this definition, the setting in *Saturday* can be designated as post-9/11, upper-middle-class London on a specific day in the early 21st century.

Ryan's third category is labelled story space. This is “the space relevant to the plot, as mapped by the actions and thoughts of the characters” (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 24). It contains all of the space frames and locations mentioned in the text that are not the scene of the actual unfolding events, including all of the real-world locations referred to by place names. Indeed, *Saturday*'s story space contains a vast number of locations, among others the rooms of the house in Fitzrovia, (most likely) a fictional Chateaux St Felix under the Pyrenees where John Grammaticus had retreated from London, a number of London streets and squares, as well as newspaper offices that Perowne visualises with his eyes closed: “With eyes closed he sees the newspaper offices, the curled-edged coffee-stained carpet tiles, the ferocious heating system that bleeds boiling rusty water, the receding phalanxes of fluorescent lights illuminating the chaotic corners, the piles of paper that no one touches, for no one cares to know what they contain, what they are for, and the overinhabited desks pushed too close together. It's the spirit of school art room. Everyone too hard-pressed to start sorting through the old dust heaps” (McEwan 2005: 122).

To the story space can be added spaces of intertextuality; this is very rich in *Saturday*, as Groes has demonstrated, having documented more than thirty references to writers from various periods of time, from antiquity to modern times

(Groes 2009: 102). The variety of references range from direct citations, through the construction of parallels, to echoes and allusions, among which an allusion to McEwan's own novel *The Child in Time* (1988) can be found on the list of the literary inventions of magic realism that Perowne rejects as unacceptable to his taste: "One visionary saw through a pub window his parents as they had been some weeks after his conception, discussing the possibility of aborting him" (McEwan 2005: 67). Furthermore, many references to musicians, painters and other artists can be found, as well as to sociologists, philosophers, etc. Perowne likes music, but he is not an aficionado of literature. Nonetheless, his daughter, who has studied literature in Oxford, is willing to educate him in the field, so he diligently studies the recommended texts and thinks about them in a way that reveals McEwan's witty empathy towards an intellectual who is not sensitised to literature:

[William] James had the knack of fixing on a surprising common place – and in Perowne's humble view, wrote a better-honed prose than the fussy brother who would rather run round a thing a dozen different ways than call it by its name. Daisy, the arbiter of his literary education, would never agree. She wrote a long undergraduate essay on Henry James's late novels and can quote a passage from *The Golden Bowl*. She also knows dozens of poems by heart which she learned in her early teens, a means of earning pocket money from her grandfather. Her training was so different from her father's. No wonder they like their disputes. What Daisy knows! At her prompting, he tried the one about the little girl suffering from her parents' vile divorce. A promising subject, but poor Maisie soon vanished behind a cloud of words, and at page forty-eight Perowne, who can be on his feet seven hours for a difficult procedure, who has his name down for the London Marathon, fell away exhausted. (McEwan 2005: 58)

Intertextuality is also crucial for the action dimension of the novel. The central conflict between Perowne's family and Baxter, who is a kind of representative of London as a city of darkness, such as McEwan often portrayed in his early works, is initially won by the family in the very field of literature. Indeed, Baxter is so overwhelmed by Daisy's double recitation of *Dover Beach* by Matthew Arnold (thinking it is her own poem) that he becomes distracted from her naked body stripped under threat and is again ready to talk about the treatment of his illness. It is only this twist that allows Perowne and Theo to finally contain Baxter.

A fourth level of the narrative space is the storyworld, defined by Ryan as the "story space completed by the reader's imagination on the basis of the principle of minimal departure" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 24). While the story space is constituted by places separated by empty spaces, the storyworld of mimetic texts, including *Saturday*, is formed by means of imagination as a coherent, uniform, ontologically complete and real-world geographical entity populated by all of the locations that are unnamed in the text. When the story relates to both

real and imaginary locations, the storyworld, according to Ryan, superimposes text-specific locations on real-world geography. Even in stories with a completely imaginary location, such as J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, readers can assume that – as is the case for a real-world landscape or parts of the world – there is a continuity of the story space between the sites named in the text, even though they cannot fill this space with any specific geographical traits.

