

THE WORK OF ART AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE IN GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

Art is a sphere of human activity whose scope in terms of subject matter and topics is very wide. This makes it hard to define – to the extent that there is no one, generally-accepted definition of art, only a very great many attempts at definitions, most of them needing modification as time has passed and new spheres of art have come into being. If art is hard to define then so also must be “work of art”, matters becoming still more complicated by the appearance in the theories of culture of the concept of the “artistic subject” whose connotations have features in common with the above.

Nevertheless, if we leave problems of definition to academics more competent to deal with them, we can accept for the purposes of our considerations that a work of art is simply the “aesthetic output” of a person engaging in art.

Science and art represent two different ways in which human beings seek to acquaint themselves with, describe and understand the world. While science strives to objectivise and account for the laws, mechanisms and principles that hold sway in that world, art is a generally subjective interpretation of reality that the creator of a work of art (plastic art, work of literature or music, play, film, and so on) has to offer. The different role of the cognitive function in art arises out of the fact that it is accompanied by (equally important) features of an aesthetic, emotional, utilitarian, ethical or metaphysical nature that either play a lesser role in science or are entirely absent from it.

What is intriguing is that, notwithstanding the aforementioned epistemological differences between science and art, the limits of each and boundaries between them are not as distinct as they might seem to be. So much so, indeed, that we might even call them fluid. There are a number of sub-disciplines in the humanities that can bridge the science-art gap, among them the anthropology of literature, ethnology and aesthetics. A particular place in the borderland between the two great spheres of life is in turn taken by architecture, since this requires artistic knowledge and skill on the one hand, and engineering knowledge on the other.

For its part, geography is not really subject to the above dilemmas, being clearly and strongly grounded among the true sciences. Those sub-disciplines that do involve

themselves with art are really rather niche-related, existing beyond the main thrusts to geographical study.

Art as such has nevertheless been subjected to geographical study at times. It is first and foremost representatives of the geography of culture (cultural geography) that have shown an interest, their work mainly seeking to analyse spatial differentiation to forms of art, mainly painting, music and film (Brouillette, Feder, 2010; Carney, 1998; Lukinbeal, 2005; Kaufmann, 2004; Nash, 1968; Ornta, Valdes, 2007), or else to identify specific elements of art (often traditional folk art) as these are configured locally or regionally (Berry, 1988; Fiona, Mackenzie, 2006; Morris, 2005; Karan, 1984; Prorok, 1998).

For example, Kaufmann (2004) analyses the way in which geographical ideas have been employed in history-of-art theories. Among other things, that author seeks to show how some concepts in art history link up closely with the localities in which the art concerned was generated. Consideration has also been given to the spatial diffusion of trends or currents in art, not least those of the Renaissance, whose spread into Central Europe via incoming Italian sculptors has been addressed. In turn, Karan (1984) illustrates the way in which local songs or painting allow for a better understanding of the life, culture and mentality of those living in the Indian region of Mithila.

Art may also represent a method of acquainting people with the geographical environment that can be employed in geographical didactics. Through the use of different techniques from painting, graphic or illustrative art, school pupils may develop their knowledge of the world and its natural, social and economic diversity (Jeffus, Aramini, 2008). This is a form of geographical cognition mediated by the fun that can be had with art.

Finally, the relations pertaining between geography and art can concern knowledge of the geographical environment used by the artist to create artistic work, on the one hand, and geographical knowledge arising out of works of art on the other. In other words, art can be looked upon from the point of view of the geographical knowledge the artist uses, but also in respect of the knowledge of the environment that flows out of the artist's creativity. Such aspects are taken up by Couch and Togood (1999), as they analyse geographical content in the modern abstract art of Cornishman Peter Lanyon; or by Hawkins (2010), studying artistic renderings of urban space in the photographs and installations of British sculptor Richard Wentworth. Of a similar basic nature is the work of Childs (1991), Olwig (1987), Seemann (2009), Parkin (2009) and Daley (2009).

Art as a source of geographical knowledge is a peripheral matter only rarely taken up for further scientific consideration. In contrast, historians have been rather more willing to pay attention to the subject, literature, painting and sculpture all having the capacity to represent important sources of information on times past, earlier culture and traditions, societal structure and a variety of other issues of interest to historians. Nevertheless, as Radomski (2001, p. 86) notes: "The issue of using fine literature as a source from which to study the past has given rise to a series of controversies, reactions ranking from total negation to moderate optimism."

