

MICHAEL FUCHS and MARIA-THERESIA HOLUB, eds., *Placing America: American Culture and Its Spaces* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 213 pp.

The discussion of geographical as well as cultural, literary, and political spaces and places has attracted a lot of attention in the humanities over recent decades. Ever since Henri Levebvre, Edward Soja, Michel Foucault, Doreen Massey, and many others have opened the discussion, which has become subsumed under the name of the spatial turn, space has assumed a central position in critical discourses across scholarly disciplines. Space, these theorists argue, needs to be discussed whenever time and history are, for time and space are inseparable; space is marked by time and history, while time becomes palpable only in and through space.

The volume that Michael Fuchs and Maria-Theresia Holub present is positioned within this discourse and contains various texts, which examine the central question of where and when America can be located or placed (cf. 10), thus considering the place of the United States' both in space and in time. The editors refer back to the extensive spatial narrative of the United States (as in the New World, the frontier, the City Upon a Hill, etc.) that has shaped the American conception or understanding of self—American identity—as a people and nation. This spatial narrative, they argue, is intricately linked to “both a specific moment and place in time” (9), namely the foundation of the United States of America. Thus, space and time co-constitute American identity, or rather identities. Only during the last century has the mystification of America's spatial narrative ceased and a more honest scholarly examination begun, which acknowledges both Native American sufferings and modern life in North America and includes a glance across U.S. borders.

The volume's first of four parts, “Constructing America from Afar,” includes two reflections on American Studies as a discipline. It opens with a (re)positioning of American Studies as a discipline within a transnational, Leopold Lippert even argues “*postnational*” (24), context. The transnational scope and practice of American Studies is thus defined programmatically for the entire volume. Lippert proposes the transnational as a “theoretical move, as a scholarly performance rather than a field of study” (26) and goes on to explain performance as “a continuous reenactment that is never a literal repetition” (28) of any one act. The transnational, therefore, expands the field of scholarly interest and prompts scholars to renegotiate and perform knowledge and “explore *postnational* knowledges” (24) in what Lippert calls a transnational turn. His turn thus entails a new approach and practice in American Studies. Many turns have been proclaimed in cultural studies over the past decades, of which only few have been substantial enough to defend their status as a turn. Lippert's contri-

bution to this volume does, however, include sharp and necessary observations as to where American Studies stands and where the discipline will and needs to go, and would be convincing without the proclamation of a turn. Similarly, the positioning of American Studies in a postnational framework may be considered overly ambitious but it helps Lippert to make a strong point.

A major contribution to the volume's second part, "Real Places and Imaginary Spaces," is Michael Fuchs's discussion of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. Fuchs shows how space is instrumental to and a central concern of the book's plot, while he refrains from calling it a novel, because it subverts and thus escapes genre boundaries and classifications. Fuchs shows that the book is not only about space; it is essentially about America. America, he argues, "is all about space" and "intricately tied to issues of spatiality," so that space is a central constituent of "Americanness" (105). America is even shown to be a theoretical construct rather than a specific and real place, and Fuchs deconstructs the American family that, as he says, mirrors American society, "the imagined community that is the people of the United States" (118). He furthermore argues that "the book's placement on the borders between fictional narrative and factual academic treatment" (105) mirrors America's frontier in that these borders shift. Just as in Fuchs's discussion of American society, the house of Danielewski's book, too, is shown to be a place that is both concrete and malleable.

*House of Leaves*, Fuchs shows, is furthermore an allegory referring back to historical internal struggles of the United States, which reach as far back as the settlement of the New World. Ghosts are suspected both in the house (for the book is placed in the tradition of gothic fiction) and outside of it. As Fuchs demonstrates, ghosts haunt America's history, which manifests in outdoor space. However, the frontier experience is mirrored in the building in which *House of Leaves* is set, and the frontier is actually mirrored in the family's home when walls move on their own, a corridor and an extra room appear, and the family members each venture into the unknown to conquer the space of their house; some of them even disappear. The uncanny and gothic events of the book are thus allegories of the United States: just as new, mysterious, and dangerous spaces appear in the family's house, America's repressed secrets and guilt manifest themselves in the American home. Fuchs's insightful analysis of a complex book comes to stand at the center of the volume's second and longest part, showing the ways in which Danielewski erects and negotiates America's real places and imagined spaces both in the domestic world and in the nation's history and demonstrates how the making of the American home, as one of the places of American culture, is intricately linked to everything it is supposed to shield its inhabitants from.

The contributions of part three, “Drawing Borders,” shed light on artistic depictions and cultural negotiations and ramifications of the border that separates Canada and the United States. They highlight the Canadian side as well as Canadian responses to a border that has recently “thicken[ed]” (146)—post-9/11 and somewhat unexpectedly. Yvonne Völkl’s contribution proves that the volume’s focus transgresses U.S. borders and includes Canada in the discussions of American spaces. Völkl discusses the border that separates Canada internally into French- and English-speaking parts and shows how this border is both made an issue in and transgressed by the 2006 movie *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, directed by Érik Canuel. Linguistic, geographical, and cultural borders are shown to have been carefully erected over time so as to construct the Canadian ‘two solitudes,’ i.e. Québec and Anglophone Canada, which are alienated from one another. Arguing that these “two solitudes” were initially an image of mutual protection and support, Völkl shows how the movie reinstalls this meaning, weakens historical separation, and uses humor as a catalyst to alleviate the stereotypes that exist on either side about the respective ‘Canadian other.’ In Völkl’s analysis, the border becomes a historical yet artificial obstacle that can be both culturally constructed and *deconstructed*. The social construction of space(s) is thus highlighted and depicted as culturally loaded but reversible.

The volume’s fourth and final part, “Marginalized Cultural Spaces,” discusses the United States as a space that is haunted by its indigenous ghosts. In her contribution, Madalina Prodan examines the portrayal and negotiation of “Indianness” (173) versus ‘Americanness’ as a basis for identity construction in Sherman Alexie’s novel *Flight*, where the half-Indian protagonist’s self-identification as Indian and with Indianness occurs mainly via TV. Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity as well as Edward Said’s theory of filiation and affiliation are used convincingly to examine the cultural dilemma of the protagonist: the belonging to and simultaneous exclusion from two cultures (Indian and American) at once. *Flight* is portrayed as a bittersweet “post-race utopia” (184) in which the mixed-race individual has a hard time developing a sense of self, identity, and belonging but in which, too, “the boundaries between ethnicities are broken down in favor of human spiritual unity” (ibid.). The cultural space of American society is thus shown to be complex, comprehensive, and flexible.

Fuchs and Holub’s volume impressively covers a wide range of topics; from theoretical musings about the academic field of American Studies to reflections on the U.S.-Canadian border and relationship, representations of American spaces in movies and novels, dystopian comics, and even to science. The ongoing discussion of spaces and spatiality as well as of the opposition of space and place are certainly enriched by this volume, which offers new insight into a complex topic and features innovative, substantial, and inspiring essays.

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