# The Insides of the Outsider

## Women and the Poetics of Space and Place

Edited by Mariangela Ugarelli

Women's Studies



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#### Introduction

#### Cecilia Esparza

Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

The articles gathered in this volume, entitled *The Insides of the Outsider:* Women and the Poetics of Space and Place, share a common interest in studying the relationship between female subjectivities and transformations of space, understood in a broad sense. The starting point of these is the notion of *deterritorialization* proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the alteration of complex social relations that brings with it the reconstitution or creation of alternative spaces, be these geographical, cultural, political, or social practices that pretend to order reality.

The relation between women, space and place is marked by processes that have historically tried to situate women in a predetermined place that would restrict their possibilities for agency, or to place them outside the institutions and centers of power. Thus, the authors of these articles explore the textual strategies of female artists belonging to different literary traditions, but who, nevertheless, share a common intention of proposing a poetics of space that would enable the emergence of liberatory possibilities for women.

The notion of affect is central in these essays: the authors reflect upon texts that represent bodies defined by "[their] power of affecting and of being affected" (Deleuze and Guatarri 2000). As Paola Marrati explains, this notion refers not to the field of subjective emotions, but instead to the capacity of bodies to act, to the power of being affected and affecting their milieu. Even though the authors in this volume study texts produced by rather dissimilar writers such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz; the American Jean Webster and Elizabeth Gaskell; diaspora writers like Vimala Devi, born in Goa, India; and authors of experimental texts like the Mexicans Amparo Dávila and Gloria Gervitz and the Chilean Cecilia Vicuña, the focus is on – in terms of Deleuze and Guatarri – the affects of the bodies as *becomings*, that is, as possibilities that release the female subject from the fixed positions set by the ontological and social order in different times and circumstances.

The first essay by Rachel Williams analyses *Los empeños de una casa* (1683), one of the most complex *comedias* by Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Focusing on the metatheatrical aspect of the play, the author deconstructs the assemblages of gender and the art of playwriting to affirm that Sor Juana creates a "shifting

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perception of reality and fiction" (12) in order to criticize the social impositions on women's subjectivity. The article offers a reading of Sor Juana's play based on Judith Butler's ideas about gender as performance, which has as its center the cross–dressing scene of the character of Castaño, the *gracioso*, the servant who clumsily tries to solve the love triangles and misunderstandings that characterize the *comedia de enredos*. The concept of "agencement" or "arrangement of parts" suggested by Deleuze and Guatarri, is also important in the study of Sor Juana's skill in assembling the relations among the characters, the connections to famous plays by well- known authors like Calderón de la Barca, the debates over theatrical quality of the plays written in the Spanish colonies, and the interactions among characters, audience and the author of the play. These theoretical approaches are the basis of the article's proposal: "the women in the play have no identity outside of the assembled perceptions of the others around them" (15).

Three essays interrogate the traditional subjection of women to the domestic space. Erna Anderson studies *Daddy Long–Legs* (1912) and *Dear Enemy* (1915), popular novels by Jean Webster that were greatly influential in modulating female subjectivity at the turn of the last century. The plots are set in school institutions and orphanages dedicated to the education of young women. The narratives enable the main characters to develop beyond the space of the family as they access the professional field. The article shows that Webster's novels do not resolve the class and race antagonisms, as the plots revolve around privileged women who can reject societal expectations and obtain freedom from domestic restrictions at the cost of the labor of women of color and orphans.

For her part, Lisu Wang studies *French Life* (1864) by Elizabeth Gaskell, which recounts her trips to France during the second half of the nineteenth century, as a chronicle that offers a panoramic vision of French society through the observation of details of domestic life. Gaskell's descriptions of the life of middle- and upper-class Parisian women, as compared with the situation of working-class women, invite a critical discussion regarding class differences, gender views, and social structures in France and England.