And if even historians have their doubts regarding the value to them of works of art (in this case of literature), how much greater wariness might we anticipate among geographers, whose world is perceived in a distinctly more "material" way?

Researchers of a scientific bent may simply become irritated at the very idea that geographical knowledge might be looked for in artistic output. Yet even they make wide use of cartographic studies, which always have their clear “admixture” of art. For, as he or she interprets reality, the cartographer reaches for both shading and symbolism as elements in the conveying of cartographic information via the two-dimensional work known as the map.

So, while the answer to a question regarding works of art genuinely serving as sources of geographical information will tend to confirm that this is possible, certain conditions will have to pertain if usefulness in geographical research is to be ascribed.

A further research topic of interest concerns the type of knowledge that may be extracted from works of art. Is the said knowledge purely of a documenting nature, or can it serve as a basis for new concepts and ideas? The aim of the relevant considerations is to assess the possibility of classical works of art (mainly of fine literature and painting) being used as a source of geographical information or new knowledge.

A MODEL FOR A WORK OF ART'S RECEPTION AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

While the only knowledge or information suitable for geographical research is that of a reliable and objective nature, works of art have inherent to them what are often highly subjective interpretations – first of the artist him/herself, and then of the recipient of the work thereof. As all interpretations of art that are excessively subjective may lead to mistaken research results, it is worth giving consideration at the outset to the very model by which information is conveyed from a work's creator to its recipient, in the process seeking out conditions to be met where a work can indeed serve as utilisable source for the geographer.

Among the geographical sciences and related disciplines, the issue of communication between artist and recipient is first and foremost tackled by cartographers, who draw on general theories regarding the conveying of information as they perform their tasks (R a t a j s k i, 1970; R o b i n s o n, P e t c h e n i k, 1975] G u e l k e, 1976; T a y l o r, 1983). Just as a writer assumes the existence of a reader, so the editor of a map assumes the existence of someone who will look at and use his/her work, this person being the recipient of information – conveyed in cartographic form – about some fragment of the geographical environment. According to R o b i n s o n and P e t c h e n i k (1975), a map is a coded signal serving the recipient in regard to the obtainment of necessary information on reality, this having first been the subject of a selective process at the hands of the cartographer. In respect of cartographic communication, the authors distinguished three sets of information of differing significance to the recipient. The latter above all uses information from the overall set that is needed by him/her, while screening out or ignoring information with which familiarity had been gained at an earlier stage, or else information going beyond his/her capacity for sensory or intellectual perception.

The main difference between the conveying of cartographic information on the one hand and information contained in a work of art on the other lies in the fact that the former is more formalized, and more fully “agreed” with the recipient. The map is thus a model of reality defined in line with mathematical and graphic principles that

have already been consented to, in some sense, i.e. widely adopted. A work of art in contrast offers considerable discretion as regards interpretation, and an equally great degree of latitude when it comes to the technique by which content is conveyed (be it graphic, musical, literary or whatever).

But the boundaries separating a map from a work of art are not all that sharp. Quite evidently, the old maps that quite often take pride of place on our walls are most likely seen as much (or even more) as works of art than they are material documenting the views and approaches adopted by the geographers of these times. A modern map may also be used as a motif for the creation of an artistic installation.

Cartographers themselves enter into cooperative ventures with representatives of the world of art. For example, a symposium convened in Vienna in 2008 had as its theme and title *Art and Cartography: Cartography and Art*, those in attendance deriving in equal measure from the two spheres. The result was a book called *Cartography and Art*. (C a r t w r i g h t, G a r t n e r and L e h n, 2009).

A work of art resembles a map in that it may be treated as a medium by which information is conveyed to a recipient by an artist. It is usual for the artist to come up with his/her own interpretation of reality, which he/she then encodes in a work. The recipient must decode the signal contained in the work, but it is usual for him/her, in so doing, to create a new – and often very subjective – take on reality.

However, a basic aim of those artists that make use of words or images, for instance, is to evoke their artistic objective – i.e. an aesthetic experience – in their recipients. This has the effect of constituting an entity “*that cannot be identified with anything real, the perception of which offers the impulse for the development of an aesthetic experience, and it usually (especially if the work of art has been created with this aim in mind) plays the role of regulator in the course of what is experienced*” (I n g a r d e n, 1970, p. 97).

