

Alberto Ribas-Casasayas and Amanda L. Petersen, eds.
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How does something immaterial and immeasurable underwrite our experience of the present as a “time out of joint” – a moment characterized by asynchronicities and unhinged from its own temporal flows and fluctuations? How do ghosts – understood as the invisible yet perceptible forces of such immaterial and immeasurable conditions – influence cultural production in the contemporary age? How do signs of ghostly hauntings infiltrate, interrogate, and perhaps even eventually come to inhabit our present moment? Through what forms, affects, materials or structures do specters manifest in order to place an ethical demand on the living? And how does spectral criticism – the active engagement with and study of such ghosts and their demands – illuminate the ways in which we, those who survive history’s aftershocks, might be permitted to approach the past intelligently, to maneuver through, read and interpret the web of history in its various strands of concealment, repression, silence and aporias? These questions lie at the heart of the edited volume, *Espectros*, an anthology that brings together twelve original scholarly essays under the rubric of spectrality. Across the book’s diverse chapters, the very concept of the ghost or specter (also included by the editors in this category is “the talking dead”) as a palpable presence in contemporary literature, film, photography, and material culture is viewed from within different contexts that comprise the “Transhispanic” world, a geo-political term the editors define as encompassing Latin America, Spain, and Latino diaspora.

Espectros: Ghostly Hauntings in Contemporary Transhispanic Narratives is a unique and welcome collaboration, the cultural and geographical breadth of which is inspiring, and the theoretical aim of which is most timely and provocative. Through an impressive compilation of divergent perspectives on ghostliness, ranging from the lingering legacies of authoritarian regimes and traumatic aftermaths of military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, to narrative accounts of armed conflict in Central America, to literary and cinematic “topographies of disappearance” in Colombia and the vestigial but pervasive violence of neocolonialism in Venezuela, to – last but not least – the failing

economy of a post-Transition, post-Europeanization, globally integrated and democratic Spain, the individual essays in this collection carefully and insightfully attend to the ghostly residue that resurfaces and takes up residence in and through texts, whether literary, visual or beyond. Indeed, what connects these authors is a common critical language around, a deep understanding of and an attentive approximation toward the ghostly (spaces, subjectivities, images, affects) as a productive challenge to accessing a forgotten because erased past – a past that is, with the appearance of the specter, reconstituted, and as such bears the promise of *rewriting history* in the name of justice for the future, but would otherwise, which is to say *without* the uncanny affects generated by ghostly hauntings, remain inaccessible.

While these essays all, in one way or another, contend that ghostly traces of a traumatic and/or unresolved past complicate notions of linear time and work against the grain of reifying narratives of progress, they also suggest that such traces work to create necessary tensions – *openings* – in the surface of the present moment from which we might re-envision and come to grasp other times (those temporal orders that are, by definition, *out of sync* with the present) as they persist in continual patterns of repetition and deferral, emergence and disappearance. This central question of the past's accessibility – the possibility of (but also the demand for) tapping into the cultural phenomenon of haunting in order to uncover the dark undercurrents of hegemonic discourses and dominant historical narratives and thus creating the possibility for *re-mapping* the relations between power, knowledge, and experience – is the very gravitational movement that binds these distinct readings into one collective frame. Within this frame, the powerful movement and sway of spectrality follows specific coordinates, the trajectory of which moves the reader swiftly from encounters with haunted histories (Part I), to collective and individual trauma (Part II), to the tension between visibility and absence underlying photography (Part III), to symbolic representations and the “invisible hands” of global capital (Part IV).

In their brief but concise introduction, editors Alberto Ribas-Casasayas and Amanda L. Petersen, inquire what relevance spectral criticism holds for literary and film analysis today. How does the presence of ghosts reveal silenced pasts, repressed histories, and absent subjects? How are the workings of spectrality bound up not only with questions related to temporality, knowledge and the production of power, but also questions of representation and the power of representational forms to grant (or deny) us access to the past? In answer, and as a structuring mechanism for the entire volume, they outline three aesthetic models that directly depend on spectral or ghostly phenomena – the notion of rupture, the wound, and haunting. These three different but interrelated models or “types,” respectively advanced by the groundbreaking theories of Hispanists Nelly Richards, Cristina Moreiras, and Jo Labanyi, are brought into dialogue with one another throughout *Espectros* in an effort to continue analyzing and synthesizing the overlapping threads within modernity between and across three

cornerstones that have come to define Latin American and Spanish criticism in the last couple decades: politics and aesthetics, psychoanalysis, and cultural studies.

At the time of writing this review, in spring 2018, the “spectral turn” is by now a familiar one that marks a discernible “before and after” among deconstructionists, Derridean and Marxist scholars, as well as within debates arising from post-structuralism, post-colonialism, psychoanalysis, and visual studies, to name but a few. Drawing on the new wave of scholarship ushered in by this theoretical “turn,” *Espectros* provides an invaluable resource for scholars, students, and researchers of the contemporary. At once ambitious in its geographical scope, solid in its theoretical focus, and unique in the way it traverses an eclectic grouping of cultural and political contexts, this anthology presents itself as neither an exhaustive nor prescriptive study of spectrality. Instead, it situates itself squarely and appropriately within the parameters of an already budding and yet still totally fertile field of scholarship. In this vein, the contributors to this volume compellingly add new voices to the ongoing conversation in and around the presence of ghosts and the importance of attending to what ghosts demand. As the essays in *Espectros* seek to locate spectral effects in less studied contexts they also make an effective and nuanced case for the *potentialities* of haunting in a Transhispanic sphere that will likely incite new lines of inquiry and research as the debates persist over what the contemporary is, what it includes and excludes, and how it is constituted in relation to history.