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The Inordinate Eye. New World Baroque and Latin American
Fiction (review)

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(Review)

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Joseba Gabilondo. The event brought together a rather heterogeneous mixture of people and materials that, much like the *Beste Bat* publication itself, offered results that cannot be detached from the historical circumstances of both RRV and the moment when *Beste Bat* became a public, social event.

Among the contributors to the volume, we find journalists, musicians, *bertsolaris*, comic creators, and scholars. Each section of the book consists of a written and/or visual reflection on a song from the 80s, and the eighteen songs selected are themselves quite useful as a basic approach to mapping the period. The chapters range from a minimalist, anti-climatic comic strip retelling the author's personal involvement with RRV (Mauro Enralgo), to the ironic deconstruction of a "radical" song that ends up denouncing the underlying lack of radicality of the song as in the suggestive discussion of Hertzainak's *Hil ezazu aita!* (Kill your father!) between Gabriel Villota Toyos, professor of Audiovisual Communications at the Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea, and Joseba Gabilondo, Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Michigan State University. Fragments of history (both personal and collective) are provided, as well as nostalgic and ironic reinterpretations of the past. Yet what underlines all fragments is a shared understanding of the music and popular culture of the 80s as mediators between the individual and a Utopian imagining of the community. The aptly titled *Beste Bat* (Encore!) presents at the end of the book helpful translations of all the "texts" into Basque, Spanish, and English (although none of the *collages* and comics are translated themselves).

For the non-specialist reader, there are other books that offer a more comprehensive narrative of the movement, such as Elena López Aguirre's *Del txistu a la telecaster: Crónica del rock vasco* (Vitoria: Aianari, 1996), or privileged views of its beginnings, such as *Flores en la basura: Los días del Rock Radikal* (Algorta: Hilargi, 2003), by Roberto Moso, journalist and singer

of Zarama—with Hertzainak, the two groups that began singing punk in Basque. What *Beste Bat!* brings to our understanding of RRV is a myriad of possibilities for critical analysis and scholarly discussion. Perhaps more importantly, through its sheer heterogeneity, *Beste bat* proves that, no matter how much time goes by, and how much disillusionment hinders the possibility of radical social movements, RRV represented a source of creative energy that provided youth culture with the means to articulate dissenting, anti-hierarchical politics at a time when public culture was saturated with antagonistic articulations of the social climate.

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*The Inordinate Eye: New World Baroque
and Latin American Fiction*
The University of Chicago Press, 2006
By Lois Parkinson Zamora

In this novel interdisciplinary study, Lois Parkinson Zamora explores Latin American cultures and their forms of visual and verbal expression in relation to the transcultural modes of signification embedded in the aesthetic and ideology of the New World Baroque. By thoroughly analyzing Latin American fiction alongside an impressive variety of cultural artifacts from Pre-conquest tradition to contemporary murals, paintings, and architecture from both sides of the Atlantic, the author shows how modern Latin American writers use the New World Baroque syncretic structures to define post colonial identity.

Chapter one describes the European and Amerindian encounter in terms of an ontological confrontation. It formulates the "syncretic" nature of the image of the Latin American Baroque through the foundational narratives of Quetzalcóatl's mirror and Guadalupe's eye. As god "images" are vital to culture, the author

traces the cultural distinctions that underlie their process of signification. She claims that, as visual-performative media, indigenous representation renders a better depiction of the image, which comprises the “fluid” identity of Mesoamerican gods. As western alphabetic system denies this mode of signification, she concludes that Guadalupe’s eye, as a “syncretic” image imprinted in Juan Diego’s *tilma*, does not only promote proselytism but it also illustrates the interactions of indigenous cultures and European colonizing systems.

In chapter two, the author demonstrates how contemporary artists’ visual and textual images engage in the pre-Hispanic tradition of the *códices*. She identifies the “experiential field” of time/space of Mesoamerican cosmology as the central theme of Elena Garro’s *Los recuerdos del porvenir* and *La semana de colores*, Eduardo Galeano’s *Memoria del fuego* and Diego Rivera’s murals. As records of Mesoamerican culture, *códices* link cosmic movement and human history. Time ties in with space in a structure that favors mutability and whose interpretation involves the association of images with myth by the public performance of the *tlacuilo*. She presents Rivera as a modern *tlacuilo*, whose murals reproduce the structures of the *códices* and transmit post revolutionary values. She defines Garro’s and Rivera’s work in terms of their “inordinate” spatial structures. As Galeano, they recreate the *códices* and transgress realist expression.

Chapter three focuses on the New World Baroque as a postcolonial poetics for Latin American cultural self-definition. Lois Parkinson Zamora grounds her argument on Alejo Carpentier’s cultural theorizing, *El siglo de las luces*, and *Concierto barroco* alongside a vast number of literary, architectural, and musical examples and Neobaroque theories. Convinced of the need to analyze the relationship between European cultural forms and American expression, Carpentier recognizes in the Baroque’s *horror vacui* and Latin America’s “inclusionary” nature the foundations of his “transcultural theory.” As he redefines the Baroque as “a constant of the

human spirit,” he proposes the New World Baroque as an aesthetic of inclusion that accounts for Latin American identity. She explains that Carpentier’s theory surfaces in a narrative that is emblematic of a “decentered” and all-inclusive, “inordinate” perspective.