An aesthetic experience may also accompany the researcher who employs a work of art to scientific ends, but this does not represent any of the phases in the process by which information is sought. It may even be considered that the aesthetic experience – insofar as it represents a brief shift away from awareness of the world around us and matters of the intellect – is actually an inappropriate event in the process whereby artistic output is employed as a source of scientific knowledge. For the steps taken by a researcher should be objective, logical and free of metaphysical or spiritual features. If they are not, then we may, to put things in the most general terms, be left vulnerable to the drawing of erroneous conclusions from our scientific study.

Bearing in mind the use of works of art as sources of geographical knowledge, it is possible to put forward a general model for the transfer of geographical information from the artist across to the recipient of a work that involves four main phases: 1) reception of the real world by the artist’s senses and his/her subsequent creative interpretation of reality, 2) the coding of reality in the form of a work of art, 3) decoding by the recipient of signals arising out of the work, 4) the generation by the recipient of a reality that is founded upon the work and its content (Fig. 1).

In the first of the said phases, the source of information is the real world as perceived by the artist using his/her senses and then interpreted in his/her thoughts. In the course of his/her interpretation of reality, the artist generates a subjective imagining entailing the selection and choice of elements from the real world that are (in his/

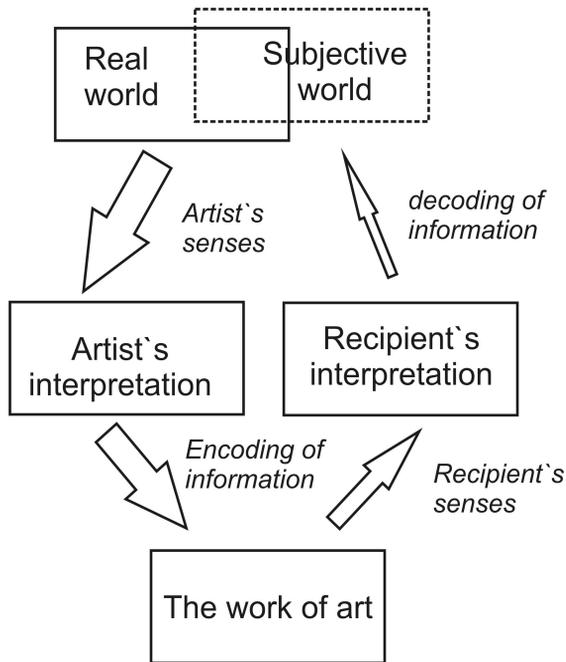


Fig. 1. Model of information transfer as mediated by works of art

her view) of greatest significance for the work-to-be. Some elements of the world in question are obviously either rejected consciously or ignored as a result of sensory “imperfections”.

Even at this stage, we are in a position to reject certain forms of artistry or creativity, on the basis that they make no reference whatever to the reality surrounding us, and thus offer no cognitive content for geographical research. The matter of the fields of art “lending themselves” to geographical study is one returned to in the upcoming part. Here, we may confine ourselves to examples from the plastic arts and literature. All abstract examples of the plastic arts need to be eliminated from further consideration at the outset, the presentation in this case not making direct reference to forms or subjects observed in reality. For geographers, work of this kind is just not helpful.

Likewise, in fine literature we may come across, and are required to set aside, work from the “fantasy” genre as broadly construed. While it is true that science fiction is often able to anticipate the future (as Jules Verne did in *From Earth to the Moon* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*), the prediction work is entirely deprived of scientific methodology.

The second phase to the transmission of information is the coding of reality as interpreted by the artist into a means of communicating with recipients, of course by means of selected artistic techniques taking the form of works of art. The latter might be paintings, literary texts, pieces of music, items of graphic art, engravings or whatever. Each is a set of symbols of defined designation and connotation.

As the process is also associated with the loss of part of the information concerning reality, it is important that such artistic techniques be applied as will only to

a limited degree eliminate the level of detail at which information is conveyed, and will be understandable and acceptable to the recipient.

