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Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America (review)

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recuperaciones musicales fundamentales como *Los Pirineus* de Pedrell, editada por Francesc Cortés, que coloca a su autor mucho más allá del lugar de un mero teórico.

No obstante, el arriesgado enfoque de Lamas no deja de ofrecernos sugerencias de interés, especialmente en el capítulo final (“Federico García Lorca ante el abismo referencial de *El amor brujo*”), que ofrece una novedosa visión de las relaciones conceptuales entre Lorca y Falla y una original explicación de la posición de la música en la obra del poeta granadino.

El desarrollo de nuestro conocimiento sobre el teatro musical español ha sido tan exponencial en los últimos veinte años que no solo ha permitido completar numerosos huecos existentes en el repertorio, sino también comprender la riqueza y complejidad del fenómeno de las relaciones entre la música española y la europea. El intento de ofrecer una visión global a partir de la cuestión de la identidad, pese a su originalidad, resulta problemático, conduciendo muchas veces a repetirnos algunos tópicos pesimistas de la situación de la música española en relación con la cultura universal. Solo una visión más amplia de un fenómeno complejo y una articulación que supere el canon germanocentrista de la historia de la música puede ayudarnos a comprender la importancia del teatro musical español y su posición tanto en la cultura española como en el contexto internacional. Así, el original esfuerzo realizado por Lamas se debilita precisamente al utilizar desde su bagaje moderno coordenadas y referencias ya superadas.

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ADAMS, RACHEL. *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009. 310 pp.

More than half a century after *La invención de América*, Edmundo O’Gorman’s insistence that we attend to the ideological consequences of geographical categories continues to be salient. Rachel Adams contributes to the discourse O’Gorman founded by exploring the genealogy of the narrower imagined construct of *North America*. *Continental Divides* complements recent works like Walter Mignolo’s *The Idea of Latin America*, though its agenda—“to introduce the continent as a heuristic frame for comparative cultural study” (23)—is considerably less prescriptive than Mignolo’s.

Adams argues in her cogent introduction that unlike its equally fictive “Latin” counterpart, the concept of a unitary North America emerged in the early 1940s and gained traction as the “reigning metageographic concept” (12) of US diplo-

macy during the Cold War, in some ways superseding the worn-out hemispheric ideal. Slippery from the outset, the term sometimes gestured at a presumed Anglo-American solidarity between the US and Canada, though the extent to which this cloaks a US-centric worldview is tellingly revealed by the virtual synonymy of *norteamericano* and *estadounidense* in Latin American usage, as she notes. A selection of alternatives to that dominant geopolitical mapping is also reproduced here, ranging from the Chicano Movement's reclaimed Aztlán to utopian, alarmist, and satirical visions of the continental order. The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement was obviously a watershed in the genealogy of the concept, and Adams carefully separates herself from any celebratory notion of the cultural and political unity between Canada, Mexico, and the US that is inevitably projected by that regional imaginary. Instead, she takes pains to show "the implausibility of that project" (17). Yet when critically applied, she argues, this continental optic can reveal the unequal economic and political relations that NAFTA elides, and thus can be more revealing than "more geographically inchoate rubrics such as globalization or diaspora" (7). For her, the frame of North America becomes a device to "bring into view alternate histories and cultural formations that might be obscured by an exclusive emphasis on the nation-state, or by too-close attention to any one region" (246).

Continental Divides takes aim at less balanced comparative studies built around spatial constructs like the border or the hemisphere, contending that "U.S.-based Americanists have shown considerable interest in Mexico, but typically ignore Canada or treat it as an extension of the United States, while those scholars of Mexico and Canada who have written comparatively about the United States rarely take one another as objects of critical interest" (6-7). She challenges Latin American and Latina/o studies scholars to assume, instead, "a genuinely comparative view of North American borders that locates them in relation to one another and to borders in other parts of the world" (21). Her archive, while clearly tipped more toward English-language materials, achieves that sense of relation.

Because of its refusal to impose a false sense of coherence upon the fictive construct of the continent, Adams's study wisely does not pretend to historical or regional completeness. Its coherence derives instead from the total effect of the loosely connected case studies that make up the book's six chapters. While the main focus is on works of fiction, each chapter also offers adroit readings of other forms of cultural expression: plays, photographs, documentary films, and conceptual art, nodding toward Diana Taylor's enlarged notion of what might comprise the archive of the Americas. This amplitude of selection risks seeming diffuse, yet many of the chapters are so lively and thoughtfully conceived that one wishes they had grown into separate book-length studies of their own. The opening chapter, on fictions of transnational indigenous solidarity, opens and closes with post-

