
Fanny Moghaddassi, Ghislain Potriquet, Anne Bandry-Scubbi, eds., *Defining and Redefining Space in the English-Speaking World: Contacts, Frictions, Clashes* (New Castle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2016), pp. ix+294. ISBN (10): 1-4438-9791-4; ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9791-4

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A round robin is, by definition, something that ‘goes around’. Those who are involved in it take turns to play, speak or write about a given matter. Applied to literature, the term indicates a form of collaborative storytelling in which a number of authors write chapters of a novel or pieces of a story in rounds. The order in which each participant gives their contribution is rational: they follow the lead of the one who preceded them.

In this very fashion, the recent book edited by Fanny Moghaddassi, Ghislain Potriquet and Anne Bandry-Scubbi, *Defining and Redefining Space in the English-Speaking World: Contacts, Frictions, Clashes*, ends with a round table discussion on contact improvisation. Although it is not a *leitmotiv*, the round robin exercise seems particularly fitting in describing this volume, for it is indeed a result of a comprehensive dialogue among European scholars of various disciplines gathered together in 2014 at the University of Strasbourg to discuss the spatial nature of contacts. The resulting multidisciplinary exchange has been channelled into this volume of contributions that follows the thread of its subtitle, “Contacts, Frictions, Clashes”, presenting a wide range of ‘spaces’ which come together precisely via contacts, frictions and clashes that occur, not only among the topics of the contributions, but also among the languages used to discuss them. In fact, the scholars employ either English or French in their dissertations, creating a bilingual, hybrid space for this collection, in which topics and languages come into contact with one another, rub each other at times without producing any conflict but rather a pleasant change from one subject (and one language) to another. This transition from a wide variety of topics and methodological approaches has been possible thanks to the work of the editors, whose purpose, as declared in the “Foreword”, was to “study the physical proximity implied by the spatial dimension and unmediated experience of contacts, frictions and clashes in different fields of cultural history” (x), a purpose accomplished.

Divided into four parts, “Mapping Contacts, Friction, Clashes”, “Experiencing Contacts, Friction, Clashes”, “Redefining Spaces of Contacts, Friction, Clashes”, “Vying for Space and Influence: Contacts, Friction and Clashes”, the contributions thrive from the diverse topics related to space, which span from literature to

ethnography, from history to performing arts, covering a time frame that goes from the Middle Ages up to present days: Hannah Skoda, for instance, looks at the contacts and clashes “between gown and town” in medieval Oxford, while Livio Belloi and Michel Delville offer a reading of contacts and frictions in *A Humument* by Tom Phillips; Carline Blanc discusses immersion, friction and transmission in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Mules and Men*. Space and its (re)definitions are analysed, revised and introduced not only as body perceptions: if “contacts are often experienced as cultural challenges” (ix), friction becomes “a creative process as it is sabotage” (Alice Godfroy et al., The Dégadézo Dance Company, “A Round-Robin Discussion on Contact Improvisation”, 273), whilst clashes might be “the occasion for a metamorphosis” (Anna Maria Cimitile, “Tragedy and Metatheatre, Media Archaeology and Spectatorship in Pasolini’s and The Wooster Group’s Visions of Shakespeare”, 197), for they “generate new forms of entanglement” (Wendy Harding and Jacky Martin, “Conflict or Entanglement? The Case of the Modoc War on the Oregon-California Border”, 33). The volume presents new perspectives and approaches that explore the intrinsic, basic nature of contact, suggesting that “contacts are primarily not concrete events which take place in a definable physical context, but experiences of the mind” (Fanny Moghaddassi, “*In at a Roche the Levedis Rideth*: Problematic Conflict Between the Fairy and the Human Worlds in Some Middle English Breton Lays”, 58), as in the case of the Breton lays, in which contact occurs between the real and the imaginary world, “closing the gaps in space and time, very much as dreams do” (Moghaddassi, 57). Physical and mental, then, are the ‘spaces’ of reference for the observation and the analysis of every aspect of contact and its outcomes; in examining contact within them, regardless of the topic, each contribution proves to be related with the others. On the physical side for instance, within the human experience, contact shows its greatest potential for it “permet un début de médiation entre soi et autrui” (Valentine Prévot, “*The Coral Island: À La Rencontre du Cannibale, Entre Repulsion et Incorporation*”, 43), while the lack thereof – as in illness – stresses out its value, since the body “deprived of human contact” seems “isolated from any other form of life” (Mélanie Grué, “*A Passionate Eloquence of the Body: Social Clashes, Contact and the Communion of Bodies in the Works of David Wojnarowicz*”, 75). Focusing on the mind, the experience of contact comes through sight, and pictures prove once again to be powerful tools that can emphasise, on a deeper level, the implications of contact: in caricatures, for example, the clash obtained by “ou d’amalgames entre forme de chair et d’os” (Martial Guédron, “*La Perfection dans la Distorsion: La Caricature selon James Peller Malcolm [1767-1815]*”, 102) creates a distorted body with the intention of revealing another aspect of a character, another definition of its identity, while in sacred emblems, contact appears in the form of an impact, “un signe visuel mais aussi comme une sorte d’intention performative” (Emilie Jehl, “*Les Heurts Du Coeur: Représentations de la Conversion Dans Les Emblèmes sacrés Au XVII Siècle*”, 106).

