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The Colonial Spanish-American City. Urban Life in the Age of
Atlantic Capitalism (review)

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(Review)

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El estudio se divide en cuatro capítulos, precedidos de una breve introducción y un sugerente epílogo, y toma en cuenta diversas formulaciones teóricas para explicar el modo en que cada uno de los textos considerados establece un diálogo con el quehacer histórico. Específicamente se evalúa de qué modo estos escritos intervienen en lo social desde preocupaciones éticas que convergen en "... llamar la atención hacia planteamientos más humanos y más solidarios" (23). El primer capítulo, "Modernidad inacabada, postmodernidad complaciente," ofrece una detallada y rigurosa presentación de las premisas epistemológicas que enmarcan la discusión del autor y que se emblematizan, respectivamente, en las propuestas de Jürgen Habermas y Jean-François Lyotard. Uno de los aspectos más sugerentes del capítulo, y del libro en general, es la cuidadosa discusión de los apartados 1.3 a 1.3.3 donde se examinan los ensayos "Planfetos desde el planeta de los simios" de Vázquez Montalbán y "El bosque de las letras" de Goytisolo. Ambos publicados en 1995:

buscan una reformulación de legitimidades, de sujetos, [...] de procederes éticos y morales, de identidades, de proyectos de futuro, de nociones finalistas de la historia, etc., acordes con sus posicionamientos personales, sus críticas y alternativas al momento y modelo actuales. (63)

En el capítulo II, "El sujeto y el Otro: Elecciones éticas y políticas," enfocado en las novelas *El estrangulador* (1994) de Vázquez Montalbán y *Netchaïev est de Retour* (1988) de Jorge Semprún se examinan las confusas y complejas relaciones que se plantean cuando entran en conflicto la autonomía individual y la autonomía pública. Se echa de menos que en un capítulo dedicado a la autonomía de elegir y al "Otro" no se discutan ambos aspectos en relación a la "otredad" que caracteriza la narrativa de Semprún: hasta el 2003 todas sus obras de ficción se escriben en francés. En el contexto de lo argumentado por Aguado, no se pueden dejar de evaluar las implicaciones de esta elección por parte de Semprún. Este aspecto también se encuentra ausente en la discusión del capítulo III, "Negociaciones con el pasado y el presente: Hacia lo postnacional,"

cuando se evalúa *L'écriture ou la vie* (1994) de Semprún a la luz de la "solidarité avec les humiliés et les opprimés" (203). En este apartado también se considera la novela *Autobiografía del general Franco* de Vázquez Montalbán y es aquí, en el mejor capítulo de *La tarea política*, donde se establece que "mediante el artificio literario [ambas narrativas] construyen el armazón para pensar en [...] un mañana mejor" (203).

Enfocado, principalmente, en *El sitio de los sitios* de Juan Goytisolo y en *Tembolor* de Rosa Montero, el capítulo IV, "Desnegociaciones," expone cómo ambos textos "recuperan experiencias extremas para lograr una mejor comprensión tanto de lo real inaccesible como de la realidad inmediata que nos rodea" (207). En el "Epílogo" se resalta la vigencia actual, para el siglo XXI, de unas producciones que, aunque se ajustan a unos años determinados, adelantan visiones críticas, "de resistencia" (289), que se contraponen a las interpretaciones cerradas y reduccionistas de la realidad.

Riguroso y bien documentado, el libro de Aguado es, sin duda, un aporte valioso a los estudios culturales españoles pues no sólo enriquece la discusión sobre la amnesia histórica contribuyendo al campo como lo han hecho Jo Labanyi y otros, sino que aporta sugestivas lecturas para las obras analizadas. Lo que lamento es la excesiva cantidad de subdivisiones que se ofrecen en cada capítulo pues interrumpen la fluidez de los argumentos y lecturas que se presentan. Parecen ser los rastros que permanecen de lo que es probablemente una tesis doctoral. Sin embargo, por las aportaciones ya destacadas, considero que *La tarea política* cumple, con creces, su propósito y ha de servir de estímulo a críticos y estudiosos del período contemporáneo.

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*The Colonial Spanish-American City.
Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism*
University of Texas Press, 2005
By Jay Kinsbruner

In *The Colonial Spanish-American City. Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism*, Jay Kinsbruner offers both a history and interpretation of the colonial Spanish American city from Pre-Columbian times to the early nineteenth century. His synthesis focuses on the city as an urban phenomenon and a product of Atlantic commercial capitalism. Kinsbruner defines this type of capitalism as characteristic of the pre-industrial era and as a system which allowed individuals to participate in the market economy for profit. According to Kinsbruner, within this system one finds agricultural, mining and merchant capitalists as well as owners of large landed-states which produced “grain, wool, meat, and other products for nearby and distance markets” (64). As participants in this economy their main goal was the pursuit of profit. The historian suggests that what distinguishes the city as an urban settlement is the fact that “the economy is centered in nonagricultural activities” (3). Proximity to good water, availability of land transportation routes and the existence of a productive hinterland, which enabled supply food and materials for manufacturing, were also important components of an urban city. According to Kinsbruner, the social and commercial negotiations, which took place on a daily basis, made the Spanish American city a fluid and productive space of interaction.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, including the conclusion. Each chapter examines a particular dimension of what constituted the set of relationships which took place in colonial cities. The first chapter is devoted to a helpful definition and origins of the colonial city as it was related in function and form to what constituted an urban aggregation. In the following chapter, the author discusses the constitution of pre-Columbian cities as they were envisioned as ceremonial centers and agricultural communities. The author also discusses the importance of the plazas as the center of pre-Columbian urban life. Chapter three discusses the structure and organization of the colonial city as the Crown in their royal decrees had delineated it. According to Kinsbruner, Vitruvius, *De Architectura*,

