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# Ana M<sup>a</sup> Manzananas and Jesús Benito, Cities, Borders, and Spaces in Intercultural American Literature and Film. Ana M<sup>a</sup> Manzananas and Jesús Benito, *Occupying Space in American Literature and Culture: Static Heroes, Social Movements and Empowerment.*

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- 1 As the titles of the two books suggest, *Cities, Borders, and Spaces in Intracultural American Literature and Film* and *Occupying Space in American Literature and Culture: Static Heroes, Social Movements and Empowerment* analyze the trajectories of the spatial turn taking place from mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards which has resulted in the appearance of new ways of assessing spatiality as well as new definitions of spatial concepts. Even though the two volumes are not a continuation *per se*, both books are co-authored by Ana M<sup>a</sup> Manzananas and Jesús Benito and the more recent *Occupying Space* complements and completes the issues discussed in *Cities, Borders, and Spaces*, which suggests continuity between the publications and encourages to read them as complementary. In *Cities, Borders, and Spaces* Manzananas and Benito argue that the “alleged new spatial turn of American exceptionalism has always been there” (2) but due to the redefinitions of spatial concepts allowed by post-prefixed theories, new spatial definitions do away with dichotomous oppositions and thus lend themselves to “plurality and openness” (6) as well as reflect the shift from stasis to mobility, activity, and heterogeneity. Consequently, the authors account for the complexity of the discipline, evoking numerous scholars who have contributed to

different definitions of spatiality – including, among others, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Edward Soja, David Harvey, Yi-Fu Tuan, Mike Crang, or Doreen Massey, in order to provide a foundation for their analysis of “pluralization and the inescapable hierarchization of space, and its resultant visible and invisible geographies” (6) reflected in selected literary and cultural texts. The other goal of the volume, as the authors admit, is to examine how space and spatial concepts function for those who are often un-spaced, how space’s “usage, appropriation, or domination into place – operates for those who have been traditionally traversed by borders of class, ethnicity, or nationality” (6). This results in a reconceptualization of spatial terms and new definitions that reflect more adequately the reality of those who “are contiguous to those regular, visible space practitioners” (6).

- 2 Manzanas and Benito achieve that by moving between different spatial constructs/units – from the nation, through the city to the body. *Cities, Borders and Spaces* begins with the analysis of “symbolic premises” (14), or “ports of entry, ports of exit” (11) which include seemingly the unrelated spaces of Hawthorne’s “Custom House,” Ellis Island and detention centers as reflected in McCarthy’s *The Visitor*. The authors suggest the interrelation between the three locations and examine how they determine one’s inclusion in the nation, and consequently the space of the city, or trigger exclusion and result in unbelonging. Following up on that in Chapters 2 and 3 Manzanas and Benito refer to invisible dwellers of the migrational city on the basis of Chuck Palahniuk’s “Slumming: A Story by Lady Baglady,” Helena Viramontes’s “The Cariboo Café” and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*, respectively. In the first analysis of the two short stories the authors examine how “invisible practitioners par excellence: the homeless” by walking across the permeable boundaries of the “invisible, migrational, soft non-city” (30) transform contemporary urban spaces and what the effects of their traversing are. Examining Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*, Chapter 3 addresses spatial practices of the homeless in Los Angeles and here the relationship between power and distribution of spaces in a contemporary postmetropolis is clearly delineated along with the representation of the creation of new liminal spaces that result from redesign of restricted spaces and redefinition of dividing lines. Consequently, the first part of Chapter 4 addresses a redefined space of the borderlands, analyzing Gloria Anzaldúa’s reconfiguration of *la frontera* into a space that “embraces multiplicity, non-linearity discontinuous narrative, and transnationalism,” as opposed to the formerly cherished location of Aztlán. The authors both present the aforementioned transformation and analyze how the new site corresponds to other ideological formations that facilitate the production of *mestiza/o* identity. In the second part of the chapter Manzanas and Benito illustrate the construction of nomad mestizo identities produced in the process of traversing unchartered territories –Mexico City, Delhi, and Lamex– which are at the same time the titles of the three books constituting Alejandro Morales’s *The Rag Dog Plagues*. In their examination of Morales’s trilogy the authors also aim to depict the “correspondence between body, space, and history” (77) firstly by showing how the body can be “a site of signification and meaning that bears the inscription of stories” (10) and furthermore, by postulating that “Aztlán, the borderlands, and the body. . . represent three stages of *mestizaje* in the constantly de- and reterritorialized Southwest” (10). The body thus becomes a vortex in the narrative on Chicano identity formation. The two tropes –that of the body and the border– are evoked also in Chapter 5 with the deployment of the metaphor of the border as an open wound that renders itself to healing and thus “testifies to the multiple choreographies of the border” (10). In this way, once again, the metaphor allows to “link and translate body dynamics into

spatial choreographies at the borderlands” (94). Apart from that the chapter focuses on the land in between –what Anzaldúa calls *nepantla*– that is pivotal in the analysis of the border experience and the process of identity formation. In Chapter 6 the authors once again ask the question “What is the border?” (113) and return to the idea of the border as a dividing line, analyzing threshold sites created by different borders (112). In this chapter the authors focus particularly on “the transversal dimension to the border and the places it creates” (113). On the basis of different examples of “border choreographies” (113), including Dagoberto Gilb’s *The Magic of Blood*, Thomas King’s “Borders” and Steven Spielberg’s *Terminal*, Manzanas and Benito explore contemporary borders and the thresholds that are created through border crossings. The Conclusion analyzes yet another film, Alejandro González Iñárritu’s *Babel* that, as the authors argue, “proposes an alternative cartography of the present and the way it is narrated” (12). They indicate Iñárritu’s attempt at spatializing the language and visual logic that creates “a space that comprises all spaces” (12).