In the end, every aspect of contact may very well be seen as a performance since they can convey someone else's idea, feeling, vision, just like a performance does, and the last section of the volume begins and ends with contributions about contact in different 'performing media', as with the combination of plays, marionettes and films in one performance which generates a clash, a disruption from the ordinary that redefines the space on the stage and the role of every agent involved, effectively creating a third space where the performers are "actors simulating puppets that in turn stand for characters in a play" (Cimitile, 207). While puppets are moved, directed by a puppeteer in a fashion that points "to the human condition ... as the condition of a prisoner" (Cimitile, 211), dancers can be free to choose how to move within a given space, with their body responding to movement in a seemingly endless contact of muscles, nerves and other bodies, as in the case of Contact Improvisation, where this ultimate form of "contact without touch" (The Dégradézo Dance Company, 275) practised in the space of a studio, "the gap in which [dancers] may allow certain things that wouldn't be possible out there" (The Dégradézo Dance Company, 279), gives the opportunity to "share ... experience ... perspectives and ... practice" (The Dégradézo Dance Company, 285). Dance is the field where friction – the least treated topic in the volume – is more prominent, for its trigger is movement, "the condition of a living body and its relation to physical forces ... part of the everyday life of every human being" (The Dégradézo Dance Company, 280). Contact here is discussed by the dancers, either in English or in French, in a perspective that is both physical and mental, considering every type of contact positively: "if friction happens on the skin level, the intimacy of the dance develops. If friction goes below the tissues ... or even goes deeper to the bone level, the connection deepens too" (The Dégradézo Dance Company, 274), and when the contact happens, "une fois 'touches' nous avons une conscience vécue de notre corps dans son environnement qui nous permet de nous considérer dans un plus large tableau" (The Dégradézo Dance Company, 272). Eventually, any experience of contact helps in redefining our personal idea of space.

What emerges from the variety of the topics presented in this volume is that the concept of space is still mainstream, although its definition(s) is (are) labile, susceptible to cultural changes. In spite of the title, the languages of the contributions prove that any discussion about space is not confined to the English-speaking world only.

One last consideration on the book as printed product, which would have benefited from a final revision in the process of proofreading, as typos do at times get in the way of reading. Having said that, the diversity of methodological approaches, the emergence of an aesthetic but also political quality of any engagement with the topic of space (be it in literature, the arts, or any cultural phenomena) makes this a stimulating volume for all those with an interest in space and our ways of being in and imagining it.