In the third phase, what the artist has to communicate is received and decoded by the senses of the recipient. In this phase too, certain elements of the communiqué become "blurred", or may be lost altogether, thanks to imperfections in the recipient's sensory apparatus. In this, the knowledge and artistic processing of the artist are also of importance, he or she being in a position to play a very important role as regards the way the work is understood, along with the knowledge or information conveyed by means of it.

At the end of the process, the recipient interprets what is being communicated to him/her by the work of art, and then goes on to create his/her own imagining of reality. The key issue then becomes whether the interpreted world of the recipient of art shaped on the basis of the artist's artistic transfer of information has something in common with the real world. Obviously, it would be hard to imagine the situation in which the world shaped in the mind of the recipient reacting to a work of art can be fully in line with the real world. Thanks to the imperfections of the artist's senses and full interpretative and artistic freedom, each phase of the transfer of information is associated with a loss of fragments of reality. If the real and subjective worlds of the recipient do have something in common, then it can be accepted that a work of art carries a certain cognitive value with it. Otherwise there will be no value in its use as a source of geographical information.

At this point, it is worth invoking the cartographic communication concept espoused by R o b i n s o n and P e t c h e n i k (1975), this entailing the division of a work of art into several information-related layers (Fig. 2). The most important of these will be the cognitive layer (L1), thanks to which the recipient obtains new knowledge of the natural or socioeconomic environment. The layer of information possessed (L2) is of more limited value to the recipient, though it may offer confirmation in respect of knowledge already acquired. In contrast, the layer of information unknown to the recipient (L3) extends beyond the capabilities of his/her sensory or intellectual perception. This state of affairs may reflect limited skill with the inter-

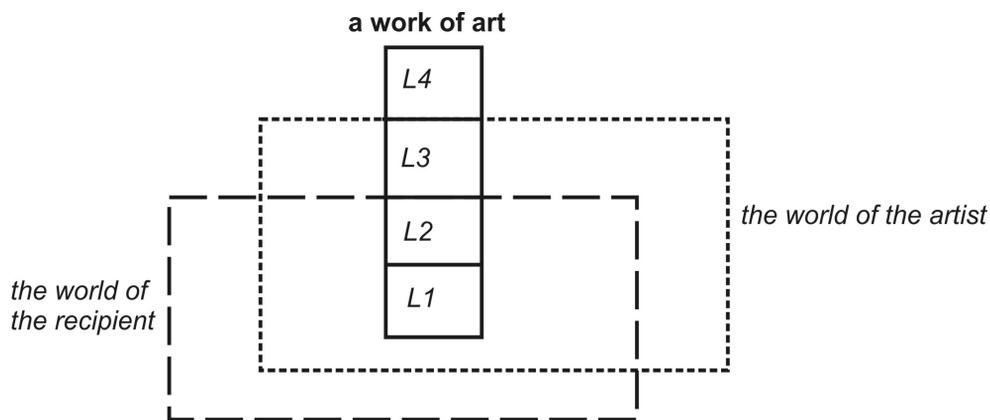


Fig. 2. Informational layers to a work of art

preting of works, unfamiliarity with artistic techniques, senses that are for some reason in a poor state, a lack of technical instrumentation, and so on. The concept layer (L4) does not contain any information flowing directly from the work, being rather a consequence of its analysis. This is a kind of “added knowledge” reflecting skill in the linking or associating of facts and phenomena that the work is concerned with.

SPHERES OF ART UTILISABLE IN GEOGRAPHY AS SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

The traditional division of art into spheres or domains would usually have included fine literature, dance, theatre and film, plus the plastic arts. These spheres might in turn be sub-divided into groups and sub-groups. Thus, for example, the plastic arts have been taken to include painting, sculpture, photography, graphic art, scenography, illustration, installation and so on.

Not all spheres of art can supply works that are a source of knowledge for the geographer. For example, it is hard to seek out this feature in music, dance or theatre (here taken to mean, not only classical theatre, but also ballet, opera and other performance arts). The fields in question have of course been the subject of geographical study: as, for example, where experts on folk music or the different categories of dance have no difficulty in identifying the country or region of origin thereof. Nevertheless, these specialists would find it difficult to use these forms as a source of geographical knowledge, though their use as a source by which the geographical environment can be recognised must not be precluded entirely. There are, after all, examples of music being used in studying cultural migrations, even if the work in question is first and foremost of an educational nature (B e r r y, 1988; B r o u i l l e t t e and F e d e r, 2010). By knowing the regions in which such different musical rhythms as rap, rock, blues, gospel and jazz originated (e.g. Mississippi or New Orleans) – with their most distant roots in Africa – it is possible to analyse directions of spread.