- 3 *Occupying Space* returns to the idea of space as a relational construct of heterogeneous character that is both produced and productive, which the authors offered in *Cities, Borders, and Spaces*. The volume is grounded in theories sketched out in the previous publication, as the authors admit, but in *Occupying Space* tenets postulated by Doreen Massey’s in *For Space* become the pillars of the publication. Therefore, interrelationality of space, its heterogeneity and constructedness postulated by Massey allows the authors to redefine spatial concepts they analyze in individual chapters and enables them to “clarify the connections between race, space, class, and identity” (3), focusing on different interrelations in this matrix and examining “the occupation of space, the creation or repetition of spatial morphologies, and the situation of bodies between lines” (2). This involves the discussion on the relation between power and space, which has been evolving similar to other spatial relations, yet at the same time remains of great importance in the process of distribution of spaces. The authors argue that the “requalifying of presumably assigned spaces. . . is key to the dynamic and open vision of space” the volume seeks to explore (5) and enables to identify new nomadic heroes in American literary and cultural productions that redefine the traditional ideas of spatiality and spatial units.
- 4 Therefore, Chapter 1 analyzes one of the Bachelardian “dispersed beings” – Bartleby, occupying the intersection of spatial and linguistic axes. The authors’ examination of the protagonist of Melville’s “Bartleby, The Scrivener” is a pretext to discuss different cases of the appropriation of spaces in American literature and the nomad heroes created in the process. Taking up Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concepts of smooth and striated spaces as well as their idea of nomadic thought, Benito and Manzanas argue here that Bartleby in his “un-actions” (24) of resistance “engages in nomadic thought without becoming a nomad himself” (20) and at the same time he resists what Žižek calls “the hegemonic ideological coordinates” (19) that other apparent nomads “fail to escape” (19). Chapter 2 in turn examines spatial practices of two homeless, or un-homed, characters – Francis Phelan from William Kennedy’s *Ironweed* and Eric Packer in Don DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis*. The authors not only present the aforementioned spatial practices of the two characters but they also show their different results and question “the traditional assumptions attributed to particular places” (10) to argue that it is Eric Packer who in the end cannot claim a space he could call home, whereas Francis Phelan “finally achieves home in the nonhome and nonspatial” (10). Chapters 3 and 4 indicate how the spatial concept of “territory” may have two derivatives – that of “terra,” “the land that may sustain and nurture” (10) and “terrere” – “the kind of place where terror and violence are routinely exercised” (10). This violence can be exercised

in multiple ways and spaces. Hence, Chapter 3 analyzes different forms of internment camps on the basis of W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*, Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660*, and Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita's *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148*. Even though the camps in those narratives are different, they develop new forms with time and they are "lethal spaces that destroy difference in order to impose an abstract homogeneity" (11), this way producing a specific inhabitant, namely (Agamben's) "*homo sacer* [who is] the individual that is deprived of rights by the state itself" (11). According to the authors, owing to the properties of this space that include "hostile hospitality" (11) or "dislocating localization" (11) camp-thinking is generated. The premises of camp-thinking in turn assume degeneration of citizenship and all-prevailing homogeneity. Finally, what is even more unsettling is the fact that, as the authors argue, "the barbed wire . . . is always ready to reproduce itself in another location" (11) and in this way create "new geography of incarceration" (11). Chapter 4 returns to the concept of dividing lines and barbed wires, examining encounters with the Other across those lines, as presented in Courtney Hunt's *Frozen River* and Philippe Lioret's *Welcome*. These encounters involve "going outside the self" (11) and this action is necessary for the subjects to become full. The discussion about "self and Other in the creation of identity" (103) parallels the discussion on "the spatial and conceptual divisibility of the border" (103). Through those parallels the authors analyze both the emergence of what Arjun Appadurai identifies as translocality (104) and the "inherent relation to the Other" (113) which, according to Levinas, is an intrinsic part of the identity formation process. Finally, Chapter 5 returns to the striated spaces of Wall Street constituting a frame with Chapter 1 of this volume. This time the authors analyze how the demonstrators rewrite this particular space in Manhattan and create a "new architecture of consciousness" (137), emphasizing thus, once again, the "political power of physical places" (137).

- 5 The two volumes not only reflect the authors' long-established interest in space (resonating, among others, in *Border Transits: Literature and Culture across the Line* and *Literature and Ethnicity in the Cultural Borderlands*) but also affirm the growing recognition of multiple roles and functions of diverse spaces and places. With *Cities, Borders, and Spaces* and *Occupying Space* the authors contribute greatly to the current debate on space, providing excellently-researched analyses of cultural and literary productions with a focus on the roles of the spatial in them. Each analysis is preceded by the introduction of theoretical tenets deployed in the chapters and in this way the two volumes are also an invaluable source of knowledge and suggestions for further reading for those researchers who are interested in the changing role of space in American literature and culture. With those two volumes Manzanas and Benito definitely influence the trajectory of the discussion on representation of spaces and places in the future.

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