

**Péter Gaál-Szabó**

## **“They got tuh find out about livin’ fuh themselves”**

### **Female Places and Masculine Spaces in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*<sup>1</sup>**

While Hurston scholarship often positions her female characters in a panoptic space of masculine subordination, Hurston reveals another, genuinely feminine aspect of their lives. The aim of the present study is to investigate on the basis of two of her novels, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, how Hurston’s female subjects are able to establish their individual places and to contribute to forming a communal space of women. I argue that Hurston’s female subjects do retain subjectivity also through place-construction in two ways: (a) by reinscribing space, whereby they use places of masculine social space to invert them into their own meaningful places; (b) by establishing what Teresa De Lauretis calls “space off.” In this fashion, Hurston’s women hybridize space, also creating a framework where a genuine female communal space can evolve.

Zora Neale Hurston’s manifold cultural spaces envision female place-construction in various, often panoptic contexts, and thereby genuine feminine spatiality for her females. Thus, even though in her novels, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, Hurston acknowledges masculine transparent social space that denotes the superimposed position of the masculine, she moves beyond the simple binary of masculine and feminine and establishes female subjectivity and feminine sense of place apart from (or notwithstanding) masculine social space, yet within it. Hurston envisions places constructed by women – that is, place constituting identity, not producing it – and a space in which women negotiate identities for themselves through subjective praxis.<sup>2</sup> These places represent thirding in Edward W.

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1. This paper represents part of a larger research, some findings of which were published in Hungarian in “Női helyek – férfi terek Zora Neale Hurston *Their Eyes Were Watching God* című regényében,” in *A Nő Mint Szubjektum, a Női Szubjektum*, ed. Nóra Séllei (Debrecen: Kossuth, 2007), 141–57; it forms, in a finalized form, a chapter of my PhD dissertation, defended at the University of Debrecen in 2009.

2. Much as space and place may appear interchangeable even in the scholarly literature, they represent different entities. In the present paper I take space as an abstract entity, which

Soja's<sup>3</sup> and Homi Bhabha's<sup>4</sup> sense, that is, spatial tactics of "disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution"<sup>5</sup> rendering them "an ambivalent process."<sup>6</sup> They function thus as individual centers of meaning enframed by the masculine social space; that is, apart from it, opposing it, yet depending on it for identity.

As a result, we can count on the presence, even if only through its lack, of the masculine in Hurston's feminine spaces as well, which produces not only opposition, but also cohesive interrelation. So even though Hurston's strategy is to envision feminine private places constructed by women, in which women negotiate identities for themselves through, for instance, ritual praxis, Hurston's feminine "spaces-off" are ambivalent in nature. Teresa De Lauretis's term refers to "the elsewhere [i.e.,] those other spaces both discursive and social that exist . . . in the margins."<sup>7</sup> In this way, space-off means ultimately place elsewhere, not in the centre, but constructed in opposition to the hegemonic spatial discourse. Space-off suggests relationality; furthermore, it also devises spatial tactics that are characteristic of the masculine hegemonic discourse. For instance, female social space renders male presence limited, as becomes conspicuous when Lucy dies in *Jonah's*. In this scene John is excluded from the death ritual and is clearly marginalized. Thus De Lauretis's claim of "movement in and out of gender"<sup>8</sup> cannot mean the abolition of gender in the space-off, as masculine transparent space and feminine spaces "coexist concurrently and in contradiction,"<sup>9</sup> and gender has as much sense in the latter as in the former. Rather, we witness the inversion of gender in these other spaces juxtaposed to (even if within) transparent space. Only in this (pluralizing) way can De Lauretis's assertion of "multiplicity" and "heteronomy" be regarded as applicable.

In addition, the concept of space-off suggests that feminine spaces and places, and thus feminine subjectivity, are not merely socio-ideological constructs. And this is true for Hurston's fiction too. Even if it is not indicated directly in the texts, her female characters perform their subjectivities, as well as enacting them in their bodies, and inscribing and reinscribing space socially and individually, proving that

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provides the texture of places, while place's spatiality can generate its own discourse, which ultimately can be described as space.

3. See Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Malden: Blackwell, 1996).

4. See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).

5. Soja, *Thirdspace*, p. 61.

6. Bhabha, *Location*, p. 37.

7. Teresa De Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender," in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1987), 1-30, p. 26.

