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Dennis Crow, ed. *Geography and Identity: Living and Exploring Geopolitics of Identity.* Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1996. iv + 378 pp. $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-944624-24-1; $44.95 (library), ISBN 978-0-944624-23-4.

Reviewed by Kevin R. McNamara (University of Houston-Clear Lake)
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Living on a Fault Line

Over the last decade and more, "the reassertion of space in critical social theory"[1] has produced many insightful analyses of particular spaces, the phenomenology of place, and the social production of space. To this growing list we must now add *Geography and Identity: Living and Exploring Geopolitics of Identity*, the second volume of essays edited by Dennis Crow for Maisonneuve Press's Critical Studies in Community Development and Architecture.

What distinguishes this collection from others is the subtlety with which the title's key terms are interrogated as they are employed. "Geography" in this book encompasses several modes of analysis that overlap but just as often fragment the identity of place, while "identity" is itself subject to critical scrutiny that reveals its constitutive displacements and *mis*identifications. Rather than a uniformity of approach or focus, *Geography and Identity* takes full advantage of the wealth of strategies for exploring the significance of space and place in the formation of identity as authors apply them to subjects that range from malls and their constituencies, public housing and its inhabitants, Indian jute-mill workers, Native Americans, and the political-theological identities of the State of Israel.

This volume's sub-title signals that the fifteen essays, prefaced with an introduction by the editor, will combine traditional modes of scholarship with personal experience and reflection in order to explore the construction of personal and place identity, to inquire into the relation between individual or group identity and the historical, geological, and architectonic specificities of place, and to adumbrate the experience of space (p. 5). Crow invites his contributors to think carefully about how physical spaces and identities are continually created and recreated by each other over time. The dialectic–indeed, the contest–is graphically portrayed on the book's cover collage of details from J. Seward Johnson's site-specific sculpture, "The Awakening," in which the head and limbs of a giant who struggles to emerge from the ground of Hains Point, in Washington, D.C., in turn reorganizes the landscape.

Given the announced focus of the volume, any attempt to distinguish the essays as "theoretical" or "practical" would do unwonted violence to the project. Mindful of that, I want nevertheless to make a distinction of emphasis among the essays in order to discuss a group of essays that are more concerned with the significations of the keywords that recur in all of the essays before moving to a second group of essays of more immediate interest to urbanists.

Crow's own contribution to this volume, "From Derrida to Del Rio," is perhaps the most rigorous exemplar of the procedure for which he calls. It layers Walter Prescott Webb's and William Least Heat-Moon's very different work on the geography and history of the Nemaha Ridge in Kansas with a preoccupation with ears in several essays by Jacques Derrida and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*, and Crow's own memories of listening to border radio while growing up in Kansas. It results in a complex, allusive, even elusive imbrication of intellectual biography and mythologies of place and personal identity that speaks of border crossings, conflicts, and means of conquest and resistance that Crow maps onto the human sensorium. Through synecdoches of *eye* and *ear*, Crow invokes the technologies of survey and settlement that Webb associates with the abstraction and domination in the conquest of the west (p. 285), and the work of recovering and reanimating the "other voices" (p. 300) whose stories of the land and its identities often are overlooked in quantitative social science and magisterial histories. The battle of the eyes and ears that Crow finds in Webb marks an interest shared by all contributors: How does one give voice, or lend an ear, to individual stories while advancing a critical analysis that is by its nature a process of abstraction?

Furthering this mode of allusive theoretical specula-

tion, Gayatri Spivak's "Acting Bits/Identity Talk" is described by the author as not an academic essay (an imposed, self-identical structure) but "a collection of fragments" (p. 40). The form is appropriate because Spivak's guiding thread is the conviction that, "if you fix on identity, it gives way" (p. 40). Identity is never what we commonly mistake it for, a statement of "thisness"–of unique and self-consistent being. Rather, identity is an iteration of a "that" with which the subject affiliates himself or herself as being the same as (Latin, "*idem*"; Sanskrit, "*idam*"), or a "that" with which he or she is identified (p. 43-44). Spivak is herself an interesting instance of the problem of fixing identity: She is a "'daughter of Bengal"' (p. 42) who earned her Ph.D. in the United States and first came to academic attention for her translation and annotation of Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. Presently Avalon Foundation Professor of Humanities at Columbia, she has held a succession of endowed chairs at prestigious American universities. At once insider and outsider to a hegemonic metropolitan culture and a subaltern, non-western culture, Spivak enacts and records these shifts her positionality in conversations in Toronto, Lake Como, Calcutta, and Dhaka, both as she articulates her affiliations and as she is situated by her interlocutors.

