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***The New Ruralism. An Epistemology of Transformed Space.* Joan Ramon Resina and William R. Viestenz eds. Madrid: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2012.**

Joan Ramon Resina's *New Ruralism* is a stimulating contribution to the newly emerging discourses on the shifting realities of the 21st Century. In his introduction, "The Modern Rural", Resina offers a panoramic view of the ever-changing binary of the rural-urban spaces throughout recent history. From the city as the privileged space in the 19th Century and the dissolution of inherited forms in the 20th Century, to the expansion of World-cities and the eradication of regional/national cultural idiosyncrasies, Resina touches upon the literal and symbolic meanings of country and city landscapes across time. In preparation for the great variety of essays that follow his comprehensive introduction, Resina does provide the reader with the necessary definitions that allow for a cohesive "epistemology of transformed space." Resina articulates what he considers a historical shift in our time, of how the urban and rural are understood and valued, and how the dynamic between both spaces has changed. The new ruralism he proposes, with a reference to Raymond Williams, has the objective to document "a turn in the history of this dialectic pair brought about by large-scale processes that represent an acute phase of [...] social and economic phenomena [...]" (7-8).

Resina draws a connection between the present world-order and Weber's observation about the economic and cultural degradation of the rural. It becomes clear that Resina's historical view reflects an anti-capitalist and somewhat regionalist position. However, he does not express a nostalgic desire for a revival of the rural, but rather points to the social and economical inequality between rural and urban spaces, seen as the result of worldwide exploitation. One of the main questions Resina asks himself is "whether forms of experiences inherited from the rural life are still possible in our time" (11). In order to answer this question, he proposes to reexamine the present-day experience of landscape. A concept inherent to ruralism, "the landscape ends up losing its contemplative value and is now intertwined in promotional schemes that place the traditional exploitation of the rural on an altogether different footing" (11).

Evoking a variety of critics, philosophers, and sociologists, Resina lays bare the complexity of the ongoing semantic (re)definitions of the rural space, such as the broad meaning of *país*, landscape, land, or region, and how meanings

can change dramatically from one generation to another, and between romantic, economical or political contexts. While these are not new observations, Resina's interpretation of how these changes in meaning are manifestations of the metaphorical "cultivation" of space, indicative of the changes in culture itself, is well worth reading. As a consequence of this metaphorical cultivation, "'culture' became detached from the land and through dialectic inversion ended up denoting its contrary" (13), while the 'rural' no longer denotes an objective reality" (15). Resina's new ruralism pretends to express this new reality, as well as the present-day changes of and within culture. Accordingly, "a new ruralism can only refer to a critical form of disenchantment, or better yet detachment, that challenges modernity's epistemic superiority and culture's alleged dependence on the city's tempo and intensity of change" (15). The author also insinuates that his new ruralism aims for much more than a commentary on a new epistemology of transformed space, one that expresses a radical turn in modernity, and one deeply intertwined with the way man sees himself rooted in this new reality. Resina's introduction is followed by a dozen contributions by critics and writers of different backgrounds and disciplines. The great diversity of their topics and approaches makes this collection of essays a truly interdisciplinary and multicultural work, although emphasis does seem to lie on contemporary Catalan culture, with half of the essays focusing on Catalan art, literature, and landscape.

Joan Nogué's essay, "Neo-ruralism in the European Context" further provides the necessary cohesion of such a diverse collection of essays. Nogué's reexamination of neo-ruralism, when placed within a 21st Century context, shows that it could be indeed difficult to draw such defining lines between previous and "new" ruralisms. One of the reasons could be the difficulty to agree upon precise definitions of such a culturally and linguistically charged semantic field. In this sense, Pere Salabert's contribution, a "theoretical speculation" based on semiotics, is helpful. Salabert divides his essay in sections discussing the changing meanings of nature, ruralism, countryside, and the City-landscape. In order to show the shifting of terminologies across intellectual history, from Aristotle to the surrealists, Salabert evokes Goethe, Aristotle, Baudelaire, and Nietzsche, before moving on to Peirce's idea of *Natura*, until tracing its meaning to *birth*, *birthing*, and thus *origin*.

In stark contrast to this semiotic approach, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's "Can Suburbia Think?" offers a refreshing personal account of what could be understood as an unexpected defense of life in Suburbia. As he argues quite convincingly, despite our love-hate relationship with life in the outskirts, this in-between-place truly represents present-day reality. Gumbrecht values the suburban non-place as a space conducive to thinking, comparing it to Heidegger's *Provinz*. Even more importantly, he presents Suburbia as part of a universal phenomenon of de-rootedness, and as such as indicative of a new "general condition of life in a world that excludes the possibilities of real Reality and of natural Nature" (59). In our new reality, as Gumbrecht reminds us, the

urban space is but a “disguise for our rootlessness”, whereas “Suburbia obliges us to think through the permanent situation of displacement that is our fate” (59).

Marília Librando Rocha returns to the question of landscape, more specifically to that of “temporal landscape” or *saucade*, a Brazilian term she explains through the literary analysis of two of João Guimarães Rosa’s short stories (1962). Her essay examines the complex relationship between the City and the marginalized non-urban space in Brazil, as experienced through the eyes of a child in Rosa’s fiction. Librando concludes that as the destruction of the rural space progresses, the untouched landscape can only survive as an imagined space, as a temporal landscape, or could possibly be “reborn as part of the collective memory of Brazil” (75). A similar commentary, although not via literary analysis, is Robert Davidson’s study on the transformation of the rural Catalan region of the Priorat. Davidson describes how the economical exploitation of *terroir*, the “taste of the land”, has led to the radical transformation of a formerly untouched rural landscape with a complex history of poverty, depopulation and decay. Now a tourist attraction and a national brand worth marketing, the Priorat risks losing the same authenticity its economical success relies on. On a larger scale, Davidson’s observations could be read, of course, as another elucidating example of the effects of globalization and the resulting tension between the need and want for preservation of nature and regional cultures, and the equally significant desire for economical success and progress.

While the remaining essays further develop intriguing aspects of rural and urban landscapes in literature, art, and other fields (of social, geological, or linguistic nature), taken as a whole, and despite their great variety, they present a valuable example of new ruralism. However, they are also proof of the resistance to a homogenous articulation of our changing realities. Rather than a flaw of the collection, however, this resistance only further stresses the importance and value of its project. As Joan Nogué, one of the contributors, rightly states, “we are now witnessing a paradigm shift, in the widest sense of the word” (39). As a result, over the past decade and across disciplines, critics and writers have sought to articulate this paradigm shift. More than a commentary on the changing dynamics of the rural-urban binary, this book successfully illustrates the connection between the understanding and practice of transformed space, and the understanding and practice of changing national and global realities. Although a volume of this extension and thematic focus cannot be exhaustive, the essays are sufficiently well anchored within history and tradition, while still effectively explorative and provocative, in order to provide a solid first step towards further discussions on transformed space, culture, and thought.

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