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One discovery Albert Einstein came up with was that space and time were entirely different from what everyone believed. As follows from his theory of relativity, space is not the constant element in the universe that people thought, and the distinction between past, present and future is only an illusion. It would be preposterous to assume that the conception of space as “setting” or “landscape” held by cultural critics is even remotely close to Einstein’s view of space, but his discoveries in the field of science serve as a powerful metaphor to understand the changes in the approach to space in the field of critical theory during the last decades: space has come to be seen as a shifting and fertile domain where the traces and consequences of all the forces and relations that determine social life congregate; it is our misleading perceptions of space that give an impression of stability and keep these complex relationships hidden from sight.

Space was reclaimed as a political category in the context of postmodernism and postcolonialism, and literature on the subject is both abundant and inspiring. Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, John Berger, and, more recently, Fredric Jameson, Edward W. Soja and Doreen Massey have approached space as a process through which social relationships are produced and reproduced. Foucault questioned why time has traditionally been seen as “richness, fecundity, life, dialectic” while space has been treated as “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” (Foucault 1980, 70), when, as Einstein had demonstrated, the two are inextricably bound together. In a similar vein, Annette Kolodny argued that “geography and chronology must be viewed as fluid and ongoing, or as a continuously unfolding palimpsest” (1992, 9). It is this conception of space (and time) as cultural practice that proves of particular relevance to understanding the social experiences of the members of ethnic minorities whose lives have been determined by the complex relations of forces inscribed in the land.

Concerned both with issues of space and of Latino life in the United States, Edward W. Soja (1989) and Mike Davis (2000), for example, avoid reductionisms or totalizing stories in favor of relationality to analyze how the convergence of Latino and Anglo cultural forces have determined the urban landscape. While traditional approaches to

space have tended to bar Latinos/as from discourse, forcing them to occupy positions defined by dominant myths about the land that deceptively appear cut off from history, politics, and power relations, Davis and Soja, like Neil Campbell in his studies of the West (2000, 2008), see space as a complex network of relations and Latino life as determined by the interdependence of the historical, the social and the spatial. Thus, in the spirit of Einstein's theory, space and time constitute a multilayered and polyphonic concept where voices, cultures, histories, languages, practices, etc. interrelate to radically change our understanding of the forces that determine social relations.

Edited by Imelda Martín-Junquera, *Landscapes of Writing in Chicano Literature* (2013) represents an effort to engage with this tradition of studies about space and the Latino community. As she observes in the introduction, the volume "interrogates how landscapes of power have been created, sustained, and transformed along the history of Chicano literature and culture" (1). More precisely, the aim of this collection is to lay emphasis on ecofeminism, especially in its approach to questions of land degradation and of social injustice related to the Latino community. Ecofeminism, Martín-Junquera argues, "defies and contests the domination that patriarchal systems exert on nature, women, and oppressed human beings (lower classes and ethnic minorities primarily) and works to eliminate hierarchical differences between the privileged and the oppressed" (2). Unfortunately, a startling gap separates the objectives heralded in the introduction and the essays that make up the volume.

Indeed, while the introduction is a comprehensive overview of the current state of environmental criticism, few of the eighteen chapters included in *Landscapes of Writing in Chicano Literature* can be said to actually engage with questions of space, environmentalism or social justice. The contributors, who include PhD candidates as well as familiar names in the field of Chicano/a studies, adopt a very liberal approach to space by tackling physical as well as symbolical and spiritual landscapes. However, while the editor invites a perception of landscape as overlapping with other categories like history, ecology, biology, economy, politics, gender or labor, many of the contributors see "landscape" simply as a rhetorical trope disconnected from other disciplines and, more worryingly, from the world outside the text. The majority, far from considering how new concepts of space can offer different insights into the complex relations which constitute the actual contexts that disempower Latinos/as in the United States, simply adopt a conformist, decontextualized textual analysis camouflaged as multiculturalism.

Although Martín-Junquera avoids a clear-cut classification of the different chapters in the table of contents, she identifies several implicit, albeit questionable, sections. The first section comprises four articles that deal with Sandra Cisneros's major literary works. It opens with an analysis of the representation of space in *The House on Mango Street* (1984) by Elisabetta Careri that epitomizes the kind of complacent textual analysis mentioned above. Elena Avilés examines how Sandra Cisneros's short story "Woman Hollering Creek" (1991) redefines the relationships between Latinas and the land, contributing to the construction of a Chicana-centered discourse, and granting

women agency and independence. However, throughout the analysis, she ignores the actual contexts of reception. For her part, Ellen McCracken focuses on the performative strategies deployed in Cisneros's *Caramelo* (2002) and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) to display and assert ethnic identity, which she links to the Chicano Movement's assault on the dominant US multicultural myths. María Laura Spoturno, on the other hand, centers on Cisneros's *Caramelo* to reveal the function of footnotes in the construction of marginal ethnic spaces and the recreation of conflicts between the center and the margin.

The articles included in the second section explore the relationships between landscapes and Latina experiences as articulated in poetry and theater. In line with some of the contributions in the first section, Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe forwards an overview of Chicana poetry as a gendered perception of experience that differs from that of men of their same community. She centers on the work of poetesses Gloria Anzaldúa, Ana Castillo, Pat Mora, Lorna Dee Cervantes, Rebecca González and Angela de Hoyos as a means of calling attention to how the symbolism rooted in the natural world represents a rewriting of Mexicanness that attempts to circumvent the gender bias inherent in Mexican culture. Taking the concept of "lived experience" as her theoretical framework, Yolanda Godsey adopts a more political stand to examine how Josefina López's play *Real Women Have Curves* (1997) compels the spectator to consider the relationships between working conditions in the LA garment industry and the niches of undocumented Mexican immigrants. Finally, Carmen Melchor Íñiguez contributes an exploration of Latinas' experiences of sexual awakening and maternity in Chicana literature. Regrettably, her essay is burdened by an exasperating lack of focus.