Via the intermediation of the sense of hearing, sound alone has much interesting geographical information to offer. Work is being done on the sound landscape and acoustic environment (B e r n a t, 2002; C a r l e s, B a r c i n o and L u c i o, 1999; P o c o c k, 1989; W a t e r m a n, 2000). However, the musical compositions artists come up with tend to be deprived of such information. The interpretation of sounds and depiction of reality on the basis of them would be a serious abuse, on account of the excessive subjectivity it would entail.

Classical literature is more useful in geographical research than music, where the former is construed as text in which the key property entails the aesthetics of language employed. In it we regularly encounter subject matter that relates directly to the natural environment, or to the space in which human beings live and act. We need to exclude from our area of interest all utilitarian texts whose purpose is informational, designed to publicise, or of a scientific and academic nature, since these lack the artistic dimension. Literature does of course throw up examples of texts on the borders between genres, which are hard to assign to fine literature on the one hand or utilitarian on the other, but here we are encroaching too far upon the competences of literary study, into matters of little significance to the subject matter of the present article.

Fine literature not only has geographical facts to offer, but it also brings very complex information on social structure to bear, as well as on spatial differentiation, and the characteristics of different regions and smaller areas. An example of simplified – if nevertheless unique – information is provided by the third song in Homer’s *Iliad*, from which we learn that the Ancient Greeks possessed geographical knowledge of Equatorial Africa and the inhabitants thereof. For Homer writes of the Pygmies, inhabiting an inaccessible region of central Africa. The so-called “father of history” Herodotus also makes mention of a tribe of short people encountered by the Nassamons.

...“Once troops had formed in ranks under their own leaders,
Trojans marched out, clamouring like birds, like cranes
screeching overhead, when winter’s harsh storms drive them off,
screaming as they move over the flowing Ocean,
bearing death and destruction to the Pygmies,
launching their savage attack on them at dawn.”...

Book III, *The Iliad*, Paris, Menelaus and Helen (Translation by Ian Johnston)

Knowledge of the Pygmies may have had its origins in Egyptian sources. As long as 2500 years BC, Egypt was organising southbound expeditions along the Nile with a view to the river’s sources being located. Participants on such expeditions could have come into contact with the inhabitants of Central Africa. While the Pygmies’ struggles with cranes are a fantasy out of Homer, the directions to the migrations of cranes up the Nile to areas the given tribes inhabit are fact.

The poetry of Homer was indeed a key source for H. Schliemann, who really did uncover the Troy of legend. Indeed, Homer’s descriptions provided, not merely for the uncovering of Troy, as located in today’s Turkey, but also for the discovery of many items of Achaean heritage in Greece. *The Iliad* is thus a work of literature capable of constituting a source of knowledge in history, archaeology and geography, among other disciplines.

Where geography is concerned, fine literature also has more complex facts to supply. There are indeed many examples of literary language being applied in the synthetic description of socioeconomic and natural phenomena and processes. There follows an example of prose by contemporary Polish writer S t a s i u k (2009), describing the small town of Gorlice, located in southern Poland: “In autumn, it is plain to see how this is a dying town. Those with any will to leave have long since left... Four road junctions, one roundabout, traffic lights on flashing amber from 10... Only the petrol station remains alive, but no one fills up. Everyone’s buying booze or moving on to some bar...”

Such a description offers the quintessential socioeconomic diagnosis of what is going on in a peripheral small town, afflicted by the twin problems of depopulation and social exclusion. The writer, as an alert observer of daily life, does not need to analyse statistical materials or scientific literature to be in a position to encapsulate and present in just a couple of sentences the specific nature of a local community that a scientist would take many pages to describe and account for.

A different kind of example of a synthesis of the rural landscape and farm therein is provided by an extract from the Polish national epic by A. Mickiewicz entitled *Pan Tadeusz*, as first published in 1834. In a couple of lines of text, the poet offers

a description of a farmed landscape located along the River Neman (Niemen). This generates a subjective picture in the mind of the reader, though it also supplies precise information on aspects like crops grown and the forms assumed by cultivated fields.