One of the consequences of Spivak's attention to the interplay of geography and identity destabilization of the identity of "center" and "margin" that is the central trope of much critical social theory including, at times, her own. "Acting Bits" pursues this end through its verbal form, as I have noted, but also by the way it stages the emergence of identity through the author's encounters with other artists: the Algerian writer Assia Djebar and, particularly, the Lebanese-Canadian Jamelie Hassan, whose installation, "Midnight's Children," displaces to the partition of Palestine Salman Rushdie's phrase to describe the constitution of Indian and Pakistani nationalities. Spivak's engagements of these texts produces a shared an identity-in-difference across religious and geographic partitions among what she calls "feminist(s)-in-decolonization" (p. 41).

While advancing the exchange among geography and critical social theory many of the essays thus also offer an implicit rebuke to one of the less fortunate consequences of the reemergence of geography in critical theory: a spatialized *rhetoric*, a tropological discourse that forgets its own metaphoricity and deploys spatial terminology as if it had some recognizable and stable content instead of "being dependent on their objects of investigation" (Spivak, quoted by Crow, p. 11). In his introduction, Crow observes that often in contemporary critical discourse "'place,' like 'margins,' 'borders,' 'space,' 'boundaries,' etc. are…place-holders for more analysis in terms of political-economy, culture, or biography" (p. 11). Absent such substantive analysis, these putative spaces in turn become the "site" of one or another "practice" (or "spatial practice," a concept in contemporary critical theory whose provenance is primarily de Certeau and Foucault) by a group whose identity is in circular fashion validated by occupying the "space" that their practices demarcate, as if collective identities were not "inherently heterogeneous and permeable" (Tajbakhsh, p. 155). At its worst, such circular validation produces the rationale for ethnic cleansing. Yet not even a recognition of the impurity of identity or the hybridity of spaces is necessarily proof against such circularity: There exists a whole literature of cultural borderlands and Mestizo Spaces in which the space demarcated frequently is an ideological position rather than a geographical space or a conventional marker of identity.[2]

Daphne Spain's contribution to this volume, "More Marginal Than Thou: Feminist Identities in Academia," stands as both a criticism and an example of this problem. The author promises a critique of "an effort among some feminists to differentiate themselves within the feminist community by establishing the most radical (and thereby most marginal) credentials" in order "to establish (their) legitimacy" (p. 120). She rightly observes that the appearance of marginality is in many disciplines (ironically, most often disciplines marginal to the academy's economic performativity)[3] more than a strategy for establishing one's "legitimacy"; it is an effective form of self-promotion. She notes that at her university the Women's Center and Women's Studies program are "protected" from budgetary cutbacks by their "marginality" (p. 122). The essay thus begs for a rethinking of the social cartography of center and margin to displace the model of a single center that makes the margins surround it. The solidity of "center" and "margin" may once have been appropriate, but it no longer adequately describes cultural production and dissemination; we need a more relativistic field of center*s* of cultural production that are themselves be marginal to other centers in specific ways. Instead, we are treated to the possibility that higher education is "the emergent 'new space of radical resistance"' and reassured that academic feminism will "prevail," even as "a more differentiated marginality has replaced common marginality" (p. 125), whatever coordinates those terms might designate.

The problem with essentialized identities is taken up more productively in Kian Tajbakhsh's inquiry into the grounds of identity among jute-mill workers in India. This critique of class-based identity as a default mode of

analysis even among analysts who intend to articulate a more complex description of group identity, stems from work with community-based and tenant-rights groups in New York, where the author first noted a dearth of attention to identities formed "not (around) production, but consumption," and not around the workplace but where one lives (p. 144). In the case of the jute-mill workers and commentaries on them, Tajbakhsh argues that, consistently, "The subjects of the history are workers; thus any other identity is an impurity" (p. 150). Actions undertaken by worker groups, for instance, no matter how violent, are called "strikes," but actions whose agents are religion- or caste-identified consistently are characterized as "riots" (p. 149); the implication appears to be that they lack political or historical significance.

