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Landscape of Placelessness: Soviet Propaganda and Space in 1930s American Travelogues

ABSTRACT. Olena Yufereva, *Landscape of Placelessness: Soviet Propaganda and Space in 1930s American Travelogues* [Krajobraz bezmiejscowości: radziecka propaganda i przestrzeń w amerykańskich relacjach z podróży z lat 30. XX wieku]. „Przestrzenie Teorii" 43. Poznań 2025, Adam Mickiewicz University Press, pp. 265–284. ISSN 1644-6763. https://doi.org/10.14746/pt.2025.43.14.

This article examines the influence of propaganda on the construction of space in the travelogues of Will Rogers and Jay Norwood Darling, two American travelers to the USSR. Their works, "There's not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts" (1927) and "Ding Goes to Russia" (1932), have received limited scholarly attention and have not been previously analyzed within this critical framework. The paper aims to conduct a geocritical interpretation of the Soviet socio-political landscape as represented in the travelogues of Will Rogers and Jay Norwood Darling. A key objective of this study is to define the core approaches to the concept of "propaganda space" based on the spatial and place-based theories of T. Cresswell, M. Auger, and E. Relph. Given the specificity of the studied material, this research employed a combined approach to geocritical analysis, incorporating both geocentered (B. Westphal) and egocentric (R. Tally) perspectives. By focusing on how propaganda's influence in displacing the anthropological place and replacing it with a "place-doxa" (industrial projects, proletarian streets, museums), the narrators conceptualize the Soviet landscape as a realm of placelessness, highlighting its functions of manipulation, coercion, othering, constraint, and the erosion of individual space.

KEYWORDS: travelogue, landscape, propaganda, space, place, placelessness

Introduction

Scholars often describe propaganda as monopolizing an idea presented as "truth" while marginalizing dissenting views. However, they struggle to define this phenomenon precisely. The terminological vagueness – synonymous with various forms of mass communication, from advertising to disinformation – serves as the starting point for almost every study on the subject. Regime-specific propaganda forms help clarify the scope of study. For example, A. Pisch proposed a definition synthesizing the phenomena of propaganda and agitation. Developed from an analysis of Stalinist propaganda, this definition interprets propaganda as the manipulation of

language and symbols to achieve an ideological or social goal[1]. The diverse goals and functions of propaganda determined its dynamic and expansive nature; it actively shaped landscapes and subordinated them to ideological objectives.

Modern spatial studies analyze the influence of ideology on the urban environment, particularly regarding the propaganda of totalitarian regimes. The urban landscape did not merely serve as decoration; it significantly mediated political and cultural discourse. Propaganda and the promotion of a new collectivity were expressed as effectively through street planning as in newspapers or radio[2]. In the USSR, architectural solutions, neighborhood redevelopment, and the restructuring of urban centers and peripheries aligned with the political program. The creation of new cities symbolized a new social and political order. Unification and the elimination of differences between city districts were among the strategies used to realize the promoted socio-ideological goal of a classless society[3].

Among Western travelers to the USSR during the Stalinist period, many intellectuals, attracted by official ideologies, constructed narratives reinforcing the notion of a "manufacture of consent"[4]. They viewed the uniformity of the landscape as a manifestation of a just system. However, some recognized the regime's excessive self-promotion and the discrepancies between its image and reality, perceiving the landscape as fragmented and asymmetrical. Notable among these observers were Will Rogers and Jay Norwood Darling, who satirically depicted the mechanisms of propaganda in their works *There's Not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts* (1927) and *Ding Goes to Russia* (1932). Given the historical differences between 1926 and 1932, the travelers' observations allow for an analysis of the noticeable expansion and deepening of ideological influence over time.

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[1] A. Pisch, *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953: Archetypes, Inventions and Fabrications Acton*, Acton 2016, p. 28.