8. De Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender," p. 26.

9. De Lauretis, "The Technology of Gender," p. 26.

the subject is always already present as a “holistic, irreducible unit”<sup>10</sup> despite a panoptic context. In fact, the subject cannot *not* be and, therefore it is able to resist contextualization, that is, totalization. As Raoul Eshelman points out, elaborating on the novel move of generative anthropology that he calls “performatism”: “Subjectivity and semiosis are no longer treated as context-dependent, continually failing gestures but rather form closed, performatively realized wholes that resist dispersal in surrounding contexts.”<sup>11</sup> Hurston’s feminine subjects go through a process leading from a position with gendered identities through a “vertiginous progression toward deconstruction of identity” and “molecularization of the self”<sup>12</sup> to nomadism.<sup>13</sup> This process differs from Rosi Braidotti’s proposition in that for Hurston’s women “territories are not be crossed in the nomad’s never-ending journey”<sup>14</sup> in order to secure boundary transgression for its own sake, but through a journey to (re)connect to place and self. In this way, nomadism marks for Hurston’s women the ability to transgress and use space; and the resistance of contextualization means for her female characters that they are able both to connect to masculine social space (which, at most, can mean partial contextualization) and to establish their own places through “the ability to manipulate time, space, and causality for their own benefit.”<sup>15</sup> For Hurston, stability of the minimal self<sup>16</sup> through connectedness to place is an imperative, and the creative, existential use of space is a must.

Accordingly, Hurston’s female places evolve in private or public masculine places in the first place, as they are tightly connected to the positioning of the female body. There are three kinds of female places detectable in the works under

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10. Raoul Eshelman, “Performatism, or the End of Postmodernism,” *Anthropoetics* 6.2 (2000/2001), 30 June 2005 <<http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/apo602/perform.htm>>.

11. Eshelman, “Postmodernism.”

12. Raoul Eshelman, “Performatism in Architecture: On Framing and the Spatial Realization of Ostensivity,” *Anthropoetics* 7.2 (2001/2) 30 June 2005 <<http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/apo702/arch2.htm>>.

13. In her *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), Rosi Braidotti refers to nomadism as “a creative sort of becoming . . . a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction experience and knowledge” (p. 27), thereby identifying a hybrid subject that “resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior” (p. 26).

14. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p. 17.

15. Eshelman, “Postmodernism.”

16. Hurston’s idea of a minimal self is in contrast to Christopher Lasch’s concept, who, in a Freudian manner, conceptualizes the minimal self as an ambivalent entity in the function of a “tension between the desire for union and the fact of separation” (Christopher Lasch, *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* [New York: Norton, 1984], p. 177). For Hurston it signifies stability supported by spatial embeddedness.

discussion, which also function as signifiers of these women's stage of development and the degree of maturation of their subjectivity: domestic space, the (back) yard, and places outside the former, for example, outside built environment. These are physical, geographic locales, where, apart from their bodies as minimal places, Hurston's women can identify with the environment freely.

Even if the particular female character lives on her own as Nanny in *Their Eyes* does, her place is situated in and surrounded by transparent space. The constraint of race complements the first stage of Janie's life as she and Nanny lived "in de white folks' back yard."<sup>17</sup> Her sense of place is determined to an extent by Washburn's place so that, as Janie reports, "Ah didn't know Ah wuzn't white till Ah was round six years old."<sup>18</sup> Her reduced self is also shown by the fact that at the Washburns's she does not even have a name; she is called "Alphabet" for her many names. Furthermore, stigmatized by the place, she is excluded from the ring games by the other, black children.<sup>19</sup>

I have discussed the scene of the "blossoming pear tree in the back yard"<sup>20</sup> elsewhere (see "Ambivalence"<sup>21</sup>), which reveals Janie's genuine sense of place, characterizing her feminine place-construction. This all-important, yet ambivalent scene marks not only her sexual awakening and the advent of her maturing subjectivity, but also her socialization into gender. In fact, the visionary pear tree in bloom engenders for Janie a specific and subjective sense of place, and its subsequent absence conditions her behavior powerfully:

She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Nothing on the place nor in her grandma's house answered her. She searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front gate and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made.<sup>22</sup>

The vivid description shows Janie's maturation and, spatially, her effort to make use of Nanny's house, that is, to enliven it, as well as Janie's final disenchantment with Nanny's house. Hurston's description is existentially even more relevant as Janie's alienation is heightened by Nanny's penetrating antagonism: "Her [Nan-

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17. Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper, 1990), p. 9.

18. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 8.

19. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 8.

20. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 10.

21. Peter Gaál-Szabó, "The Ambivalence of Zora Neale Hurston's Imaginative Space," *British and American Studies* (2004) 187–197.

22. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 11.

ny's] eyes didn't bore and pierce. They diffused and melted Janie, the room and the world into one comprehension."<sup>23</sup> The palpable coinage demonstrates the extreme mechanism of power, as also manifested in the trope of the pear tree, as not only is Janie's body marginalized and positioned unwillingly in space, but the contours of her body, those of the minimal self, are attacked. Her newly emerging sense of place, denoting her subjectivity symbolized by the blossoming pear tree, is endangered.

The other striking aspect of Janie attempting to enliven Nanny's place is how her habitus urges her to construct her own place, but it also characterizes the nature of her sense of place, which is tied to an immaterial, visionary place. Pierre Bourdieu conceptualizes habitus as a "strategy-generating principle"<sup>24</sup> and as "universalizing mediation,"<sup>25</sup> which "reproduce[s] regularities [as] history turned into nature."<sup>26</sup> Thus habitus is rooted in past experiences and recurs as a horizon of expectations in present situations. Searching the world from the top of the steps means searching out the horizon, but not so much the geographic environment as the regions of her mind. Such confabulation – "wherein the remembering subject intercalates fictitious elements or events into memory without awareness of the intercalation"<sup>27</sup> – is activated by her habitus. It is enabled by "the demands of the current situation and past activity,"<sup>28</sup> and, through the mediation of confabulation, "habitus generates action."<sup>29</sup> Janie's daydreaming, engendering what Foucault calls "countermemory,"<sup>30</sup> is an ultimate characteristic of Hurston's women.

The tree metaphor plays a significant role at Killicks's place, accompanying Janie all her life. Similarly to Lucy in *Jonah's*, Janie is urged to identify with the gender roles by "Nanny and the old folks"<sup>31</sup> and tries to render Killicks's house motivated for herself. In this way, the collective attempt at socializing her into gender seems successful as she initially accepts the spatial gender divides within the home; she even inscribes gendered space when she insists on her own domestic territories such as the kitchen.<sup>32</sup> This notion proves her need of place-construction and sense

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23. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 12.

24. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977), p. 72.

25. Bourdieu, p. 79.

26. Bourdieu, p. 78.

27. Edward S. Casey, "Stompin' on Scott: A Cursory Critique of Mind and Memory," *Research in Phenomenology* 30.1 (2000) 223–239, p. 230.

28. Theodore R. Schatzki, "Subject, Body, Place," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91.4 (2001) 698–702, p. 698.

29. Schatzki, p. 698.

30. Braidotti, p. 25.

31. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 20.

32. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 30.

of place, and also the crack in hegemonic spatial tactics that enables Janie to use even gendered space creatively and for her own goals.

Besides domestic places, the yard takes a central position in the spatial discourse. Moving to the yard to work under a "fine oak tree"<sup>33</sup> is her first attempt to break away from gendered environment. There she is able to enact her vision of the pear tree authentically. The recuperation to the vision prompted by the trope of the tree pinpoints Janie's nomadic character as this scene marks, for the first time, nomadic cohesion in Braidotti's sense: it is "engendered by repetitions, cyclical moves, [and] rhythmical displacement."<sup>34</sup> The oak tree can be identified as the first cyclical move in Janie's journey. Not only does the firm stature of the oak tree, releasing associations with an ancient setting, suggest so, but, and especially in contrast to the desolate atmosphere of Killicks's house, so does the sensuous description of the moment, reminiscent of her vision. It is springtime – the time of blossoms – and "the noon filtered through the leaves of the fine oak tree where she sat and made lacy patterns on the ground."<sup>35</sup> In this condensed scene the lacy patterns reveal what is really going on in her. If the scene is compared to how Lucy prepares and decorates her wedding bed with "homemade lace,"<sup>36</sup> a common pattern emerges. She is waiting for the visionary to happen as she did previously under the pear tree, when she heard whistling and her future husband appeared.

*Jonah's* presents the relevant female characters, Amy and Lucy, captives of domestic places. In Amy's case nature enforces limitation even more strongly. It does not present her unconfined with opportunities and the possibility of freedom in Alabama, as Amy lives on the wrong side of "de Big Creek"<sup>37</sup> among sharecroppers. Here social and economic opportunities are strongly curtailed by the geographic location and limitations of nature – its barrenness signifying her own. Her forlornness explains why she felt free only "for a minute" and had to return to the house, where she could experience relative autonomy in gendered space – a seeming contradiction.