The last category of narrative space is narrative universe, which, as stated by Ryan, includes “the world presented as actual by the text, plus all the counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams, fantasies and imaginative creations” (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 25). While surrounded by the individual universes of the characters, the “actual” world here subsumes the external, physical facts stated by the narrator; as *Saturday*'s author insists on the inner focalisation of the central character, these are, of course, above all the potential worlds arising from Perowne's own mind. Given that Perowne is an atheist, a rationalist and a very down-to-earth man who does not give in to reveries, and because we follow him while he is awake in the novel, there are perhaps fewer of these worlds than we would expect. Nevertheless, when listening to Theo's music he is transported to a different world, one that is better than the real world and that is even marked as impossible:

No longer tired, Henry comes away from the wall where he's been leaning, and walks into the middle of the dark auditorium, towards the great engine of sound. He lets it engulf him. There are these rare moments when musicians together touch something sweeter than they've ever found before in rehearsals or performance, beyond the merely collaborative or technically proficient, when their expression becomes as easy and graceful as friendship or love. This is when they give us a glimpse of what we might be, of our best selves, and of an impossible world in which you give everything you have to others, but lose nothing of yourself. Out in the real world there exist detailed plans, visionary projects for peaceable realms, all conflicts resolved, happiness for everyone, for ever – mirages for which people are prepared to die and kill. Christ's kingdom on earth, the workers' paradise, the ideal Islamic state. But only in music, and only on rare occasions, does the curtain actually lift on this dream of community, and it is tantalisingly conjured before fading away with the last notes. (McEwan 2005: 171–72)

However, Perowne is a lot less sensitive to literature than he is to music. Despite his daughter's conscientious instruction, he has not made much progress. This is also reflected in his experience of the poem recited in dire circumstances, under Baxter's threat, by Daisy. Like Baxter, Perowne incorrectly concludes that Daisy has written it, while under pressure his experience is simultaneously flooded by arbitrary visions and constructions of possible worlds:

The lines surprise him – clearly, he hasn't been reading closely enough. They are unusually meditative, mellifluous and wilfully archaic. She's thrown herself back into another century. Now, in his terrified state, he misses and misconstrues much, but as her voice picks up a little and finds the beginnings of a quiet rhythm, he feels himself slipping through the words into the things they describe. He sees Daisy on a terrace overlooking a beach in summer moonlight; the sea is still and at high tide, the air scented, there's a final glow of sunset. She calls to her lover, surely the man who will one day father her child, to come and look, or, rather, listen to the scene. Perowne sees a smooth-skinned young man, naked to the waist, standing at Daisy's side. Together they listen to the surf roaring on the pebbles, and hear in the sound a deep sorrow which stretches right back to ancient times. She thinks there was another time, even further back, when the earth was new and the sea consoling, and nothing came between man and God. But this evening the lovers hear only sadness and loss in the sound of the waves breaking and retreating from the shore. She turns to him, and before they kiss she tells him that they must love each other and be faithful, especially now they're having a child, and when there's no peace or certainty, and when desert armies stand ready to fight. (McEwan 2005: 221)

However, McEwan does not stop at Perowne's experience of this poem; following Daisy's second rendering of the poem, he wittily suggests an entirely new possible world:

Henry missed first time the mention of the cliffs of England 'glimmering and vast out in a tranquil bay'. Now it appears there's no terrace, but an open window; there's no young man, father of the child. Instead he sees Baxter standing alone, elbows propped against the sill, listening to the waves 'bring the eternal note of sadness in'. It's not all of antiquity, but only Sophocles who associated this sound with the 'turbid ebb and flow of human misery'. Even in his state, Henry balks at the mention of a 'sea of faith' and a glittering paradise of wholeness lost in the distant past. Then once again, it's through Baxter's ears that he hears the sea's 'melancholy, long withdrawing roar, retreating, to the breath of the night wind, down the vast edges drear and naked shingles of the world'. It rings like a musical curse. The plea to be true to one another sounds hopeless in absence of joy or love or light or peace of 'help for pain'. Even in a world 'where ignorant armies clash by night', Henry discovers on second hearing no mention of a desert. The poem's melodiousness, he decides, is at odds with its pessimism. (McEwan 2005: 221–222)

