

# **UCLA**

## **Mester**

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GRZEGORCZYK, MARZENA. Private Topographies: Space, Subjectivity, and Political Change in Modern Latin America. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 191 pp.

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On the front cover of *Private Topographies*, the reader sees a visual of the book's underlying theme: a hand-drawn window showing the view of an actual city, and at the same time the reflection of an interior of an imagined living room. This multidimensional scene shows how space between a public city and a private living quarter has been arranged and then determined by the constructed window. To express the idea of how individuals organize the space around them, Marzena Grzegorzcyk coins the word "implacement," or "conversion of abstract *space* into differentiated *place*" [my emphasis] (3). The author analyzes this concept further by linking the political transitions during which the implacements occurred. For example, Grzegorzcyk shares her observation of the peculiar obsession individuals in Poland had with replacing windows during the transition from communism to free markets in the mid-1990s. Then she elaborates on the reason why Domingo Faustino Sarmiento chopped down the tree blocking the view from his house window the day after the revolution in Argentina. These examples demonstrate how earlier and later spatial configurations reveal the influence major historical events have on people, therefore asking the reader to consider how disorienting political transitional periods cause people to reorient their surroundings. How, for example, do unpredictable sociopolitical transformations affect not only individuals' daily lives but also their cultural production? In *Private Topographies*, Grzegorzcyk explores these concepts as they relate to the growing Creole ruling class in politically and culturally transitional nineteenth-century Latin America. In this book the author examines the "windows" created in Mexico, Argentina and Brazil by discussing how differing implacements are represented in these countries' respective literatures. The literary works analyzed in this book demonstrate different ways individuals responded to the destruction of the old Spanish order during the Latin American post-independence period by reshaping and redefining their new Creole identities and surroundings. In addition to her central argument, she also draws upon architecture, urban planning, psychoanalysis, social theory, political history, post-colonial theory and even phenomenology for a truly interdisciplinary critical analysis.

In the introduction, Grzegorzczuk begins with two parallel anecdotes that exemplify the central theme of her argument, followed by an exploratory discussion on the concept of transition as a "culture of event." In the first chapter the author shifts into an analysis of Latin America's first modern novel, *El Periquillo Sarmiento* (1816) by Joaquín Fernández Lizardi. The way Lizardi maps out the protagonist's erratic adventures throughout present day Mexico and the Philippine Islands reveals the impact the transition from Spanish colony to independent Mexico (second decade of the nineteenth century) had on normative citizenship. In the second and third chapters, Grzegorzczuk focuses on the moment of transition involving the consolidation of the nation-state in Argentina (1845-80). Specifically in chapter two, the writer analyzes the brutal historical erasure and vigorous territorial staging techniques employed by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento in his caudillo trilogy *Civilización y barbarie* (1845, 1863). By contrast, in chapter three the author explores Juana Manuela Gorriti's forced nomadism as the contemplative traveler uses a recuperative nostalgic approach in order to cope with the unstable past hovering over the land in *Gubi Amaya. Historia de un Salteador* (1852) and *La tierra natal* (1889). The last two chapters of *Private Topographies* present the impact of the inconspicuous transition from monarchy to republic on Brazil at the end of the nineteenth century. In chapter four, Grzegorzczuk offers an analysis of the agoraphobic inaction determined by the carefully constructed yet unpleasant dwelling in Machado de Assis's *Dom Casmurro* (1899). She then exposes the improper city that lacks rationalized separation between private and social spaces in Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* (1902) in chapter five. In her conclusion, Grzegorzczuk ties together these distinct topographies and further extends her analysis by claiming that the rift between the immobility of the symbolic level and the mobility of the experience one acts as the groundwork for Latin American literature in the subsequent twentieth century.

Marzena Grzegorzczuk's extensive analysis presents an original argument in an insightful manner. Her astute observations and theoretically challenging explanations on the political transitions and implacements would be particularly useful for a reader with considerable familiarity with literary theory as well as with the literature and culture of post-independence Latin America. Although specific

to literature and political historical contexts of Latin America, Marzena Grzegorzcyk's concept of "implacement" and the ideas developed in *Private Topographies* incorporate universal concepts on the human condition that scholars in multiple disciplines can no longer ignore.

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