Such analyses, which Tajbakhsh critiques, reproduce that same circular reasoning with respect to the social "space" of class. The solution to this problem is not, Tajbakhsh notes, simply to prefer "anti-essentialist" accounts of individual or group experience to historical narratives in which some socially constructed identity founds all action and choice, while other affiliations are merely additive. That approach still proposes a core of identity, while experience, at best a partial and mediated perception of the social totality, is part of the material of identity (p. 154). We are no closer to an understanding of how one activates the identities that in turn direct action. He likewise proposes that we understand identity not as the expression of an innate state but as the performative iteration of one among a set of possible collective identities whose meanings are not internal to them but "what structural linguists since Saussure have termed negative values" (p. 155). Identity is then seen as elective, not a product of structural determination or inherent being. It goes without saying, however, that the choice of identity is always overdetermined by a host of ideological factors, such that identity is a process of constitutive *mis*recognition by all parties.

Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin add to this discussion a closely-argued and wonderfully clear engagement of the histories of universalist and particularist forms of cultural or racial identity derived from Pauline and rabbinic sources. It supplies the groundwork for their brief in favor of "diasporized identity." In "Shifting the Ground of Jewish Identity" they explore "a Jewish political subject 'other' than that of (nationalist) Zionism" (p. 79), which "transform(ed) entirely the meanings of (Jewish) social practices" as these practices became hegemonic in Israel. Among other things, the Boyarins' account is an exemplary demonstration of both the unstable identities of "centers" and "margins" and the forms of violence that arise from a refusal to account these changes in order to preserve a claim to marginality.

The Boyarins develop a "diasporic Jewish identity" as a transformation, or a translation, of space into time. The physical space of Israel is refigured as a "memory of shared space and…hope for such shared space in an infinitely deferred future" (p. 93). This deterritorialization is possible without a loss of identity–indeed, they see it as a *gain*–because the diasporic narrative recuperates an identity based on "family, history, memory and practice" to replace an identity rooted in "a Divine Promise to give this land which is the land of Others to His People Israel (that) is a marker and sign of bad conscience" (pp. 98, 99). Along the way, the Boyarins assert the validity of a differential approach to group or ethnic identity, contending that "For people who are somehow part of a dominant group, any assertions of essence are ipso facto products and reproducers of the system of domination. For subaltern groups, however, essentialism is resistance, the insistence on the 'right' of the group actually to exist" (p. 90). In so saying, they refute one extreme in the critique of identity, which finds ample reason for moving entirely beyond communal or cultural identity in the long history of violence perpetrated in the name of identity.

II

Several of the essays that focus on specific locations are of direct interest to urban historians. Robert Mugerauer's account of an emergent social group in Austin, Texas, the "Alternative Symbolic Analysts" is the richest and, in my estimation, the most successful combination of autobiography and "traditional" scholarship in this volume. His subject is a sub-class of the professionals who "simplify reality into abstract images that can be rearranged, juggled, experimented with, communicated to other specialists, and then, eventually transformed back into reality," as former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (quoted by Mugerauer, p. 326) describes his category of symbolic analysts. The alternative analysts, among whom Mugerauer numbers himself, are economically dependent upon the information sector lasso-ed for Austin by the State's old-boy political network, but use their influence to resist and redirect "*the high technology and mainstream establishments in range of ways on behalf of groups that do not have the same privileges and access that the symbolic analysts themselves do and on behalf of the environment (especially in light of the historical biocultural character of the place*" (p. 328; emphasis in the original).

But the particular triumph of "Plugging into the Information Flow in Austin, Texas," is the grace with

which Mugerauer performs the operation of the symbolic analyst (abstraction, rearrangement, transformation "back into reality") on the cultures and geography of Austin. The essay begins with personal reminiscences: Mugerauer's exploration of an alternative Austin while in school at the University of Texas, and his mother's comment that the geography and culture of Austin recall "the southwest corner of Wisconsin…where you were born and spent most of your summers on your grandparents' farm" (p. 309). It moves to a lucid, "abstract" discussion of the physical surface of the Austin region, the modes of agricultural life each bioregion supported, and how the confluence of settlement patterns has defined the ethnocultural map of Austin for over a century. This presentation is also noteworthy as the volume's only sustained treatment of the impact of natural features on the development of an urban landscape. The essay returns to the "reality" of autobiography as it follows the development of "the five traditions" (African American, Mexican, German/Czech, Southern, Cowboy) and their political and economic "fault lines" through the recent development of Austin as a node in the high-tech and information economy, whose growth prompted Mugerauer's return to the city.