The third section consists of studies devoted to landscapes of trauma, war and identity conflicts. Berta Delgado contributes an overview of Chicano autobiographies with special emphasis on those written by Vietnam War veterans, which she interprets as an attempt to negotiate their ethnic identity after their war experiences. In one of the strongest essays in the volume, and in line with the work of Soja and Davis, Sophia Emmanouilidou explores how Mario Suárez's depiction of "barrio" life gives cultural visibility to Latinos/as and calls into question traditional racial boundaries. For his part, Manuel Broncano offers a general overview of Rudolfo Anaya's literary corpus. By not engaging, in any way, with the objectives of the book, Broncano's article, like Melchor Íñiguez's, epitomizes the worrying tendency in researchers to substitute the convoluted, self-referential vocabulary of academia for public debate over the actual challenges faced by the Latino community. This is a sample of what passes in the text for a socially engaged study of Chicano landscapes: "[i]t is the world turned into word and the word turned into world. And this textual entrapment of the real in a discursive net reveals Anaya's proximity to the postmodernist tenants" (122). Next comes Diana Rebollero's examination of how a number of authors, most notably Pat Mora, Richard Rodriguez, Jimmy Santiago Baca and Diana García, use the image of the house as a symbol of identity and belonging. From a different, more socially-concerned perspective, María

Jesús Castro analyzes the global dimension accrued by the Virgin of Guadalupe in the context of contemporary transcultural movements and how it has helped counter hegemonic discourses in reception countries. Roberto Ayala contributes an assessment of the space represented by the sanitarium in Alejandro Morales' *The Captain of All These Men of Death* (2008). Making use of Foucault's studies on the subject, Ayala's chapter exemplifies the tendency in literary studies to adopt theories *impersonally*, more as an act of academic ventriloquism (using a text to illustrate a theory) than as a strategy to intervene in the contexts. In the last article in this section, Carmen Flys focuses attention on Rudolfo Anaya's Sonny Baca series and the different ways in which the characters connect with the land in the context of increasing globalization.

The last section deals with linguistic borders and code-switching as spaces of resistance and identity. Norma Elia Cantú contributes one of the strongest and most refreshing articles in this otherwise unexciting collection of essays whose only common facet is their monotonously uniform disconnection from prominent schools of thought on the subject of space and their heavy-handed fetishization of the literary text. She looks at three traditional Latino celebrations—Los Matachines, La Quinceañera, and the Princess Pocahontas pageant—as texts through which “border communities and residents negotiate the existing power relations” in the context of hegemonic discourses about the border (173). By virtue of these cultural expressions, Cantú observes, women of Mexican ancestry resist assimilation along the lines demarcated by the manifold manifestations of power. Rather than a conventional essay, José Antonio Gurpegui offers a personal account of Spanish as by far the most non-English spoken language in the United States. The two remaining articles, by María López Ponz and Cecilia Montes-Alcalá, look at the hybrid language of US Latino writers. The former deals with the problems code-switching poses for translation, while the latter submits a detailed analysis of the different cases of code-switching found in Chicano literature.

Although this collection includes some convincing scholarly essays, on the whole, it does not measure up to the expectations raised in the introduction. Few chapters deal with issues of space and even less adopt an ecofeminist perspective. Instead of an attempt to better understand the complex relationships that hegemonic views on, of and about landscape tend to hide from sight, the majority of the contributions are no more than conventional readings that do not bother to look beyond the textuality of the works. Indeed, instead of interrogating how the text *connects* with the world outside, most of the articles tend to simply rephrase the stories or take them at face value and, in this way, academic explorations of the type further retreat into the fictional world—a strategy that has been condemned by theorists as dissimilar as J. Hillis Miller (1992) and Terry Eagleton (2013). Despite their references to Latino/a identity and living conditions, most of the authors fail to genuinely engage with the *real* contexts of injustice, that is, the actual social, cultural and political challenges faced by Latinos/as. In short, the general approach to theory in most of the contributions reveals a worrying neglect of contexts. Instead of bringing together the social and the spatial

along the routes opened up by the theorists mentioned above, instead of asking what *new* knowledge current theoretical debates on space can offer in a given conjuncture, most of the authors seem content with adjusting their pre-conceived interpretations to narrow, decontextualized readings of a theoretical paradigm. On this premise, Gloria Anzaldúa's often quoted description of the borderlands as "una herida abierta" ["an open wound"] can be looked upon as a case in point (1987, 3). Over and over again, her words are adopted routinely and naively, borrowers of the quote never realizing that any theory brings with it its own limits—limits to the questions we may ask and to the answers the text may yield.

As a consequence, many of the contributions that make up this volume boil down to simplistic denunciations of racism (we all know racism exists) or to reductionist celebrations of multiculturalism (a movement we are all aware of but which is the source of many different readings, e.g., Sara Ahmed, Nirmal Puwar). Without an ideology and a political agenda, the celebration of multiculturalism, as Russell Jacoby observed (1994), may become an ideology in itself, stripped of its potential to challenge hegemonic practices and unable to offer alternatives to the structures that perpetuate racial discrimination. In this respect it would be more creative to keep in mind Anzaldúa's Gramscian plea to "do work that matters" (2005, 102).

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