When dealing with the textualisation of the narrative space at the micro level (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 25–27), Ryan's point of departure is Franz K. Stanzel, one of the first narratologists to tackle this issue. In *A Theory of Narrative*, Stanzel distinguishes two strategies of space description: perspectivism and aperspectivism. In his view, perspectivism is a representation of space that "encourages the reader's illusion of being directly and vividly presented with fictional reality" (Stanzel 1984: 123). This strategy allows the reader to come to conclusions about the locations of objects and their interrelationships. According to Stanzel, in a perspectivist description, which in general is typical of third-

person narrative with a focalising character, such as *Saturday*, the scene is described from a particular viewpoint, occupied either by the narrator or the focalising character. A good example of perspectivism is the description of Perowne's study and work desk, where he brings Baxter to finally distance him from the rest of his family and somehow contain him:

Henry hesitates for a moment on the threshold, hoping to see something he might use. The desk lamps have heavy bases, but their tangled wires will restrict him. On a bookshelf is a stone figurine he would have to go on tiptoe to reach. Otherwise, the room is like a museum, a shrine, dedicated to another, carefree age – on the couch covered with a Bukhara rug his squash racket lies where he tossed it when he came up to look at Monday's list. On the big table by the wall, the screen saver – those pictures from the Hubble telescope of remote outer space, gas clouds light years across, dying stars and red giants fail to diminish earthly cares. On the old desk by the window, piles of papers, perhaps the only hope. (McEwan 2005: 226)

In an aperspectivist description, on the other hand, “the interior of a room is never depicted in such a way that a graphic sketch can be made, even if the reader is given a more or less complete inventory of the objects in the room” (Stanzel 1984: 120). An aperspectivist depiction can be imagined as originating in a position floating freely in space (Dennerlein 2009: 151), with the impossibility of assigning perspective to an embodied human being located in one place. In this case, the perspective is a matter of non-corporeal, temporally and spatially undelineated consciousness, powered by memory or imagination. According to Stanzel, aperspectivism is more frequent in first-person narratives.

At the structural level discussed above, Ryan introduced the “map” and “tour” categories to represent space; these can be further distinguished at the micro level, where their hybrid variants are also identified. The circular structure of *Saturday* is characterised by “tour”, which also dominates at the micro level of the textualisation of the novel's narrative space. The same strategy is used for the description of the staircase and the front door of Perowne's house, with the door enabling communication with the outside world and, at the same time, acting as a kind of protective barrier:

He crosses the hallway, soothed by the cool touch of the smooth stone flags under his bare feet. On his way to the main stairs, he pauses by the double front doors. They give straight on to the pavement, on the street that leads into the square, and in his exhaustion they suddenly loom before him strangely with their accretions – three stout Banham locks, two black iron bolts as old as the house, two tempered steel security chains, a spyhole with a brass cover, the box of electronics that works the Entryphone system, the red panic button, the alarm pad with its softly gleaming digits. Such defences, such mundane embattlement: beware of the city's poor, the drug-addicted, the downright bad. (McEwan 2005: 36–7)

Along with Lotman and contemporary cognitive theoreticians, Ryan finds that space is an indispensable element of “plot” (this is how she translates the term *sjuzhet*), its universal feature, so to speak. In fact, it was Lotman who first argued that the language of spatial relations is one of the fundamental means of giving meaning to reality. He showed that it was possible to illustrate non-spatial structures by semanticising spatial opposites (e.g., high-low, left-right, near-far, open-closed) with values devoid of spatial content (e.g., precious-non-precious, good-bad, own-foreign, accessible-inaccessible). As Ryan puts it: “The human mind operates by associating these conceptual pairs with nonspatial ideas, using them as empty signifiers capable of being filled with a wide variety of meanings” (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 35). These pairs are conditioned by the basic concept of the border, “which structures storyworlds into differentiated zones obeying different rules” (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 36). Borders prohibit crossing, but prohibitions can be violated, and it is precisely the violation of a prohibition and the crossing of a border that provides the text with a key event, one that is crucial to its narrative success. According to Lotman, plot can always be reduced to the main episode, i.e., to the crossing of the basic topological border in its structure. Thus, in *Saturday*, the key episode can be recognised as the moment in which Perowne, with his silver Mercedes, drives into a street sealed off due to protests and has an accident, thus triggering an unprecedented sequence of events that threatens both his own safety and that of his family.