...“to those green meadows stretched far and wide along the blue Niemen; to those fields painted with various grain, gilded with wheat, silvered with rye; where grows the amber mustard, the buckwheat white as snow, where the clover glows with a maiden’s blush, where all is girdled as with a ribbon by a strip of green turf on which here and there rest quiet pear-trees.”... (*Pan Tadeusz*, Book I, The Farm, as translated by George Rapall Noyes, 1917)

Many facts about the appearance of the farm and its specialisations are also to be gleaned from the next passage in the work: “Amid such fields years ago, by the border of a brook, on a low hill, in a grove of birches, stood a gentleman’s mansion, of wood, but with a stone foundation; the white walls shone from afar, the whiter since they were relieved against the dark green of the poplars that sheltered it against the winds of autumn. The dwelling-house was not large, but it was spotlessly neat, and it had a mighty barn, and near it were three stacks of hay that could not be contained beneath the roof; one could see that the neighbourhood was rich and fertile. And one could see from the number of sheaves that up and down the meadows shone thick as stars—one could see from the number of ploughs turning up early the immense tracts of black fallow land that evidently belonged to the mansion, and were tilled well like garden beds, that in that house dwelt plenty and order. The gate wide-open proclaimed to passers-by that it was hospitable, and invited all to enter as guests.” (*Pan Tadeusz*, Book I, The Farm, translated by George Rapall Noyes, 1917)

A still greater cognitive role in geography than that played by fine literature is that attributable to film, most especially works of an educational or documentary nature. By their very nature, these films have cognitive content of significance to science. Along with their educational and cognitive value, these films document the state of geographical space, as well as serving in exchanges of thoughts and views as regards the phenomena and processes under study in the different geographical disciplines. The problem here is one of definition, since the documentary and/or educational film has content that specifically ceases to be art, instead being more of a scientific work using artistic means of expression to present the achievements or science, and/or the views of individual researchers or teams thereof, as transferred on to moving pictures. In most cases, the documentary film is a certain form of scientific expression whose content is not fiction, but rather a documentation of reality. Where art remains, it is in the narration, direction, screenwriting or editing. In this case, the phase of the interpretation of reality by the artist (see: the model for conveying information) would seem to be more weakly developed. It is first and foremost confined to elements of reality, rather than to the interpretation thereof *sensu stricte*.

In contrast to the above, the fictional film is a work of art fully in line with the model for conveying information that is of interest to us. While the content may in general be fictional, the film of this kind still represents a source of factographic information (arising directly out of the image contained in the film), as well as of more complex knowledge arising out of the very content of the film. Archive footage is obviously of particular value, since this can offer a source for analysis and

for comparisons of the state of geographical space over a period now exceeding 100 years¹.

From among the traditional spheres of art, it has been painting that has most caught the attention of the geographer, this being able to supply factographic information first and foremost via the medium of the picture painted. For example, the Old Masters may supply information on the physical structure of towns and cities, the layouts of rural settlements, forms of vegetation, the shape and courses of river corridors, and so on.

The content of a picture supplies historical facts above all, resembling a form of photographic registration of geographical space from the past. Fixed on canvas or paper is some old landscape, the appearance of a settlement, some outlines of field and forest boundaries, etc., these all being available for comparison with the contemporary situation, with appropriate conclusions thus being drawn as regards trends and the variability of phenomena. The gathering of many such facts in turn provides for a look at social relationships, methods by which economic activity has been engaged in, issues of humankind's adaptation to natural conditions, etc. Similar knowledge may be conveyed by an artistic photograph, or by other forms of plastic art, like a woodcut or copperplate engraving.

PAINTING AND GEOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE – SELECTED EXAMPLES

There are tens of different painting techniques and styles, of which some (like abstractionism, surrealism and symbolism) generate works whose use in geographical research is precluded. Equally rich is the spectrum of artistic subject matter, along which the types of greatest importance to the geographer are the landscape and the genre scene. The first of these kinds offers a presentation of the landscape and nature, the second a subject linking up with daily life and habits. Within landscape painting, it is even possible to identify the so-called topographical landscape, which presents a concrete reality that is not therefore the product of an artist's imagination at all.