Mugerauer might have offered more information about how the symbolic analysts' interventions have fared. He supplies ample evidence of the depredations of the developers, the boosters and their interests, and of the rise of an "'alternative community' that supports and is supported by 'alternative' businesses" (p. 334). There is a good accounting of the alternative analysts' negotiation of cultural borders–"enjoy(ing) the rituals and ceremonies, arts, food, clothing and personal or home decorations that are part of the (marginal Austin) groups identities" (p. 329), and of their dependence on techno-capitalism. But how and where the alternative symbolic analysts have intervened with as well as "on behalf of disadvantaged populations" (p. 328) is an undoubtedly interesting story that is given short shrift.

Something similar happens in Robert Shields's otherwise informative account of The Mall that Ate Edmonton. As a case study of how malls work, how the West Edmonton Mall reorganized the perception of Edmonton's geography, and how the mall respatialized sociality in Edmonton, "Social Spatialization and the Built Environment" works wonderfully. But a second major strand, in effect a clash of theoretical a prioris, is less successful. It pits those spatial analysts (e.g.: Gottdiener, Jameson) whose emphasis falls on the disciplinary properties of built spaces against other theorists (e.g.: de Certeau) whose interest is in the way spaces are used or consumed. After taking Gottdiener to task for neglecting "ironic reversals and hijackings of intended perceptions" that "'ward off' the spirits of the…Mall" (349-50, 346), Shields only asserts the presence of a counter-practice of *flanerie* that "subver[ts] 'mall design' and the intended consumer experience" (350). What is needed, perhaps, is an approach that does not presume the existence of a struggle between planners and users; there may be other, less agonistic, forms of discipline at work in the anticipation, satisfaction, and even the creation of desires for consumption–visual as well as economic–that the mall satisfies.

Debbie Nathan's "Love in the Time of Cholera: Free Trade at the Border Line," is rich with specific, material detail, as befits a journalistic essay. The El Paso-based Nathan reports on the living conditions for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the *colonias* on both sides of the Texas border that make it vulnerable to the cholera epidemic that has been predicted along the U.S. southern border since 1975 (p. 376). Beneath the gaze of the Border patrol, Nathan gives an ear and a voice to the story of Perla and translates geopolitical issues into lived experience. "Love in the Time of Cholera" is also autobiography, the story of Nathan's own crossing and recrossing of borders: between the Mexican community and the world of university seminars on cholera and conferences on free trade at the local Marriott, between the United States and Mexico with Perla and her sisters-in-law to get the fruit that they sell door-to-door. (One of Nathan's neighbors did not recognize her in old clothes, covered with the filth of the river and a sewer tunnel, and gave her a charitable dollar.)

Among the more "traditional" scholarship of interest to observers of urban culture and society are Peter Marcuse's "Walls in the City: Is the Goal a Wall-less City?", Lawrence J. Vale's "Destigmatizing Public Housing," and Marshall Berman's "Falling Towers: Life after Urbicide." Marcuse offers a taxonomy of walls–physical and experiential, fixed and fluid–and notes on their provenance and their function. Many of his observations are developed with contrastive examples drawn from New York, Los Angeles, and Berlin, but the essay is more a thought-provoking blueprint for further studies than a finished work.

Vale's Boston case study of residents' perceptions of whether or not their developments "look like public housing" concludes that "the 'look' of public housing involves far more than can be seen" (p. 240). Indeed, while some differences between a "development" and a "project" are matters of landscaping (grass, flowers,

trees) and groundskeeping, superblock plans, red brick, and buildings that all look the same are not in themselves markers of public housing. What repeatedly emerges as a theme in residents comments about themselves and their surroundings is the perception of others. Whether the structures would look like public housing to anyone driving by, or whether other residents exhibit behaviors that have become associated with public housing and serve to stigmatize it, are common indices in the responses. Not surprisingly, the level of satisfaction among residents was higher when their involvement in the process of redesign was solicited (p. 240). How much of that satisfaction is attributable to the design itself and how much it reflects a community-building experience of empowerment is a question Vale might have looked at more closely than he did. Like the process by which residents identify their living conditions through the putative evaluations of others, it speaks directly to the component of *mis*recognition in identity.

Finally, Marshall Berman's "Falling Towers: City Life after Urbicide" is an unabashedly humanist counterpoint to the volume's theory-inflected themes. A survey of "the literature of urbicide" (p. 176) draws its lessons from the Old Testament and *The Trojan Women*, Baudelaire's "The Eyes of the Poor," Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (both discussed in *All that Is Solid Melts into Air*) and Kafka. If Berman takes his title conceit, "Falling Towers," from T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, he looks elsewhere than the poet's Tiresias, an impotent witness, for regeneration. Recalling the Book of Nehemiah and its description of "the work of rebuilding, a task of enormous difficulties, both material and spiritual" (p. 180), Berman offers "Notes for a New Nehemiah" (p. 185) who would recall for us the cultural and social centrality of cities throughout history, the strong linkage between the renewal of cities and the renewal of culture. If the argument is no more new than Eliot's litany, "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/Vienna London," and Berman's addition of The Bronx, it nevertheless remains timely.

