readiness to be actively involved in the hermeneutic process, which—in this particular case—is also that of construction and reconstruction: the only certainty they are left with is that of the instability and experimentalism which mark the poet's work, full of linguistic and structural complexities, at times gravitating towards "[r]eferential uncertainty" (151), abstraction or non-referentiality. What is made clear in *Frank O'Hara and the Ends of Modernism* is that the only plausible critical attitude to the poetic work under discussion is a pluralistic one: more than one method of approaching and interpreting O'Hara is necessary, the word "interpreting" often being used for want of a more satisfactory one. Not only does Pióro offer extensive readings of O'Hara's major poems and sometimes challenge earlier readings of the poems in question, he also refers to or at least touches upon several aspects of the poet's *œuvre* which may inspire fellow scholars to pursue critical vistas which either, so to speak, hover in the background in *Frank O'Hara and the Ends of Modernism* or are so gripping that they offer seemingly infinite opportunities for the researcher, O'Hara's "painterly" connection being a case in point. The role of the media, analogies between Baudelaire's Paris and O'Hara's take on "modern metropolitan culture" (100) exemplified by New York, queer readings of O'Hara's poems, his use of camp aesthetics or corporeality are also some of the interesting possibilities opened up to readers, students and scholars by a multilevel poet whose work, in the words of Lytle Shaw quoted by Pióro, keeps revealing "strange and compelling qualities" (201).

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Alicja Piechucka
University of Łódź

Izabella Kimak. *Bicultural Bodies: A Study of South Asian American Literature*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013. 144 pages.

A century or two ago, bodies, cultures, and places seemed almost inextricably entwined, but the more people migrated across the globe to settle on distant continents, the more apparent it became that there is no inevitable correlation between racially marked bodies and cultures. Since the 1940s, and ever more forcefully since the 1980s, scholars across the social sciences and the humanities

have been saying that race is a cipher—a socially constructed category that has no predictive value where human intellectual, moral, and physical potential is concerned. If race is a cipher that reveals little about our innate capacities and habits, then organizing bodies of literature and criticism around Asian bodies might seem counterproductive. Indeed some, like the Chinese American postmodern writer David Wong Louie, consider such groupings pernicious and ghettoizing: "it's like putting us in the Chinese laundries" *(qtd. in Cheung 201)*. If the aim of antiracist scholarship is to de-emphasize the significance of race, then why make it central?

An answer to this question can be found in Izabella Kimak's study *Bicultural Bodies*. The significance of race may be a figment of the American cultural imaginary but because so many believe it to be real, and act as if it were real, race has far-reaching material consequences. Americans of South Asian descent learned this in the aftermath of the 2011 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Ostensibly these events had nothing to do with South Asians, but because of their physical resemblance to Arabs, they became "objects of suspicion, racial profiling, and hate crimes" (Kimak 129). Far from being obsolete, race becomes more salient in the United States whenever this country enters into geopolitical conflicts or hits on hard times. Another group that has repeatedly borne the brunt of racially-motivated changes of sentiment is the Japanese American minority. Barred from citizenship as the "Yellow Peril" in the early twentieth century, incarcerated in 1942 following Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, barely tolerated in the 1950s, rehabilitated and touted a "Model Minority" in the 1960s, and then vilified again in the 1980s when Japanese imports were blamed for the American auto industry's downsizing. The 1982 murder of Chinese American engineer Vincent Chin by angry white auto workers who misidentified him as Japanese, testifies to the material consequences of race. Racialization in the United States is thus one factor that organizes writers and critics around the racially-defined category "Asian American."[1]

Immigration is another. The drama of the interracial and intercultural encounter is replayed again and again in the individual lives of immigrants of all races. On arrival in the United States, immigrants learn that the American society is stratified

1 An ostensibly more enlightened approach used by David Coward in his 2006 study *Trailing Clouds: Immigrant Fiction in Contemporary America* was to disregard the politics of race and focus on the dominant tropes and formal elements in the fiction of immigrants from across the globe, including Saul Bellow, Eva Hoffman, Bharati Mukherjee, and Jamaica Kincaid. While this approach is not without merit, it allows Cowart to downplay the significance of racial difference, and to cast immigrant writers as staunch defenders of the United States as the land of liberty, in contrast to their "unlivable" homelands.