An example of how landscape and genre themes may be combined is provided by the 1565 painting by Pieter Bruegel the Elder entitled *The Harvesters*. From it, we may learn about the then rural landscape, forms of land management, layouts of cultivated fields and access roads and means of working the fields (Image 1 – appendix). Furthermore, by extending beyond the purely factographic information, we are in a position to draw conclusions on the division of labour in a rural community, forms of cooperation and daily obligations in the harvest period. The study of other works by the same artist (like *Spring* 1569, *Summer* 1569 and *Landscape in Summer* 1569) that also address rural subject matter may go further in supplying valuable information to historians, cultural anthropologists, ethnographers and geographers. What interests

¹ The first ever films were documentary in nature, e.g. the 1895 “Workers leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon” and “The Arrival of a train at La Ciotat”. The first “directed” film of fictional content is taken to be L’Arroseur Arrosé (“The Sprinkler Sprinkled”) from that same year.

the geographer above all are the forms of rural landscape, settlement locations and the distribution of farms, the functions of villages, the land-use structure and the way in which areas are managed.

An example of landscape painting might in turn be Philip Dombek's picture entitled *Gen. Zajaczek's entry into Lublin w 1826*, presenting the architecture and urban planning layout of the then Lublin, a city located in the eastern part of Poland (Image 2 – appendix). In the foreground we see the main route into the city, and beyond that the built-up area of the Old Town, with the castle in the background. The painting might form a basis for more far-reaching research in the spheres of urban planning or physical development. Indeed, in the past there were a series of paintings and drawings presenting panoramas of Lublin. Thanks to that, it was possible for studies on the physical development of the city and suburban areas to be enriched by comparisons and analyses of change over different time periods.

An example of genre painting might be the 1889 watercolour by Stanisław Masłowski entitled *On the pasture* (Image 3 – appendix). Among other things, we learn from that how cattle grazing in the Polish lowlands in the late 19th and early 20th centuries looked, how big the herds might be, and what their diversity from the point of view of breeds (red-and-white and black-and-white cattle plus Polish Reds can all be made out). The grazing herd looked after by a cowherd has complete freedom. The pasture is rather natural in appearance and nature, most probably growing on low-quality soils and rather resembling today's areas of wasteland.

Other works of similar subject matter from the same period (i.e. those presenting Polish pastoral scenes) are available for analysis (e.g. T. Axentowicz–Gęsiarka, J. Brandt – *On the Pasture*, A. Kędziński – *In the Field*, and R. Kochanowski – Gaški and J. Szermentowski – *Cattle at Pasture*). These enhance the knowledge of the agricultural geographer as regards the appearance and species diversity of livestock, as well as places and forms of grazing. While some precise factual information is available, there is also a chance to pursue a more generalised interpretation regarding the role of pastoralism in the then world of agriculture in Poland.

As was noted above, the use of works of art as sources of geographical knowledge is a very complicated process in which key significance needs to be attached to the role played by artist and recipient alike, when it comes to the interpretation of reality. Let us investigate that with reference to painting. For us, the artist is an independent agent, since he/she does not produce the painting to meet the needs of geography, but for the sake of a more general artistry. In turn, each geographer-recipient may obtain different detailed information from the studied work, albeit with the layer of generality being uniform. In other words, for the geographical knowledge arising out of a given work to be of a cognitive nature, it must be accepted by a group of researcher-recipients dealing with the given subject.

To confirm the thesis of the above kind, a study was carried out among 20 students of geography who acquainted themselves with 18 oil paintings or watercolours depicting the Polish countryside and the everyday life of its inhabitants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They were then asked to discuss the geographical knowledge that they considered to have been rendered by the paintings analysed. Answers related first and foremost to facts perceived directly in the works. For example, the content of S. Masłowski's work *On the Pasture* (Image 3 – appendix) was characterised by reference to the descriptions: "large herd of cows", "pasture on poor soil", "cattle

of various different breeds” and “cattle-raising”. Several students drew conclusions of a cognitive nature (not always justified), e.g. that “poor soils made livestock rearing imperative, since crop-growing would not have paid” and “poor soils made crop production impossible, so the land was used as pasture instead”.