Two other essays of interest to urbanists are less rewarding. Helen Liggett and David Perry's reexamination of Robert Moses does offer an interesting critique of how "casting Moses as the ruthless author of the modernist city legitimates planning by giving it the moral high ground, absolving it of its failures by not confronting them" (p. 208). Yet the essay's larger project, to read "the text" of Robert Moses, is over-theorized and less convincing, in part because the authors seem underprepared for the sort of rhetorical analysis they would offer. Contesting the Moses of Robert Caro and Marshall Berman, who are accused of reifying him as a "great man," the authors in fact leave the reader reassured that Moses was a consummate bureaucrat and self-promoter who demanded and received the complete loyalty of all who worked below him: a "powerbroker" indeed. Writing of Moses's relation to his "muchachos" (his inner circle, who were "hired (for) loyalty and trust over competence" and paid him "complete fealty" [p. 204]), Liggett and Perry claim, "Moses was literally fragmented: The muchachos were an extension of (him)" (p. 205). Surely, they don't mean *literally* fragmented, but even taken figuratively the claim is unconvincing. These ambulatory extensions may make for a prosthetic Moses, but as extensions of his agency they do not "fragment" him. (I do not deny that Moses's or anyone else's subjectivity is fragmented; my argument is with the essay, not with poststructuralism.)

Kenneth Frampton's "Place, Form, and Identity," a stripped down version of his essay, "Toward a Critical regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance"[4] lacks the history of critical regionalism and most of the Heideggerian nostalgia and the screed against postmodernism, air-conditioning, and television. In this form, the essay more effectively advances Frampton's argument for an architecture that would resist the imperatives of global modernization, but the traces of Heidegger leave him with problems. Employing Heidegger without also "demythologizing" him is ethically suspect for reasons revisited in Michael Dear's essay for this volume, "The Personal Politics of Postmodernity" (pp. 128-42), his well-known willingness to place his philosophy of Being at the service of Naziism, an unutterably deplorable conjunction of geography and identity. Far from demythologizing Heidegger, Frampton endorses practice that is "grounded in the real *and/or mythic* history of a particular place" (p. 166, my emphasis). One of the best ways to expand this essay (first published in *Domus*) would be to justify the appeal to "mythic history" in the face of the suffering authorized by myths of blood and soil, a geopolitics of identity that most of the contributions to this volume seek to deconstruct.

The other failure of this book is editorial. There are many typographical errors and several points at which the copy editor seems to have been napping: occasionally a sentence is unreadable, in a couple of essays footnotes do not match up, a couple more have entries missing from their lists of works cited. I would also have welcomed an index, as a way of moving meaningfully between the essays, and notes on the contributors and their work.

If *Geography and Identity* reaches the circulation that it deserves, there will be an opportunity to correct

those glitches. They are, at any rate, a small distraction from the volume's rich and singular blend of topics and methodologies. The diversity of interest and approach make Crow's collection an ideal reader for urban studies or cultural studies courses; the essays gathered herein not only instruct, they open avenues for self-aware critical practice.

Notes

[1]. Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London and New York: Verso, 1989.

[2]. See Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Stephen Rendell, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, especially pp. 91-130; and Michel Foucault, "Space/Knowledge/Power," trans. Christian Hubert, *Skyline* March 1982, pp. 16-21. Gloria Anzaldua is deservedly a central figure in this discourse of marginal identity and borders, but another gay Mexican-American author who engages the many of same subjects, Richard Rodriguez, is marginal to the discourse of marginality because his interpretations are too "mainstream." I find Rodriguez's account of the complexities of identity–its elective and imposed affinities, and its negotiation and realization in a social field–to be far more interesting, especially to urbanists; see Kevin R. McNamara, "A Finer Grain: Richard Rodriguez's *Days of Obligation*," *Arizona Quarterly* 53.1 (1997): 103-122.

[3]. With "performativity" I invoke Jean-Francois Lyotard's critique of the function of the university as a source of workers skilled in ways that best serve the information economy; see *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Theory and the History of Literature 10, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp. 47-53.

[4]. Frampton, "Toward a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983, pp. 16-30.

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