not just by class but also by race. Europeans discover upon landing that they are white and that certain privileges accrue to their new-found whiteness. Asians, in turn, find themselves slotted into a middle ground between black and white, and interpellated into preexisting racial conflicts. Such experiences lend themselves to literary dramatization in plots of encounter, friction, acculturation, political radicalization, or acquiescence. And since the United States opens and closes its doors to immigrants from specific countries at different historical moments, plots of first encounter tend to come in batches. *Bicultural Bodies* covers fiction by South Asian Americans produced since the mid-1970s, a period marked by the rapid growth of the South Asian minority, from less than 300,000 in 1970 to over 3,000,000 in 2010.

Though the title does not reveal this fact, *Bicultural Bodies* is not only organized around race and culture but also around gender: it is a study of literature by women, perhaps because a distinctive tradition of South Asian feminist writing has emerged that overshadows the handful of male-authored texts.[2] The fact that the body and sexuality are central within this tradition makes for a thematically coherent monograph. As Kimak points out, male South Asian immigrants often slip more or less automatically into their gender role outside the home because Asian and American cultures are patriarchal and the male breadwinner role is common to both. While the men might suffer indignities and exploitation as immigrants and people of color, their masculinity is relatively secure. Meanwhile, many South Asian women's experience in the United States is often marked by dissonance because unless they come from the westernized elites, they are treated by the diasporic communities as carriers of cultural tradition and required to resist acculturation. Exposure to western models of femininity, coupled with the obligation to resist them, can be a source of anguish and conflict—experiences that lend themselves particularly well to literary dramatization, whether the outcome is greater personal autonomy or (in)voluntary confinement to the home and the ethnic ghetto.

In choosing to study stories by and about Asian immigrant and second-generation women writers Kimak does, in a sense, set off down a well-trodden path. Many feminist and ethnic studies scholars before her have explored the race/gender nexus, particularly the loyalty conflict experienced by women of color, whose desire for personal autonomy turns them against their fathers, brothers,

2 A similar gender asymmetry has been observed among African American authors. The fact that "there are "proportionately more women writing books, and more books which appeal to the female reader" means that boys and men lose interest in literature, since it rarely reflects their experience (Staples 176). Not feeling interpellated by literature, they are also much less likely to become writers themselves.

and husbands. Charged with sexism, the men become even more vulnerable to racist oppression. The fiction of Alice Walker and Maxine Hong Kingston, among others, has been discussed within this framework, one of the most influential texts being King-Kok Cheung's "The Woman Warrior and the Chinaman Pacific: Must a Chinese American Critic Choose Between Feminism and Heroism?" (1990). But Kimak turns her attention to a number of themes and phenomena passed over by her predecessors, most of whose analyses appeared before the conscious turn towards aesthetics ushered in by *Form and Transformation in Asian American Literature* by Zhou Xiaojing and Samina Najmi (2005). Equipped with the standard tools of feminist and postcolonial criticism, Kimak also carries with her the magnifying glass of narratology which allows her to examine a wide range of formal devices used by the South Asian women writers. By paying equal attention to politics and aesthetics, Kimak succeeds in reading against the grain of earlier criticism. In several instances she offers revisionist interpretations, for instance by showing that what was previously taken at face value is actually the view of a naïve narrator.

Another theoretical lens that makes Kimak's study of South Asian American literature refreshing is her use of posthumanist perspectives on the body as well as corporeal feminism grounded in the writings of Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler (25). Relying on these theories, Kimak goes beyond the more conventional readings that focus on the body as a signifier of racial and sexual difference, to consider the body as an autonomous agent (57, 62–63), a repository of non-cerebral knowledge and memory (58), as well as a site of mute resistance (95). But what seems to interest Kimak the most are the complex ways in which South Asian women react to being trained and retrained to perform culturally assigned roles. The roles that are foregrounded in the three analytical chapters of *Bicultural Bodies* are those of object of male desire, lover, wife, and mother. In South Asian American fiction women's bodies and sexuality are presented in a myriad ways: from the external perspectives of white and brown men, as well as from the perspectives of the female characters themselves; as sites of subjugation but also as sources of agency.