Chapter four examines Frida Kahlo’s overlooked engagement of “Baroque iconography” in the representation of modern female subjectivity as a means to understand Gabriel García Márquez’s characters. She starts by analyzing European and Folk Baroque iconography in conjunction with religious portraiture and sculpture to signify Kahlo’s work as Baroque. She argues that, as opposed to García Márquez’s repeating characters that “ironize” interiority, Kahlo’s intensify interiority and suffering. His characters challenge the Baroque allegory for purposes of political critique in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. In *Of Love and Other Demons*, on the other hand, Lois Parkinson Zamora discusses Baroque hagiography and demonic possession in the hybrid viceregal culture of the Caribbean. The chapter demonstrates that both adapt Baroque structures to their syncretic cultural contexts.

In chapter five, Jorge Luis Borges’s “miniature” New World Baroque narrative is the focal point of analysis for it differs from the “inclusionary impulse” that defines the projects carried out by Garro, Galeano, Carpentier, and García Márquez. Although Borges favors universal traditions over Spanish ones, his impulse to embrace the universe makes him Baroque—so does his self-reflective and parodic style. The author examines Baroque visual devices such as illusionism, *trompe l’oeil*, Renaissance and Baroque perspective, *quadratura*, and *mise en abîme* to discuss Borges’s disruption of realist representation. She claims that his irony lies in the fact that his illusion of infinity operates within the conventions of realistic perspective, his mastery of Baroque convention, and his knowledge of different disciplines, media, and genres. She concludes that Borges’s Neobaroque originality stems from his reworking of tradition.

The Inordinate Eye. New World Baroque and Latin American Fiction illuminates the understanding of contemporary fiction and its underlying connection to visual and verbal transcultural modes of perception and expression. In this context, Lois Parkinson Zamora's "cultural legibility" proves essential to alternative and accurate accounts of Latin American modernity. She sets an important precedent for scholars whose interest is the study of literature that reflects hybrid modes of imagining. She demonstrates the latter through the sign of the New World Baroque and its syncretic forms and defying perspectives, which she brilliantly traces in contemporary Latin American fiction.

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Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in Latin American Women's Fiction
State University of New York Press, 2004
By Dianna C. Niebylski

Humoring Resistance: Laughter and the Excessive Body in Latin American Women's Fiction is about humor and laughter, but it is no laughing matter. This is a highly original and witty study of alternative feminist strategies of disruptive humor in contemporary Latin American women's writing. Niebylski has produced a superb piece of literary criticism that coherently and convincingly demonstrates the importance of humor as a transgressive discourse. True to her comparativist training, she elegantly bypasses the binary simplifications of male vs. female perspective, as well as domesticity vs. victimhood, and engages in brilliant, genuinely original and highly creative discussion of first rate texts. Her engagingly accessible writing and brilliant and challenging argumentation takes the reader to most unexpected realms of Kristeva's and Bakhtin's theoretical apparatus, connecting the

notions of Freud's vision of humor with feminist and postmodern theories. Although Niebylski focuses on fictional works of five authors, Laura Esquivel, Ana Lydia Vega, Luisa Valenzuela, Armonía Somers and Alicia Borinsky, all rooted and living in different national locations, her discussion offers a useful and suggestive typology of textual strategies of feminine and feminist comic mechanisms that transgresses the national, as well as borders of genre.

Niebylski's book consists of an introduction, a theoretical first chapter that draws on the relationship between humor theory, cultural history, and women's embodied humor, five additional chapters on individual narratives that exemplify a diversity of strategies of feminist survival and subversion, an epilogue and an extensive, well researched bibliography. Before entering the realm of specific fictional texts, Niebylski establishes the connection between the comic and the feminine, with a particular emphasis on the humor theory and the changing cultural attitudes towards the female bodily "humors." In that sense, she posits the female body, traditionally framed by patriarchy through numerous prejudices and prohibitions, in the center of her later discussion. After having identified a problem, Niebylski gives a critical overview of the ways in which the contemporary women writers have approached the literary minefield in which they have found themselves. Therefore, she theorizes the incontinent, over-sexed, provocative, torpid, infected, anarchic and mutating bodies. Her writing is full of unanticipated twists and turns, and in the end, the reader is left with a richer understanding, provoked and stimulated to carry out further research.

The five chapters in which Niebylski persuasively engages in a nuanced analysis of selected Latin American women authors is also a prime resource, if not an arsenal, of comic weaponry. And so, the reader is faced with a sentimental comedy of Laura Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* (*Like Water for Chocolate*), the carnevalesque lustfulness of Ana Lydia Vega's "Pasión de historia" ("Red Hot Story"), with a comic, often burlesque irony