Along similar lines, Mariangela Ugarelli analyzes "El huésped" (1959), a tale by writer Amparo Dávila, from the Mexican short story tradition. This perspective emerges from a reading of the gothic tale written by women as an expression of the confinement and domestic violence experienced by female characters trapped in their own homes. Victim of abuse and confinement, the protagonist in Dávila's tale uses the house transformed into a prison and the cruelty exerted against her to defend herself and defeat the villain, a sinister and menacing being whose human or animal nature remains intentionally indefinite. In a fine exercise of attentive reading of the motives and intertextual relations present in the tale, Ugarelli shows that the representation of domestic

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violence is a transhistorical theme, worked by Dávila through the use and transformation of gothic plots.

The processes of migration, in a geographical, cultural, and symbolic sense, as well as the articulation between local spaces and global space, are explored in many of the articles. Lauren Benjamin Mushro studies the work of Vimala Devi as part of the Lusophone diaspora canon. Born in the island of Goa, exiled in Lisbon and then London, Devi writes texts that express the deterritorialization of a population trapped in colonial processes. The movement between cultures and languages, between the native Konkani, Portuguese, and the languages of the countries where she lives in exile, as well as the intertextual references from different literary traditions, offer "an experience in constant transformation" that reterritorializes Devi's work to recover local memory in a global context.

The relation between space, body and memory is analyzed by Liliana Galindo's article on the poem *Migraciones* (1979 – 2003) by Mexican writer Gloria Gervitz. This extensive poem, written and rewritten throughout her life, constitutes the complete work of the author. The poetic voice emerges from the materiality of the female body to utter a "prayer" that expresses the physical and historical migration of the Jewish diaspora from Eastern Europe to Latin America, as well as the "internal migration" of the female subject that moves across the experiences of preceding generations, the different stages of life and the tension between the recognition of the materiality of existence and the desire for transcendence.

Alexandra Arana Blas studies two pivotal novels within the emerging queer literature in Peru: Las dos caras del deseo (1994) by Carmen Ollé and Efecto Invernadero (1994) by Mario Bellatín. Both texts coincide in the representation of queer female characters who feel trapped in the city they inhabit, and thus decide to emigrate in search of a place that will offer them the possibility of a fulfilled life, beyond the marginalization they suffer in Lima society. Ollé and Bellatín imagine queer subjectivities that question fixed identities, social mandates, as well as national and cultural boundaries (104). The conflict between rejection and acceptance of the abject in their identities, along with the transformation of the city into a queer space, free from the rigidity and limitations of gender mandates, constitute the axes of the actions and effects of the characters in these narratives. The novels are analyzed as narrations centered around transnational migration in the context of globalization and neoliberalism, played by characters conscious of their precariousness, who attempt to build safe spaces for the acceptance of homosexual desire and the reterritorialization of the body.

The extraordinary work of Cecilia Vicuña, in particular her first poems, is studied by Juan Diego Pérez with attention to the construction of a new "place of the possible," that emerges from the erotic power of the body as the source of a political affect capable of transforming reality. Vicuña's incursion into

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poetry is the beginning of an intermedial work that connects literature and visual arts in a network of "vectors" that include socialist and feminist political action, ecological thought, and experimentation with art and indigenous imaginaries. Pérez reads Vicuña's poetry as "artifacts that recall and reclaim the transformative force of poetry," a vital practice that proposes a radical reconstitution of reality. According to the article, in Vicuña's early poetry, we can find the origins of his struggle against neoliberal individualism in the context of Chilean socialism. The revolutionary impulse of the poems stems from the erotic force that connects the bodies to imagine new forms of social coexistence, that project themselves from the local to the transnational and the "cosmic." The work of Vicuña constitutes, from this perspective, a resistance to the state, to modernity, to consumer culture and individualism; the poems thus project "an affective revolution against social hierarchies operating both at an individual and a collective level" (84).

The final article of the volume studies recent texts that imagine unknown spaces: the short film *The Very Pulse of the Machine* (2022) by Emily Dean, the tale "Twenty hours" included in the *Lesser Known Monsters of the 21st Century* collection by Kim Fu (2021), and the poem "The hurting kind" (2022) by Ada Limón. Victoria Mallorga proposes that these are three cases of narratives by female artists that create post-human worlds that transcend species classifications and ontological distinctions. In these narratives, the female body expands and frees itself from anthropocentric universals (141). The cosmic space to be explored, the continuum between human and machine, the fusion between organic and inorganic, emerge from creative processes open to transcending the fixity of binary identities and classifications. In the words of Mallorga: "These stories build an unmarked body always *becoming*," in other words, these narratives center around matter connected by a post-human affect.