[2] In particular, see the following works: D. Atkinson, *Totalitarianism and the Street in Fascist Rome*, [in:] *Images of the Street: Planning, Identity and Control in Public Space*, ed. N.R. Fyfe, London 1998, p. 13–30; R. Giannantonio, *Fascism / Urbanism: Town, New-Town, Non-Town*, [in:] *Architecture as Propaganda in Twentieth-Century Totalitarian Regimes. History and Heritage*, ed. H. Hökerberg, Florence 2018, s. 107–133: J. Hagen, *Parades, Public Space, and Propaganda: The Nazi Culture Parades in Munich*, "Geografiska Annaler" 2008, *Series B, Human Geography*, vol. 90, no 4, p. 349–367.

[3] B. Engel, *The Concept of the Socialist City. Plans and Patterns of Soviet Urbanism*, "International Planning History Society Proceedings", 19th IPHS Conference, City-Space-Transformation, TU Delft Open 2022, https://journals.open.tudelft.nl/iphs/article/view/6516/5350 (accessed: 10.02.2025).

[4] E.S. Herman, N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of Mass Media*, London 1994.

Both texts emphasize significant structures, enriching their visual elements with caricature. The satirical elements serve as a parodic response to propaganda hyperbole and caricatures of the Western world.

W. Rogers and J.N. Darling were highly popular figures in America. Rogers was a comic actor, satirical writer, and journalist whose six humorous books are considered by researchers as a continuation of Mark Twain's tradition[5]. Darling, a journalist and cartoonist, was beloved by millions of Americans for his gentle social criticism[6]. His drawing style inspired subsequent generations of cartoonists.

In the illustrations for Rogers's travelogue, the narrator is depicted as a cowboy, a figure easily recognizable to American audiences due to the author's stage persona and journalistic activities. However, this depiction may now seem like an oversimplified representation of a complex identity, given Rogers's Native American heritage[7]. Additionally, the visual design of *There's Not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts* was not created by the author. Instead, illustrator and political cartoonist Herb Roth provided the visual accompaniment for the first edition, aiming to highlight the text's most satirical elements. Furthermore, Darling, influenced by these illustrations, incorporated visual references in his own travelogue, demonstrating the ongoing development of propaganda. Darling's familiarity with Rogers's work is also evident in the openly ironic polemic between their texts regarding Soviet reality.

Therefore, this study examines how propaganda shapes spatial constructs in the works of authors who are culturally, linguistically, and geographically removed from the propaganda field. These authors identified zones of influence through spatial forms such as posters, monuments, the layout of working-class neighborhoods, and related practices, all of which contributed to a new symbolic landscape. This research aims to geocritically analyze the Soviet socio-political landscape as portrayed in the travelogues of Rogers and Darling, highlighting its heterogeneity. It explores how propaganda structures spatial levels to reshape human perceptions of place.

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[5] For more information on Rogers's work see: P.E. Alworth, *Will Rogers*, New York 1974; H.L. Meredith, *Beyond Humor: Will Rogers And Calvin Coolidge*, "Vermont History" 1972, vol. 40, no 3; R. Velikova, *Will Rogers's Indian Humor*, "Studies in American Indian Literatures" 2007, vol. 19, no 2.

[6] Ch. Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes: the Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons*, New York 2004, p. 94.

[7] A.M. Ware, *Unexpected Cowboy, Unexpected Indian: The Case of Will Rogers*, "Ethnohistory" 2009, vol. 56, no 1, p. 24.

Methodology

The methodological foundations of this study draw on interdisciplinary analytical strategies from cultural geography. The specificity of the material necessitates integrating two geocritical approaches: the geocentric approach (B. Westphal) and the egocentric approach (R. Tally). The challenge in combining these methods arises from their fundamentally divergent perspectives.

In the geocentric approach, geocritical analysis prioritizes space over a specific narrative or authorial vision. B. Westphal outlines four key principles of geocritical research: multifocalization, polysensory perception, stratigraphic vision, and intertextuality[8]. Multifocalization requires considering multiple authors or texts to conceptualize a place and avoid one-sided conclusions. To adhere to this principle, this study conducts a comparative analysis of travelogues by two individuals who visited the Soviet Union at different times during the Stalinist regime.