As noted above, there is a confrontation of two key conceptions of space in the novel – the container conception and the relational, network conception – which can be translated into two spatial relations: closed-open space and static-dynamic space. Their symbolic investments in *Saturday* may vary and depend on interpretive decisions. Safe-dangerous, good-bad, own-foreign, known-unknown, private-public are just some of the possibilities. In a more traditional diction, we could, for example, describe the central problem in the novel as a conflict between the private and the public, between the individual’s harmonious private sphere and the wider political, cultural and socially relevant topics of the 21st century, such as the pernicious danger of authoritarianism in contemporary democratic society. The main concern of the novel can also be interpreted through the ever-present ethical issue of personal engagement in the existing socio-political situation, or the question of how an individual should act at a given historical moment.

Space, on the other hand, is not just a universal, but also a particular feature of plot. The latter, Ryan argues, is in the function of the horizontal and vertical divisions of natural and cultural spaces. Spaces are horizontally organised by thematically relevant subspaces, such as walls, corridors, political borders, rivers and mountains, but also openings and passageways enabling communication

between the subspaces: doors, windows, roads, tunnels, mountain passes (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 38). Subspaces making communication possible are especially typical of *Saturday*, that is, openings or passageways, such as the bedroom windows at which Perowne is standing at the beginning and end of the novel, as well as the lobby and the staircase of his house, the front door with a detailed description of the house's anti-burglary systems, the city streets and squares through which Perowne drives, etc.

The narrative can also represent vertical divisions, which are related by Ryan to what Thomas Pavel called "salient ontologies". These ontologies create an ontology of layers in the narrative universe, while horizontal divisions divide the geography of the storyworld. Visible ontologies "can oppose the world of everyday life to a world of magic, dreams to reality, images to existents, or, in narratives with embedded stories, higher to lower levels of fictionality" (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016: 38), but they do not play a major role in *Saturday*. Perowne's world is based on a materialist, secular world view, and is explicable in terms of neurology and reason. Instead of embedded stories, we encounter embeddings in the representations of the process of his conscious activity or stream of consciousness, which reconstruct or recognise the memory of his past experiences, confer on them rational or emotional interpretations, respond to current reflexes or plan future actions; in its dynamic and synthesising action, the narrative continuously switches between these experiences, thus bringing together images, reflections, judgments, sensations and moods intermingled with interpretations and, above all, self-interpretations into what Brockmeier (Brockmeier 2015: 167–168) has called an autobiographical process. In this process, the experience of space and time – like that of selfhood – is fragmented.

It should be emphasised here, however, that McEwan did not use a very radical modernist discourse that would merely mimic the stream of consciousness; instead, representation is marked with a twist of irony, as is evident in the fact that "Perowne himself [is] being narrated by a fictional authorial presence" (Groes 2009: 104). More than once, it is suggested to the reader in the commentary that Perowne is only modestly perceptive, or in fact rather limited, with regard to the artistic idiosyncrasies of literary greatness, as can be inferred from the above quotations revealing his experience of the literary classics. In the process, the reader is "forced to collude with the curious voice, based in a complex language and referentiality narrating Perowne's consciousness from the inside while incessantly offering a commentary upon him" (Groes 2009: 104). No matter how carefully he or she reads, it may not always be possible to attach the voice to either one or the other, which makes any simplified interpretation of the relationship between Perowne and his narrator impossible, thus indicating the loss of narrative authority.

As argued by Ryan, a rich source of thematisation is offered by a live experience of space. “Some stories present space as closed and confining (prison narratives; Anne Frank’s diary), others as open and liberating (narratives of exploration; many travel narratives), and still others as open and alienating (stories of wandering aimlessly in a hostile environment; modern representations of the city)” (Ryan, Foote, and Azeryahu 2016: 38). While McEwan’s narrative discourse in *Saturday* seems comparable to representations of the city in *Ulysses* and *Mrs Dalloway*, it is, at the same time, too complex to be reduced to a single dominating urban experience. The least we can say is that the live experience of space in *Saturday* is ambivalent and dynamic, that it changes in the course of events, oscillating between pleasant and unpleasant, good and bad, bright and dark. In the opening scene of the novel, Perowne is seen to have an optimistic experience of the city as a harmonious and aesthetic achievement, “a brilliant invention” (McEwan 2005: 5), but almost immediately the view of the burning plane awakens a gloomy presentiment in him that he cannot get rid of all day. When he finds everything he needs for his fish soup in the fish shop, it actually occurs to him that this life of plenty comes from ever emptier seas, but he is nonetheless enthusiastic about the abundance on offer; with his eyes closed, he can see all of the urban defects that could only be remedied by pulling down buildings (McEwan 2005: 122), and yet he is delighted with some areas, such as those in the vicinity of his home, which provide full comfort and a richness of offer for consumers, without overlooking the waste they produce. Even though, in the end, the darker London is again happily under control in *Saturday*, the anguish and fear remain when Perowne looks through his bedroom window in the closing section of the novel, pointing to a post-9/11 era of uncertainty.