Read as a whole, the articles in this volume offer an ample panorama that shows that space and place as imagined by women artists are always susceptible to being transformed by poetic practices that defy injustice and create new possibilities of life for women.

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#### **About the Contributors**

**Cecilia Esparza** holds a Ph.D. from New York University. She is a Professor of Latin American literature at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. She specializes in contemporary Latin American literature, gender studies, and autobiographical writing. Professor Esparza is the author of *El Perú en la memoria: sujeto y nación en la escritura autobiográfica* (2006) and the co-editor of *Arguedas: la dinámica de los encuentros culturales* (2013), *La mujer es aún lo otro: actualidad y política en el pensamiento de Simone de Beauvoir* (2015) y *Trayectorias de los estudios de género. Balances, retos y propuestas tras 25 años en la PUCP* (2019).

**Rachel Williams** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Spanish & Portuguese section of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Johns Hopkins University. Her research interests include Spanish Golden Age literature, gender, sexuality, and identity. Her dissertation project investigates how the theme of the *desengaño* manifests as a tool of undoing binaries in various pieces of Golden Age literature, and how we may apply this theme to other literatures and time periods. Prior to beginning her doctorate, she received a B.A. in the College of Letters and Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Wesleyan University, where her undergraduate thesis explored male lovesickness in the Spanish Golden Age. Her writing has appeared in the journals *Transmodernity* and *Periphērica*. She served as a Curatorial Fellow at the Stern Center for the History of the Book in the Renaissance from 2024-2025, where she studied how the history of the book intersected with the Spanish imperial project.

**Erna Anderson** has a Ph.D. in American Studies from the College of William & Mary. Her dissertation explores the function of whiteness in American orphan narratives, looking specifically at how race informs and is informed by varying notions of place. Her research interests include cultural theory, different expressions of popular culture, whiteness studies, postcolonial studies, and semiotics. She is passionate about democratizing knowledge and facilitating exchanges between academia and the public. Erna was a recipient of the 2023–2024 Sweden–America Foundation Sten Westerberg Research Scholarship. She resides in Berlin, Germany.

**Lisu Wang** is a Victorianist, translation scholar, and digital humanist whose work explores how nineteenth-century British literature—particularly the writings of Elizabeth Gaskell—has been translated, adapted, and received in Chinese cultural contexts. During her doctoral years, she coined the concept of "Domestic

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Mobility" to reconceptualize Victorian women's travel writing through the lens of grassroots readerships and transcultural circulation. Currently affiliated with the Centre for Victorian Studies at the University of Leicester, she actively pursues scholarly, digital, and public-facing pathways that expand the global accessibility and relevance of British literary heritage.

Mariangela Ugarelli is a writer, artist, and scholar born in Lima, Perú. Ugarelli earned her Ph.D. in Spanish from Johns Hopkins University and her B.A. in Hispanic Literature from Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. As a writer, she has published two short story collections, *Artilugios* (2022) and *Fieras* (2023), which explore her interest in the intersection between the Gothic and representations of nature. Her academic work encompasses Latin American Gothic, horror and genre literatures, the female Gothic, and eco-Gothic as well as Latin American visual culture. Ugarelli's scholarly work on said topics has been published in journals such as *Gothic Nature*, *Brumal* and *Latin American Literary Review*. She currently resides in the United States, where she is writing her third book.

Lauren Benjamin Mushro is a policy researcher and writer. She earned a B.A. in Political Science from Boston College and a Ph.D. in Modern Languages and Literatures from Johns Hopkins University, where her research explored post-dictatorship countercultural artifacts in the Lusophone and Hispanophone diasporas. Her academic publications include an anthology with Vernon Press, articles with Routledge, and translations featured in boundary 2. Since completing her dissertation, Benjamin Mushro has transitioned to non-academic policy work with Sapien and the Aspen Institute, specializing in language bias in model training.