The principle of polysensory perception highlights the dialectical interaction between narratives, reality, and the perception of space. This study incorporates discursive and imagological methods to analyze Soviet realities and propaganda, particularly how Soviet space was received within the American sociocultural context. The third and fourth principles, which emphasize a comprehensive approach to spatial interpretations, are applied through a combination of genre and narrative analysis to examine textual representations of Soviet cities, as well as intermedial and intertextual analysis of the works' verbal and visual components.

The egocentric approach emphasizes the experience of the "other" – the outsider – as a crucial factor in shaping the perception of place. Ignoring this aspect can lead to biased interpretations, a concern raised by Westphal. According to Tally, geocritical methodology must consider "the experience of place and movement while exploring the relationships between lived experience and the more abstract or non-representational spatial network that imperceptibly or directly shapes it"[9]. In an earlier work, Tally argues that geocriticism examines how our spatial positioning influences the nature and quality of our existence. It highlights the inherent spatiality of human experience while directing critical attention to literary and non-literary texts that shape our sense of place[10]. To implement the approach, the study incorporates anthropological concepts of space.

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[8] B. Westphal, *Geocriticism. Real and Fictional Spaces*, New York 2011.

[9] R.T. Tally, *Introduction: Mapping Narratives*, [in:] *Literary Cartographies: Spatiality, Representation, and Narrative*, ed. R.T. Tally, New York 2014.

[10] *Idem*, *Introduction: On Geocriticism*, [in:] *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. *idem*, New York 2011, p. 8.

Space and Place in Geocritical Discussions: Anthropological Approaches

In spatial studies, *place* and *space* are not synonymous[11]. In the 1970s, a growing recognition of the role of social and cultural practices, representations, and imagination in shaping space helped clarify the difference between these concepts. E. Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976), in particular, presents an anthropological perspective on landscapes as assemblages of places imbued with a strong sense of belonging (a "sense of place")[12]. Relph's spatial framework offers valuable insights for examining the relationship between space, power, and human interaction with place.

Augé's concept of *non-place* is often compared to Relph's notion of *placelessness*. Placelessness emerges when distinctive places are erased, reflecting the influence of centralized state power that imposes standardized, impersonal planning. It has little connection to a location's geographical specificity, as it is shaped by abstract, preordained models. Engaging in dialogue with Augé, Relph introduces the idea of spatial hybridity, asserting that "the possibility of place is never absent in any non-place"[13]. This conceptual exchange offers valuable heuristic insights for analyzing totalitarian space. For instance, M. Arefi explains the transition from non-place to placelessness by drawing on E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger's thesis on *invented traditions*[14]. Like non-place, placelessness represents a narrative of loss, where the diminished *sense of place* is replaced by an imposed tradition. Unlike authentic traditions, these "invented" traditions cultivate a borrowed sense of attachment and a constructed identity among inhabitants[15].

The concept of *out-of-place* illustrates the intersection of social power and resistance, which, according to T. Cresswell, invariably manifests spatially[16]. The foundation of new cultural geography is based on the premise

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[11] Their distinctions have been explored in depth by scholars such as R. Freestone, E. Liu, *Revisiting Place and Placeless*, [in:] *Place and Placeless Revisited*, ed. R. Freestone, London – New York 2016; J. Duncan, D. Ley, *Introduction, Representing the Place of Culture*, [in:] *Place/Culture/Representation*, ed. *eidem*, London – New York 2005; Ph. Hubbard, *Place/Space. Cultural Geography*, [in:] *A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, ed. D. Atkinson, London – New York 2005.

[12] E. Relph, *Place and Placelessness*, London 1976.

[13] *Idem*, *The Paradox of Place and the Evolution of Placelessness*, [in:] *Place and Placeless Revisited*, ed. R. Freestone, New York 2016, s. 28.

[14] E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge 1983.

[15] M. Arefi, *Non-place and Placelessness as Narratives of Loss: Rethinking the Notion of Place*, "Journal of Urban Design" 1999, vol. 4, no 2.