Several students analysed the whole set of plastic works to draw broader conclusions about forms of livestock-raising and their diversity of livestock from the points of view of species and breed, the use of implements in farm work, the division of labour among on-farm inhabitants or indeed a whole village, the spatial structure characteristic of rural settlement, and different forms of landscape. This is part of the description produced by one student: [Village inhabitants – *author*] are such an inseparable part of the world they live in, and which in some sense at least they create. ... Everything matches together here... the people live in harmony with one another, nature dictating the rhythm of their lives and work and they consenting to that way of life”.

Another student wrote:” ... in these depictions I see above all the strong link between human beings and nature... It is nature that dictates the cycle of life for these people”.

These examples illustrate the knowledge students took away from an analysis of paintings devoted to rural subject matter. Beyond the typical factographic information, they also drew more generalised conclusions not reflecting their direct perception of the works of art. Confirmation is therefore offered for both the first thesis, that a work of art may be a source of geographical knowledge, and the second, i.e. that the art-mediated process by which reality comes to be known does offer up a possibility for the shaping of new knowledge (not arising directly out of the artistic objects under study).

CONCLUSIONS

Geography as an empirical science has very limited links with art. In the main, it is representatives of the geography of culture and the history of geography that engage in at most one-off attempts to incorporate different spheres of art within their research topics. The principal approaches concern regional cultural differences in artistic activity, the influence of geographical location in differentiating artistic currents and the opportunities for art to be used in geographical education.

Art in geography is generally treated as a subject for research. There are only a few studies in which the authors indicate how art may represent a source of knowledge for the geographer. In fact, for a work of art to be used as a source of knowledge in geographical research, it must meet several basic conditions. In the first place, its subject matter should make reference to the real world, the work then being a form by which reality is interpreted by the artist. In the second place, the world formed in the mind of the recipient of a work of art must have “something in common” with the real world. Otherwise, the conclusions drawn will in general be in error. In the third place, acquaintanceship with reality via a work of art is dependent on the recipient having an appropriate level of education and artistic “refinement”. Thanks to that, apart from the obtainment of factographic knowledge arising directly from the way a work of art is perceived, the recipient and researcher may also draw more general conclusions not supplied directly by the work analysed, for example in regard to social relations,

division of labour, the management of space and its variability, the socioeconomic functions of areas, forms of the landscape, and so on.

From among the different types of work of art, a particular role in geographical research may be played by items of plastic art (mainly paintings), fine literature and film. These are generally of a documenting nature, in that they present a fragment of geographical space in the historical past. This is why they are of the greatest significance to historical geography and other disciplines of that science that extend into the past. However, there are examples in which art may also supply knowledge, and methods of the presentation thereof, as regards the contemporary situation.

The issue of works of art being used in geographical study remains a "niche" interest that is only rarely taken up. Yet, as there are cases in which works of art may be the only source of knowledge available to the geographer, it is worth encouraging scientific circles to embrace this subject.

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ИЗКУСТВОТО КАТО ИЗТОЧНИК НА ГЕОГРАФСКОТО ПОЗНАНИЕ

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(Резюме)

Твърде необичайно е в своята работа географите да разглеждат въпроси, свързани с изкуството, а когато го правят, изкуството се разглежда като научен обект в неговата цялостност. В проучванията рядко се прилага подходът, свързан с използването на произведения на изкуството като източник на географски познания. Имайки предвид това, авторът търси да прецени как възможностите на класическото изкуство могат да бъдат използвани. По този начин той черпи

примери от художествената литература и живописа като източници на ново географско познание. Тезата, лансирана тук, е, че едно произведение на изкуството е източник на географски знания, предоставящ фактографска и обща информация, която не произтича пряко от анализираната дейност. Но за да се постигне това, трябва да бъдат изпълнени някои условия, едното от които е, че работата трябва да бъде артистична интерпретация на реалния свят, че картината, която се оформя в съзнанието на получателя, поне отчасти да съответства на реалността. Други условия се отнасят до сетивните и интелектуалните възприятия, а също до технически и технологични възможности.

От различните произведения на изкуството скулптурата (главно живописа), художествената литература и киното може да играят особена роля в географските изследвания. Това най-общо казано е документален филм на природата, представяйки фрагменти от географското пространство в историческото минало. По тази причина произведенията на изкуството са преди всичко източник на знание за тези географи, които се занимават с миналото.