It is indeed in the domestic sphere that both Amy and Lucy can establish their own places, even if these powerfully intermingle with masculine transparency, and can only obtain a degree of "*transcendent functionalism*"<sup>38</sup> characteristic of subjective places. Feminine places in *Jonah's* owe their nature to the juxtaposition of the two spaces, while the culturally dominant masculine is superimposed over the fem-

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33. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 26.

34. Braidotti, p. 22.

35. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 26.

36. Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (New York: Harper, 1990), p. 81.

37. Hurston, *Jonah's*, p. 14.

38. Eshelman, "Architecture."

inine. The two coexist, nevertheless, and feminine private places do retain a definite degree of subjectivity. Amy is, for instance, able to construct her own place in the home with the help of her children by relying on “spatially mediated, minimal relations”<sup>39</sup> that form a distinctive family space in opposition to her husband Ned.

Lucy, similarly to Janie, can initially discover only an immaterial world for herself at her parents’ place because her class-conscious mother, ideologizing gender relations, seeks to exert total control over her. Emmeline represents the same African American middle-class code that Joe Starks does in Eatonville. By insisting on “proper” gender relations and by policing Lucy closely when John courts her, Emmeline seeks to instill the gender consciousness of her class into Lucy, but without success. Even though, unlike Janie’s explicitly illuminated vision of the pear tree, Lucy experiences the same revelation – and thus new horizons and a sense of place – in a moment John squeezes her arm and “in a flash she discovered for herself old truths.”<sup>40</sup> These prelapsarian truths are, of course, contrary to Emmeline’s gender code of masculine space, and their recognition by Lucy indicates the advent of a definite subjectivity for her. As is reported of her the next morning after the encounter with John: “Lucy found a hair upon her body and exulted.”<sup>41</sup> This echoes Janie’s resolution after her vision of the pear tree: “So this was a marriage!”<sup>42</sup> Lucy’s response is identical: “Ahm a woman now.”<sup>43</sup> Her revelation may seem childish at first, but it becomes especially significant in a closely policed environment. Not only does this scene signify sexual awakening for Lucy and her declaration an act of subjectivity, but this “step away from childhood”<sup>44</sup> also loosens her ties to her mother and detaches Lucy from the parental place. In the self-conscious reassertion of her emerging womanhood, opposition to the gender conceptions of the black middle-class, mimicking white middle-class ideological notions concerning gender, is shaping up. By voicing who she is, Lucy designates a place of her own, in this case her body as minimal place, juxtaposing her world and the *other* in a pluralist, or rather, coercive fashion – as Janie does several times in *Their Eyes*.

“Unsilencing”<sup>45</sup> becomes conspicuous when Lucy talks back to her mother on the day of her wedding, evoking the feminine tree metaphor employed in Hurston’s

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39. Eshelman, “Architecture.”

40. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 68.

41. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 68.

42. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 11.

43. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 68.

44. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 69.

45. Rachel Blau DuPlessis employs the term in her “Power, Judgement, and Narrative in a Work of Zora Neale Hurston: Feminist Cultural Studies” (*New Essays on Their Eyes Were Watching God*, ed. Michael Awkward [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990], 95–125) to refer to

works: "Ahm telling anybody, ole uh young, grizzly or gray, Ah ain't takin' no whipping tuhnight. All mah switches done growed to trees."<sup>46</sup> bell hooks powerfully paraphrases struggle in her *Talking Back*:

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and growth possible. It is that act of speech of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice.<sup>47</sup>

It must be noted, however, that unsilencing is not merely a language-specific action as hooks suggests,<sup>48</sup> but a performative action in the line of De Lauretis's movement to space-off, whereby the pantheon of cultural performance is applied. Indeed, if the struggle of Hurston and her female characters is "the search for self and community,"<sup>49</sup> unsilencing is a cultural act of reimmersion.