[16] T. Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place. Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*, Minneapolis–London 1996, p. 11.

that place is shaped through cultural confrontation. Cresswell expands on this idea within radical cultural geography, explaining how place functions as a dynamic force in the struggle for hegemony and counter-hegemony. Drawing on A. Gramsci, Cresswell interprets hegemony as a taken-for-granted meaning – common sense – that permeates everyday reality more deeply than formal political discourse.

Despite their differing perspectives, Cresswell's and Relph's interpretations of place and space converge in significant ways. Cresswell argues that spatial structures and place systems promote ideologically charged "perception schemes", which shape ideas of "worthiness" or "appropriateness" that individuals internalize through their actions within those spaces. This suggests that place is created, maintained, and perpetuated through practice and adherence to established norms, rather than through indifference or detachment. Place goes beyond being a mere reflection of ideology; it actively participates in meaning-making. It establishes rules, and non-compliance is seen as deviant behavior. Only outsiders perceive the "messages" of places differently.

Thus, a theoretical framework for propaganda space emerges within a specific historical context. This spatial system, despite the hyperbole and grandiosity of Soviet propaganda, imparts, through fictionalized places, signs of normality, acceptable behavior, and an organic rhythm to ideological directives. It permeates all levels of daily life and is reproduced through active participation and practice, rather than passive observation.

The reinterpretation of the concept of "landscape" is rooted in spatial, temporal, and social interdependence. The sense of belonging to one's space, or "home", and recognizing what does not belong to it, is one of the broad approaches to defining landscape. Buildings, parks, sculptures, bridges, churches – all these elements contribute to the semiotization of space, a process shaped by literary texts, art, museums, and tourism[17]. J. Urry expands on this concept in a similar direction, defining landscape as the world familiar to those who live in these places – past, present, and future – whose practical activities unfold across its various dimensions and paths[18]. Urry's work provides an intriguing lens for examining landscape perception by both insiders and outsiders. He focuses on the space of consumption, where places acquire meaning through complex spatial politics. According to this study, "insiders" and "outsiders" are not easily separated in consumption space. However, this distinction becomes more pronounced in the context of propaganda space, where outsiders remain deliberately excluded.

[17] A. Jaworski, C. Thurlow, *Semiotic Landscapes Language, Image, Space*, London 2010, p. 7–8.

[18] J. Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies. Mobilities for the 21st Century*, London – New York 2000, p. 51.

Witnessing Placelessness: Foreign Perspectives on the 1930s Soviet Landscape

Foreigners in the 1930s USSR, focusing on the central ideological thesis of order emerging from chaos, often illustrated it through the geometric symmetry of new proletarian neighborhoods or the ascetic interiors of buildings. In contrast, other foreign travelers highlighted the neglect of residential buildings, the construction of barracks, and the absence of basic sanitary conditions, challenging the notion of "order" and instead emphasizing the disorderliness of human existence. In these accounts, urban space, the practices of Soviet citizens, and the influence of propaganda – representing power – form a semantic triangle. Within this framework, the "outsider" constructs an understanding of the new country's cultural landscape.

In the travelogues analyzed, the travelers cultivate an image of otherness by claiming ignorance of the country, despite their familiarity with its historical, political, and ideological implications. By adopting an ironic "simpleton" persona, they seek to verify rumors and testimonies. This narrative strategy shapes the genre, organizing the travelogues around an investigation of public narratives concerning the new state, while guiding the travelers' routes and focal points. Naturally, Darling's later travelogue contains more claims to verify than Rogers's, due to the increased prevalence of ideological reports on achievements – such as the absence of unemployment, the effectiveness of the five-year plan, and idealized accounts of family life, reforms, and new cities. This travelogue demonstrates the expansion of propagandistic space, evolving from a broad presence to a totalizing one.