**Juan Diego Pérez Moreno** is an educator and scholar working at the intersections of memory studies, ecopoetics, and decolonial studies, with a focus on modern and contemporary Latin American poetry and art. He is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton University. His dissertation traces a poetics of liberatory memory in the experimental poetry of Chilean poet and artist Cecilia Vicuña. He recently edited a volume of Vicuña's previously unpublished correspondence, titled *Cartas nunca enviadas y otros papelitos* (2025). Originally from Bogotá, Colombia, he currently teaches at Riverdale Country School in New York City.

**Alexandra Arana Blas** is a PhD candidate in the Spanish and Portuguese program at the University of Pittsburgh and a recipient of the Andrew W. Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship. In 2012, she won the Academic Research Award in Peru for her monograph on femininity in the work of Vargas Llosa, and in 2016, she received the PADET award for her undergraduate thesis on Peruvian lesbian

literature written in the 1990s. In 2022, she obtained funding from the Ministry of Culture and served as director of the Peruvian LGBTQ+ magazine, *Crónicas de la Diversidad*. Her research covers the reception of Asian bodies and objects in Latin America, fan culture, and LGBTQ+ production. She is currently the 2025-2026 president of the Latin American Graduate Organization of Students (LAGOS) at the University of Pittsburgh. She has worked in print and digital media, including the anime and manga magazine *Sugoi, El Camaleón, Crónicas de la Diversidad*, and *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America*, among others. She was also in charge of the blurb of Nilton Maa's book ¿Qué bestia escoges hoy para morir? (2023) and the prologue of the poetry book *CyberWitch* (2025) by Fiorella Terrazas. She is the author of the book *En el jardín de lirios el amor entre mujeres en la cultura pop asiática* (2022).

Liliana Galindo Orrego is a Literature and Language professor at Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia. She holds a PhD in Modern Languages and Literatures from Johns Hopkins University. She holds an MA in Literature from the National University of Colombia. Her research focuses on contemporary poetry, especially from Latin American and English-speaking traditions. She is also interested in the connections between literature and other forms of art, such as cinema and theater. She has published articles and chapters on filmmakers such as Lucrecia Martel and Víctor Gaviria and writers such as Alejo Carpentier and José Manuel Arango.

**Victoria Mallorga Hernandez** studied Hispanic Literature at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and pursued a Publishing & Writing MA at Emerson College. She has written *albión* (Alastor Editores, 2019), *Absolución* (2021), and *Dos chicas al borde de la cama* (Valparaíso Ediciones, 2024). Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in various magazines and dossiers in Mexico, Argentina and the United States, such as *Círculo de poesía, Nueva York Poetry Press, low-fi ardentía, Thin Air*, and in anthologies such as *ATE MAIS* (Deep Vellum, 2024), *A la mitad de todos los caminos* (Piedra Blanca, 2022) y hablemos de amores (Somos Centelleantes, 2021). Her criticism has appeared in *Latin American Literature Today, Independent Magazine* and *Espinela*. She is a Taurus, a poet, and a trickster.

**Jhonn Guerra Banda** is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Spanish and Hispanic Studies in the Department of Foreign Languages at Berea College. He holds a Ph.D. and an M.A. in Hispanic Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. His research focuses on the intersections of gender, sexuality, and violence in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Latin American literature and film. His broader scholarly interests include queer and *cuir* theory, masculinities, dissident identities, and migration and border studies, with particular attention

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to narrative forms such as the novel and the short story. His academic work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals, including *Latin American Literary Review* and *América sin Nombre*, as well as in several edited volumes such as *Vivir la violencia en el Perú del nuevo milenio* (2023), *Violencias y fronteras entre México y Estados Unidos* (2021), and *Terra Zombi* (2015). He is also the author of a forthcoming book chapter on narco-culture in Peru, to be published in *El cartel que se repite: El mito globalizado del narco* (Random House, 2025).

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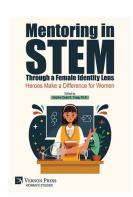
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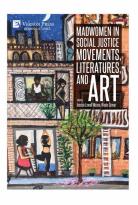
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