represented the most important source for the establishment and building of the towns and was the base for the *Ordinances for the Discovery, New Settlement, and Pacification of the Indies* of 1573. The following chapter (chapter four) centers on the administrative nature of the colonial city, as colonial cities such as Mexico City and Lima became centers of jurisdiction in which municipal councils came to represent “corporate bodies of local prestige and power” (39). A section of this chapter briefly discusses the constitution of Indian and free colored towns; the former were founded by colonial authorities following the same regulation that applied to the Spanish towns to facilitate the control of agricultural and mining labor. The latter were created to protect frontier and coastal regions.

Chapter five studies the manner in which colonial architecture in Spanish America was influenced by the aesthetics of the Italian Renaissance, the Baroque and the Moorish legacy. Kinsbruner contends that Spanish authorities used architecture to convey messages pertaining to the power and status of government and church. A section of this chapter briefly discusses what according to the author constituted one “of the most vexatious aspects of Spanish American urban life: the streets and cities in general were fetid” (58). Kinsbruner adds that the city was also affected by natural disasters which further deteriorates sanitary conditions and contributed to many diseases and epidemics. Chapter six centers on the urban economy as related to commercial capitalism. This economy, according to the author, was hierarchical, allowing the large import-export merchants to be at the apex and itinerant traders at the bottom of the economic scale. In the chapter entitled “Urban Society,” Kinsbruner studies the relationship between racism, social status and the marketplace by focusing on the relevance of the caste system to determine the role of individuals within the colonial economy. A historical examination of the concept of race was needed in this chapter in order to understand how the word racism applies to this discussion. Chapter eight continues this discussion by emphasizing how “the

dynamic of the economy sometimes breached the restrictive caste system, especially where the economy flourished and employment was widely available" (103).

In chapter nine, Kinsbruner discusses the urban family in order to understand its place within colonial Spanish American society. He touches briefly on issues of patriarchy, racial infidelity, expected age to enter the labor force, male and female ratio, women's legal rights, nuclear and extended family, and marriage as related to racial prejudice. Chapter ten offers an interesting discussion about the daily and perpetual contestation which took place in colonial cities, especially in their streets, *alamedas*, plazas and parks. For Kinsbruner, "status in urban colonial Spanish America's social architecture was proclaimed and reinforced by the space that one occupied" (125). "Conclusion: The Paradox" constitutes the last chapter of the book in which the author contends that "the city as metaphor for all urban habitats represented hope and opportunity" due to the daily negotiations of one's place in society which were so ubiquitous in urban environments (130). The book concludes with an Appendix which includes several excerpts and documents from the Spanish codification of 1573 for town layout and the statements of Vitruvius from which they were taken.

The Colonial Spanish-American City represents a great contribution to the study of the spatial imaginary of colonial cities as it brings forth relevant aspects associated with the creation and foundation of the colonial city in Spanish America such as its architecture, administration, and economy, the manner in which the city was visualized from its inception, the various social interactions which took place, its central spatial components such as the plaza and the streets, and the gender relations that transformed the nature of the city itself. The selected bibliography is a helpful resource for anyone interested in issues of space and urban development in colonial Spanish America. Despite the fact that some of the chapters do not include in depth examination of the many issues mentioned above, Jay Kinsbruner offers scholars a historical background from which one can

depart to engage in additional critical analysis and examination of the complex and fluid nature which characterized the development of the city in colonial Spanish America. Undergraduate and graduate students alike would find this book very helpful as it offers a synthesis of the historical developments of the urban city since pre-Columbian times.

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***Gabriel Miró and Catalan Culture:
 The Forging of Literary Culture
 in the Context of his Poetics***
University Press of the South, 2004
By Frederic Barberà

Este excelente estudio sobre Gabriel Miró está construido en torno a dos tesis que resultan un tanto paradójicas. Las dos tesis buscan documentar, primero, una suerte de progresiva reconciliación por parte de Miró con la lengua vernácula de su paisaje levantino (el catalán valenciano); esta reconciliación iría paralela a la también progresiva clarificación de su prosa de abusos retóricos. Parte de este trabajo tiene como fin salvar una vez más la literatura de Miró del cliché del estilismo, a la vez que explicar sus relaciones con la "cultura catalana" o con el valenciano. Pero el minucioso análisis a que Frederic Barberà somete la prosa mironiana da por resultado la imagen de una escritura desvinculada de todo contenido, atomizada en multitud de ejemplos y citas, y desvinculada de toda lógica narrativa o intencional, con lo que la destrucción del cliché estilista sólo llega a satisfacerse muy indirectamente. Sin embargo, es indudable que el prolijo rastreo de catalanismos (o mejor: valencianismos) en la prosa de Miró ilumina algo que podría considerarse un cierto malentendido en su prosa. La observación de Jorge Guillén, en su ensayo dedicado a Gabriel Miró en *Lenguaje y poesía*, de que "es inmenso el vocabulario de Miró, y hasta los españoles más cultos hallan términos desconocidos en esta