Beyond their shared use of irony and satire, the travelogues employ similar methods for understanding the "new" world. Both texts trace the travelers' experiences of Soviet daily life, focusing primarily on public spaces and "non-places" like avenues, hotels, museums, and squares, as well as the pervasive space of Soviet propaganda, which constructs a distinct geocultural reality within the Soviet Union. For example, Rogers notes: "It seems the whole idea of Communism, or whatever they want to call it, is based on propaganda and blood. Their whole life and thought is to convince somebody else"[19]. A few years later, Darling would speak more emotionally about the purpose of propaganda education:

> The people are being fed on the raw meat of bloody hatred. Nowhere could I detect in their attitude toward us that among the older generations there was any personal animosity engendered by the constant imbibing of this virulent poison, but the

[19] W. Rogers, *There's not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts*, ill. H. Roth, New York 1927, p. 125.

children and youth, who are more subject to the infectious contagion, are growing up with the conviction that a capitalist is a target for the bayonet[20].

In Rogers' caricatured visualization of urban space, archaic markers dominate: the architecture of tenement houses and the patriarchal appearance of the characters create an image of a backward, unmodernized society. The conventional depiction of interiors can be explained by the fact that the narrator in the verbal text provides no detailed descriptions, prompting the illustrator, H. Roth, to rely on his interpretation of Moscow as "oriental"[21], thus reproducing stereotypical representations. In contrast, Darling's travelogue shifts the visual markers, reflecting new processes, particularly industrialization (Fig. 1, 2).

Figure 1. W. Rogers, H. Roth, *There's not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts*

[20] J.N. Darling, *Ding Goes to Russia*, New York – London 1932, p. 85.
[21] W. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

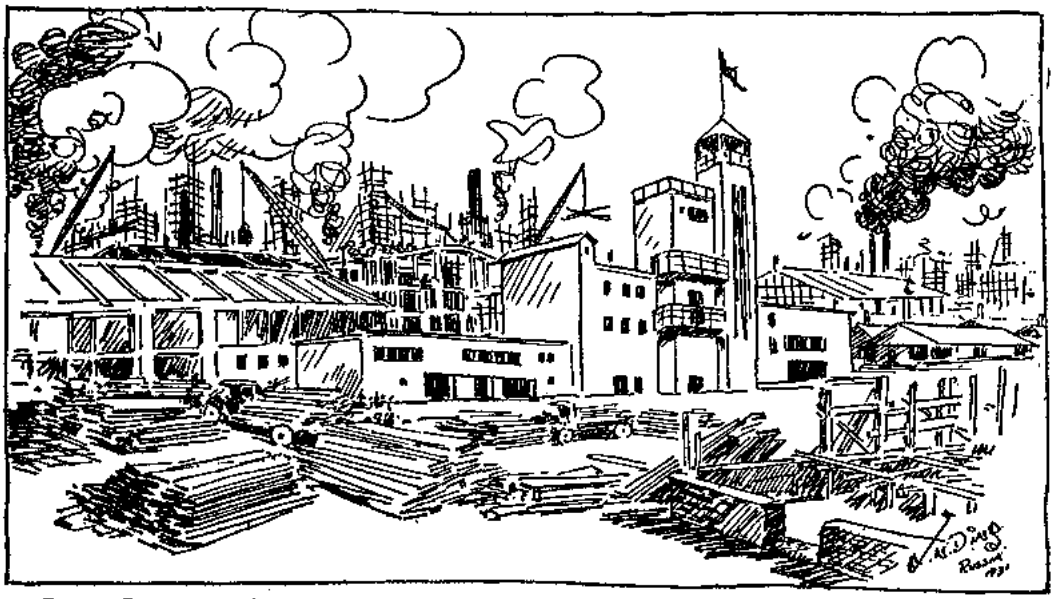
Figure 2. J.N. Darling, *J.N. Ding Goes to Russia*

Darling constructs a doxa-place – impersonal industrial buildings: "The new government has gone quite as wild in its architecture as in its political theories. Severe designs, without structural shadows or architectural concessions to any known style, flat-sided and as drab and devoid of decorations as life itself in Russia today"[22]. The graphic representation of industrial space deserves attention: while dynamic, smoking chimneys – a symbolic sign of Soviet propaganda – are present, the landscape remains entirely deserted. This desertion starkly manifests placelessness (Fig. 3).

