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IDENTITY ‘OUTSIDE THE MAP’: CHICANO/A SIGNIFYING PERFORMANCES

Abstract

Drawing on Judith Butler’s concept of performance, the paper aims at distinguishing a series of signifying performances within the Chicano/a literary environment that contribute to the configuration of a lived identity in the borderlands territory in the United States. From the corrido as the basic literary form used to define the Chicano community, to specific motifs and topos such as Aztlan or la frontera, Chicano/a authors employ various strategies to convey the idea that their identity is fragmented, yet

Keywords

Chicano/a, performance, identity, borderlands

Immigrant identity has traditionally been associated with a lack of a physical place of residence and the appropriation of a new one. In this respect, configuring an identity in a place that does not recognize the subject as being a natural inhabitant is often a matter of compensating a lack, may it be of a home, of cultural roots or of a monolithic identity. The outside the map’ configuration, however, serves as a counterpart to these almost integrative perceptions. The immigrant identity is located in a space that is neither here (as in the actual space of physical and spiritual residence), nor there (as the real or imaginary homeland), but in a new place, in-between and above the two territories. In an almost homogenizing manner, cultural critics such as Deborah Madsen refer to the traditionally perceived immigrant communities (the Asian ones), but nevertheless admit the possibility that Chicanos, as immigrants in their own land could aim at configuring a similar space. This blurring of physical and cultural boundaries conveys a non-essentialist approach to Chicano identity, the process of creating this in-between space often coinciding with the self-identification of the immigrant subject. Writing the identity becomes in this way an act of recognition in itself, and while ethnicity is no longer recognized as innate, it becomes a part of the process through which communities appropriate this
individual. As Harold Bloom briefly puts it, "perhaps two generations will have to pass before Hispanic-American literature will be judged by authentic cognitive and aesthetic standards. Myself, Bloom Brontosaurus, the academic dinosaur, I am well aware that I can no more intrude traditional canonical considerations than I can intervene helpfully in any of our current multicultural contexts." (Bloom, 2009:1) All aspects that we have touched upon so far are to be considered unstable products at the most, which could be altered upon a new performance, of a situated social and literary action. As proven by recent developments of Chicano/a subjectivity in relation to different means of articulating the self, identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances.

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