Citing Rajini Srikanth, Kimak explains that in South Asian immigrant communities men have sought to fully domesticate and control the woman's body in reaction against the lack of control they experience in the world outside the home (69). In the "contact zones" between cultures, bodily experiences such as premarital, marital, and extramarital sex, cross-racial sex, rape, pregnancy, infertility, artificial insemination, and childbirth have unstable meanings. Such epistemological instability poses a challenge for both writers and critics. As the fiction examined in *Bicultural Bodies* suggests, women find ways to contest—and occasionally accommodate to—the traditional model of gender relations.

Kimak offers ample textual evidence of such contestation and accommodation. (A story illustrative of the accommodation strategy she chooses not to examine is Divakaruni's "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs," in which an Indian immigrant wife consents to seclusion and occasional physical abuse because she strongly empathizes with her husband, a car mechanic whose working life is a series of humiliations. When the wife is lured outside her apartment by a college-educated niece who naively wants to liberate her from the domestic confinement, the two women are attacked by a group of white boys and forced to flee home. Thus the husband's insistence on keeping his wife secluded turns out to be motivated by his concern for her safety in the rough neighborhood, as much as by his desire to assert patriarchal power.)

What is particularly useful about Kimak's study is the way it incorporates and speaks to existing criticism. Undaunted by its sheer volume, Kimak does a thorough job of reviewing what is out there and acknowledging the useful insights. She is at her best when she challenges hasty, unsubstantiated, or reductionist claims. This approach allows her to recuperate some of Mukherjee's and Divakaruni's most maligned works and to give them a second chance without dismissing their problematic aspects too lightly. Earlier critics accused these writers of complicity with Western orientalists, deploring the recurrent plots in which Asian women are liberated from the shackles of Indian patriarchal culture through exposure to American norms and values. Kimak manages to complicate the picture by looking at the entire corpus of these writers' works rather than at single novels or short stories, which has been the standard practice. This is a generous approach, one that allows for the evolution of a writer's position, and for the ironic potential of texts like Mukherjee's *Jasmine* that were previously read too literally. "Exoticized bodies," she points out, "may... be used to critique the American society for making it difficult for immigrant Others to belong and forcing them to resort to any means they have at their disposal, including the attractiveness of their bodies, to assert a place for themselves in the United States" (42). Moreover, by looking at texts that feature Indian male orientalists, Kimak is able to show that the exoticization of the Indian woman's body is a function of male social/economic advantage rather than of race.

The corpus of South Asian American women's literature discussed in *Bicultural Bodies* is representative rather than chosen tendentiously to support a narrow claim. Kimak examines the work of such established authors as Mukherjee, Divakaruni, Meena Alexander, and Jhumpa Lahiri, as well as that of lesser-known writers—Amulya Malladi, Ginu Kamani, Meera Nair, and Sheila Abdullah. The goal of each reading is to elucidate the literary text and point out its often contradictory meanings. Although travel, displacement, marginalization, acculturation, the formation of female subjectivity, and the sexual body's resistance to cultural

norms are familiar themes in Asian American criticism, Kimak tackles them anew with confidence and insight, producing a very readable, carefully constructed, and elegantly written study.

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Dominika Ferens
University of Wrocław

Grzegorz Maziarczyk. *The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English*. Lublin: KUL Publishers, 2013. 316 pages.

The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English investigates the increasingly vibrant field of the history of the book, with a special focus on the supposedly transparent elements of book design and their role in producing meaning, including typeface, layout and the physical form of the book as object. As Maziarczyk points out in the opening lines of his study, the book in Western culture has come to be regarded as "the default medium for the novel" (9), thus downplaying the codex's significance as a vessel of meaning. It was perhaps only with the advent of e-books and other non-material forms of literary production that typographical features ceased to be regarded as de-semiotised structures, especially in the field of narrative fiction. Indeed, many studies have been devoted to the discussion of typographical elements in avant-garde and visual poetry, yet the domain of contemporary fiction, defined by the author somewhat broadly as "novels published since the 1960s" (10), remains, to a degree, an uncharted territory. What is especially valuable in this study is exactly the exclusive interest on contemporary fiction. Maziarczyk develops a compelling line of inquiry, discussing the works of B. S. Johnson, Raymond Federman and William H. Gass alongside those of Mark Z. Danielewski, Steve Tomasula, Graham Rawle and Jonathan