Instead, Rogers observes only old and untidy buildings – remnants of the past – indicating an unformed new symbolic landscape. At the same time, he documents the absorption of space by propaganda-induced placelessness, a process marked by the gradual substitution of symbolic markers. Some of the old churches have been converted into museums to display anti-religious propaganda. Slogans and posters now scream in the niches where sacred icons once stood. The walls of the churches are "decorated" with blasphemous caricatures, and the building materials from the destroyed churches are repurposed to construct new temples of worship: the industrial plants of the Soviet government[23].

[22] J.N. Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

[23] W. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 190.



RUSSIA BANGS AND CLATTERS WITH THE ERECTION OF NEW INDUSTRIAL PLANTS AND BARRACKS.

Figure 3. J.N. Darling, *Ding Goes to Russia*

A few years later, Darling witnesses the expansion of this process, where the past is eradicated not only in single structures like churches but across entire communities. As a result, the nature and scope of place absorption become more apparent, and the depiction of placelessness's proliferation is more detailed.

> Small peasant villages of straw-thatched, dun-colored huts, which have been there so long they seem to be part of the ground they are built on, appear to be crawling out of their old habitations, shedding them like a husk. A few hundred yards away, in a location chosen for its drainage and practical building qualities, they have taken up life in a new town – bright-colored moths emerging from old chrysalises[24].

When individuals are deprived of their homes, their way of life is eradicated. A recurring visual representation of placelessness is a white background upon which a family, with their belongings, is depicted (Fig. 4). Moreover, though not directly depicted by propaganda, the threat of being out-of-space was still a spatial realm that propaganda undeniably constructed.

[24] J.N. Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

Figure 4. J.N. Darling, *Ding Goes to Russia*

As places and their associated activities disappear, placelessness generates a new kind of experience. Individuals must overcome the confusion of placelessness by actively fulfilling tasks that transcend personal boundaries and extend into a broader space. They construct *barracks* for themselves and their new environment, driven by the need for collective resistance to the threats propagated by the regime. Travelers sense and visualize the aggressiveness of agitation (Fig. 5, 6). Unlike Darling, Rogers finds himself in a country caught in political turmoil after Lenin's death. He explains this to his compatriots in a way that portrays the "conservatives" led by Trotsky holding a bomb in one hand, while the "radicals" hold two.

Citing a cartoon from Rogers' text, Darling captures the development of propaganda, the diversity of its forms, plots and characters, and highlights the changes in its purpose:

> If there were an army at their gates threatening the country with invasion the job of keeping the spirit at white heat would not be so difficult. Lacking that tangible enemy they have built up huge bugaboos out of capitalism. Almost daily rumors are broadcast, telling of the preparations which Poland, Finland and France are making to attack their borders […] Huge, «cutout» wooden posters, 30 feet high, decorate the highways, picturing the capitalistic countries as clawfisted monsters, reaching for Russia's treasures, while a heroic figure of the Red soldier with his rifle at a challenging angle keeps back the horrid monsters from devouring the Russian children[25].

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 130–131.

Figure 5. W. Rogers, H. Roth, *There's not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts*

Figure 6. J.N. Darling, *J.N. Ding Goes to Russia*

Public spaces, reshaped by propaganda, instruct individuals to integrate into the new landscape, align with its dynamics, and accept transformation. Darling recounts his visit to the new tractor plant in Stalingrad, where he observed a large poster above a department door depicting a sleeping camel with the caption "slacker"[26]. He learned that workers at the plant were awarded the 'Order of the Camel' by colleagues who considered their work poor and slow. When the narrator inquires whether the act was initiated by the workers or dictated from above, he concludes that they are essentially the same, finding no contradiction between them. The "slacker" is not the regime's ideal citizen. He is assigned to a specific zone in the propaganda space – the *Black Kassa*. The narrator describes this "shack" as an "instrument" for squeezing the last strength out of every worker[27]. The grim structure is painted black, like an "executioner's robe", and its design ensures that all workers receiving their salary there are visible. Thus, propaganda space is a heterogeneous phenomenon, with distinct zones contributing to social segregation, power control, pressure, and manipulation.