NAFTA visual works by Native American artists. Although Adams is not the first to notice analogies between the cross-border revolutionary movement depicted in Leslie Marmon Silko's epic *Almanac of the Dead* and the actual rhetoric of Mexico's EZLN, her analysis digs deeper to find a satisfying counterpart to Silko's concerns in the work of the Canadian Thomas King, who sets his novels in the politically estranged world of the Blackfoot Confederacy—an affiliated band of communities artificially separated by the US-Canadian border. The same depth and expansiveness is evident in the outstanding second chapter, which focuses on the “neo-slave narratives” woven by writers of African origin across all three nations, from Lawrence Hill to Gayl Jones to Guillermo Sánchez de Anda. Reaching backwards to the nineteenth century, she turns the discourse of running north to freedom on its head to show how some former slaves crossed over the southern borders of the US instead, provocatively linking this discussion to new scholarship on Afro-Mexican history and culture.

Chapter Three, the longest in the book, has the loosest connection to the book's continental theme. It tells a fairly familiar story about the cosmopolitan *modernismo* of interwar Mexico City by reading the entwined lives and work of Katherine Anne Porter, Anita Brenner, and Tina Modotti. This chapter seems more interested in “filling in the picture of modernist activity in Mexico” (106) than in advancing a new argument about the phenomenon of English-speaking expatriates drawn to post-Revolutionary Mexico. Adams finds that Modotti, more than the two *norteamericanas*, “aspired not only to represent the Mexican people but also to find ways to address them directly” (164), yet important questions of the ethics of such quasi-ethnographic projects of representation are not as rigorously engaged as they might have been.

Chapter Four, however, engages this problem more convincingly when it turns to a later *gringo* writer with a bad case of Mexicophilia: Jack Kerouac. Here the trinational perspective truly pays off, allowing Adams to move between the writer's childhood in a far northern community of French Canadian descent and his adult fascination with what he considered its polar opposite: stereotypically “southern” Mexico. The analysis moves well beyond representational aesthetics by adroitly layering readings of *Mexico City Blues* and other Beat standards with discussions of Kerouac's Quebecois followers, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu and Jacques Poulin, who selectively interpreted his legacy in their own writing. Adams then traces the way the writers of *La Onda* celebrated Kerouacian spontaneity in the mid-1960s while paradoxically generating a strong critique of the very stream of touristic clichés about Mexico that expatriates like Kerouac had found irresistible. This Mexican reanimation of Beat literature hints at the way the influence of US popular culture upon Mexican life has only intensified since NAFTA.

Chapter Five follows the genre of the cross-border *neopoliciaco*, from Rolando

Hinojosa's *Klail City* narratives to the bestsellers of Mexican writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II, offering some Canadian examples as well. The different political valence of these narratives, Adams argues, "shows the tenacity of nationalism within a transnational literary form" (216). Finally, in Chapter Six, Adams compellingly argues that the influx of Latin American exiles into Canada from the 1980s onward has produced literary theorizations of migration and assimilation that both echo and deviate from better-known *mejicano* examples. Her reading of stories and plays by the Argentinian–Canadian Guillermo Verdecchia shows convincingly that the "northern borderlands" must be considered in any broad conception of what Juan Poblete calls Latin@America: they require both an amplification of the category "Latino" and a rethinking of models of border subjectivity that derive from it. The book feels a little rushed as it moves toward these final two chapters, which seek to show "how a genre travels and the fascinating things it can reveal as it is absorbed into a new context" (216): both are noticeably shorter than the others.

In the end, the only weakness of *Divided Continents* may lie in its very honesty about the conceptual limitations of the North American idea. Readers will almost inevitably want to pitch in materials that might challenge this frame: what happens when we consider the construct of North America from Mexico's border with Guatemala, for instance, or when we introduce a different geographical fiction like Mesoamerica into the discussion of transnational indigeneity? But these are the very sorts of questions and quibbles that this generous book encourages. While the primary audience it addresses may be US Americanists, it has much to offer anyone seeking to understand the peculiar cultural formation called into being by the name of NAFTA. With demand for courses in Latina/o and border studies increasing day by day, Latin Americanists will continue seeking points of dialogue with their counterparts in English departments who are attempting to meet this need within the limitations of their own training. An institutional *encuentro* between colleagues in different departments could do much worse than to assign this book as required reading.

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SPITTA, SILVIA. *Misplaced Objects: Migrating Collections and Recollections in Europe and the Americas*. Austin: U of Texas P, 2009. 294 pp.

This is a gorgeous book. It was apparently intended as a study of meanings as they migrate from places of origin to places where original meanings morph into variations on the power to conquer objects and their authors. But Silvia Spitta's