The analysis of the narrative space in McEwan’s novel *Saturday* thus gradually leads to a point where it can be argued that the novel engages in the new concept of space that, following the spatial turn, has become established in postmodern humanities. This space – like the author’s novelistic London – is not simply container-like or relational, but “open, infinite, relational, heterarchical, temporally multidimensional (the past, the present and the future enter in the same place), ontologically manifold (physical, imagined, virtual, actual, possible, discursive, lived, represented, etc.), but, most importantly, in the continuous, partly original (autopoetic) creation and transformation that hybridise the established and geometrically definable spatial realities with a flexibility of multidirectional flows and sites” (Juvan 2013: 10). Despite *Saturday*’s embeddedness in the tradition of the great modernist novels of the 20th century, the narratological perspective of the narrative space in the text unexpectedly highlights its postmodern embeddedness. Moreover, it seems that this perspective can go beyond

thematology and, in so doing, contribute to an analysis of the conventions and ideologies that intersect it.

References

- Brockmeier, Jens. 2015. *Beyond the archive: Memory, narrative and the autobiographical process*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Buchholz, Sabine & Manfred Jahn. 2005. Space in narrative. In David Herman, Manfred Jahn & Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of narrative theory*, 551–555. London: Routledge.
- Caracciolo, Marco. 2013. Phenomenological metaphors in readers' engagement with characters: The case of Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. *Language and Literature* 22(1). 60–76.
- Courtney, Hannah. 2011. Narrative temporality and slowed scene: The interaction of event and thought representation in Ian McEwan's fiction. *Narrative* 21(2). 180–197.
- Dennerlein, Katrin. 2009. *Narratologie des Raumes*. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter.
- Fludernik, Monika. 1996. *Towards a "natural" narratology*. London: Routledge.
- Groes, Sebastian. 2009. Ian McEwan and the modernist consciousness of the city in *Saturday*. In Sebastian Groes (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Contemporary Critical Perspective*, 99–114. London: Continuum.
- Head, Dominic. 2007. *Ian McEwan*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Juvan, Marko. 2013. Prostorski obrat, literarna veda in slovenska književnost: Uvodni zaris. [The spatial turn, literary studies, and slovenian literature: An Introductory Outline]. *Primerjalna književnost* 36(2). 1–26.
- Lin, Li. 2013. Interpreting the spatial narrative in Ian McEwan's *Saturday*. *Contemporary Foreign Literature* 15(2). 1–2.
- Marcus, Laura. 2009. Ian McEwan's modernist time: *Atonement* and *Saturday*. In Sebastian Groes (ed.), *Ian McEwan: Contemporary critical perspective*, 83–98. London: Continuum.
- McEwan, Ian. 2005. *Saturday*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Möller, Swantje. 2011. *Coming to terms with crisis: Disorientation and reorientation in the novels of Ian McEwan*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Nünning, Ansgar. 2004. Raum/Raumdarstellung, literarische(r). In Ansgar Nünning (ed.), *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie*, 558–560. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Parker, Joshua. 2012/2014. Conceptions of place, space and narrative: Past, present and future. *Amsterdam International Electronic Journal for Cultural Narratology*. 7–8. http://cf.hum.uva.nl/narratology/issue/7/a12_Joshua_Parker.html [accessed 12 September 2018].
- Ryan, Mary-Laure. 2009. Space. In Peter Hühn, John Pier, Wolf Schmidt & Jörg Schöner (eds.), *Handbook of narratology*, 420–433. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Ryan, Mary-Laure, Kenneth Foote & Maoz Azaryahu. 2016. *Narrating space/spatializing narrative: Where narrative theory and geography meet*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press.
- Stanzel, Franz K. 1984. *A theory of narrative*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Shen, Yuan & Xue Cheng. 2016. An analysis of Ian McEwan's *Saturday* from the perspective of space. *Studies in Literature and Language* 12(6). 47–53.
- Thraikill, Jane F. 2011. Ian McEwan's neurological novel. *Poetics Today* 32 (1). 171–201.