Relph's anthropological concept of placelessness helps clarify the nature of propaganda space, where ideological goals diminish the functions of place. This is evident in Rogers's surprise at the lack of public sports grounds, which reflects a ban on ideologically undesirable competition, and Darling's observation of the complete absence of resort entertainment in Yalta. The narrator lists leisure opportunities in America at length, noting that none of the practices familiar to Americans can be implemented in the USSR. Instead of the entertaining cinema, Soviet audiences are presented with propaganda footage of labor successes; instead of picnics, there are queues for bread.

A key feature of the analyzed travelogues by American authors is their articulation of propaganda's ability to normalize the abnormal and obscure the influence of imaginative-ideological signals in everyday life. Notably, both narratives converge on an episode that exemplifies this: the ironic depiction of mass naked bathing in a river, which transforms into a narrative metaphor for hidden deception (Fig.7, 8).

In Rogers's work, this episode becomes the basis for the title of the travelogue, manifesting the narrator's revelatory intentions. He finds it amusing that a nation lacking basic garments like underwear and bathing suits. Rogers reflects on the peculiar habits and raises questions about the special looseness of Soviet people[28]. Darling, however, ironically dismiss-

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 106.
[27] *Ibidem*, p. 105.
[28] W. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

es Rogers's shock. He suggests that the differing motivations behind the nudity negate any ethical concerns: "Just why Will Rogers, who spent ten years backstage in the Follies, should have been so shocked by the nude bathers in Russia when he visited here is still an unsolved mystery to me. There is more blatant nakedness in forty feet of a Broadway chorus than in a mile of nude bathers in the Moskva River"[29]. In this travelogue, nudity primarily depicts the defenselessness of a Soviet person stripped of their own space.

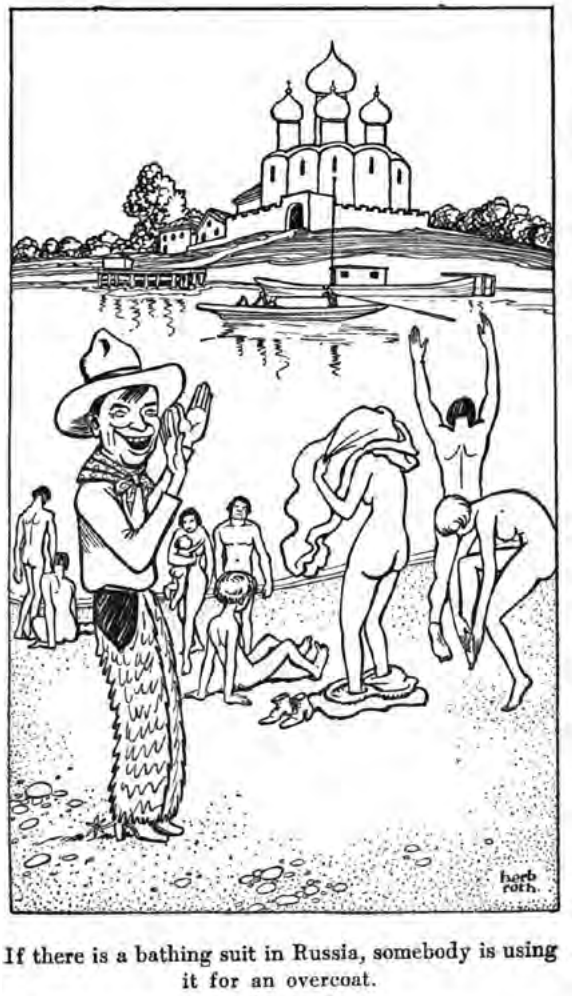


Figure 7. W. Rogers, H. Roth, *There's not a Bathing Suit in Russia and Other Bare Facts*

[29] J.N. Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

Figure 8. J.N. Darling, *J.N. Ding Goes to Russia*

Despite their striking similarity, the visual images in the two travelogues have different modalities. Darling's graphics reduce the satirical mode that Rogers's text reinforces through the metaleptic appearance of the narrator-character, a cowboy with a surprised and playful smile. Dar-

ling, however, seeks to rationalize the situation by explaining it through economic factors. He questions the effectiveness of the five-year plan, whose advertised achievements are touted in Soviet propaganda.

As previously discussed, the complementarity of M. Augé's and E. Relph's spatial concepts allows us to reconstruct the transformation of anthropological place into placelessness. Rogers's work documents merely the nascent stages of this process. Interestingly, he situates the origin of this new landscape in 1914, rather than 1917. This implies that for the twelve years since the start of World War I, little had been done to maintain trains, trams, public buildings, and other infrastructure. Among the creations of the new space is the conversion of large palaces into public places, particularly museums. One of these, dedicated to the revolution – the *Red Museum* – was visited by a traveler and called a "chamber of horrors"[30]. Thus, the initial stage involves the transformation of an anthropological place into a non-place.

Introducing a new sign – such as an ideological poster or sculpture – marks the next phase in this process. At this point, the newly created space can no longer be considered a non-place because it requires specific actions and interactions between collective members, following a rigid pattern and strict adherence to the new tradition. For example, Darling's narrative includes a lengthy description of the dining room, which has been transformed from a luxurious banquet hall. The symbolic meaning of the place is lost, which the narrator highlights by pointing out the "uselessness" of the old premises to the new owners (Fig. 9).

The parquet floor is dirty instead of the expected grandeur, and the room lacks curtains or decorations. Instead, portraits of Stalin and Lenin hang asymmetrically on two nails, replacing family portraits. Walls are adorned with propaganda excerpts. The new residents' conduct aligns with the constructed tradition of the Soviet man.

> The heads of the diners were bent so far forward that their propping elbows seemed to be the only thing that prevented them from falling completely forward into their cabbage soup, which they were consuming with the shortest possible transportation haul. They were too intent on their endeavors to glance up and were sublimely oblivious to any of the formalities or manners which their new surroundings might have suggested[31].

[30] W. Rogers, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
[31] J.N. Darling, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

Figure 9. J.N. Darling, *J.N. Ding Goes to Russia*

The cartoon that vividly illustrates this description reinforces the markers of a new identity. Additionally, Darling's travelogue visually records the emergence of new social practices. The illustrations portray the Soviet person as queuing, marching, working in formation, solitary, or staring blankly into a monotonous landscape.

Conclusion

Augé's (place/non-place), Relph's (place/placelessness), and Cresswell's (place/out-of-place) concepts provide valuable analytical tools for reconstructing the diverse influence of propaganda on the socio-cultural landscape. Placelessness effectively visualizes the transformation of individual space in the accounts of American travelers.

Although Rogers and Darling share a comparable perspective on the Soviet landscape, Darling's later text reveals a more profound and pervasive propaganda space, encompassing new cities, industrialization, and collectivization. American travelers, relying on visual cues, observed the effects of Soviet propaganda, analyzed its artifacts, and sought to understand its overwhelming success. Alienated from the Soviet landscape, the travelers acutely perceive the illusory nature of propaganda – its exaggeration and intrusiveness – allowing them to grasp its spatial influence on human beings.

The propaganda becomes concentrated around the symbolic expressions of ideologues (posters, museums, sculptures), expanding to capture the individual space and non-places – such as transport hubs, resorts, and work areas – and influencing social practices and human behavior. By imagining its action in displacing anthropological place and representing "doxa places" (industrial projects, proletarian streets and museums), the narrators conceptualize Soviet space as placelessness, outlining its functions: manipulation, pressure, displacement of the other, limitation of opportunities, and the deprivation of individual space. Eventually, the space of propaganda is fixed within a landscape formula, erasing historical urban and rural landscapes, as well as forms of life, by deploying "invented traditions" in each replaced form.

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