In her marriage Lucy's place-construction remains ambiguous. Her life is extremely limited spatially, and she is defenseless against her husband's promiscuous and sometimes brutal behavior; she cannot evade socialization into gender despite her earlier promising vision. Similarly, however, to characters in performatist fiction, who often "find themselves encased in a frame or rigid set of circumstances that they transcend by reverting to reduced states of consciousness and/or by focusing on simple, opaque things,"<sup>50</sup> Lucy manages to redeem her inner self, too. Thus she has to make do with what she has: her feminine private place derives from the identification with the walnut bed, the symbol of marriage. The bed shapes the outer contours of her extended self and so "She made it a spread and bolster of homemade lace."<sup>51</sup> Especially in opposition to the following paragraph, which describes John's permissive concept of marriage in violent contrast to Lucy's, this sentence shows not only her attention to detail and the effort she puts into shaping her home, but also her hopes penetrating her sense of place

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Janie's narrative strategy of "narrating her own silences" (p. 88) – performative action regarding her emerging new subjectivity just as her "thinking silence" or political action just as her "protesting silence" was beforehand.

46. Hurston, *Jonah's*, p. 78.

47. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End, 1989), p. 9.

48. hooks, p. 28.

49. Michael Awkward, *Inspiring Influences* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), p. 5.

50. Eshelman, "Architecture."

51. Hurston, *Jonah's*, p. 81.



that she realizes spatially. The bed also represents “paradoxical space”<sup>52</sup> – to use Gillian Rose’s term – because of its overlapping functions that “complement and contest each other”:<sup>53</sup> it both fulfills a regulatory role for Lucy as it appears as the prime means of conditioning her life and grants her space where she can enjoy relative autonomy for a while in Alabama. No wonder that Hurston uses it as the main trope to illuminate Lucy’s utmost deprivation: when she is pregnant and conscious of John’s unfaithfulness, Bud, her brother, comes to collect her debt in her poverty, and it is the bed he takes away. Only the feather mattress remains, a vague and tormented reminder of her most intimate autonomy: “Lucy was shivering and weeping upon the feather mattress.”<sup>54</sup>

Even though Eatonville does not change Lucy’s basic position as she remains characteristically in the domestic sphere, where she cannot construct a place for herself solely, on her own, because of John’s regulating presence wedging into it, Lucy’s role changes dramatically. Spatially this is shown by the bed itself, which this time she earns by sewing for a white woman.<sup>55</sup> However, she defines herself clearly with respect to and in the function of her husband already before Eatonville: “Ah wants mah husband tuh be uh great big man. . . Ah wants tuh uphold yuh in eve’ything.”<sup>56</sup> But in Eatonville she takes a more active role in determining family matters; moreover, she decides about her husband’s career plans. As an *éminence grise*, she conditions her husband (against his will: “Dat’s uh bigger job Ah wants tuh tackle, Lucy. You so big-eyed”<sup>57</sup>) to buy a five-acre plot and to take on better jobs such as carpentry and later preaching, and, as he increasingly accepts Lucy’s work ethic and “maneuvering,”<sup>58</sup> he even becomes the mayor in Eatonville as well as moderator in the state. Her will-to-power is also well perceived by the Eatonville community: in a porch talk, for instance, Walter Thomas exclaims: “Aw, ’tain’t you, Pearson. . . iss dat li’l’ handful uh woman you got on de place”;<sup>59</sup> and Sam Mosely adds: “Anybody could put hissself on de ladder wid her in de house”;<sup>60</sup> and later on he is called “Uh wife-made man.”<sup>61</sup> Lucy’s

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52. Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 150.

53. Rose, p. 160.

54. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 91.

55. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 130.

56. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 96.

57. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 109.

58. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 116.

59. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 109.

60. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 110.

61. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 113.

prestige and her leading role from the background become even more palpable in the aftermath of the campaign for mayorship when Lucy's role in winning the campaign is repeatedly emphasized.

Lucy's acceptance by the community, unlike Janie's in Eatonville after her re-birth, derives from both Lucy's acceptance of the possible horizon granted to her by masculine space and the consequent construction of "personal networks" (however, not necessarily with other women) that prove both "enabling and constraining."<sup>62</sup> Even if it is her task to push and shove John ahead,<sup>63</sup> she never exceeds the space ascribed to her, that is, domestic space with the role of a mother, and social space with satellite roles beside her husband, tied to his identity. Lucy's female places thus remain limited despite the upward movement she makes socially and her firmer and widened existential anchorage. Her confinement is rendered conspicuous many times in the work, but, perhaps, most vividly by her high degree of immobility. When Lucy and John converse, it happens in their home, where John receives instructions, but when Lucy is in need, she is left alone in the home and her habitus does not allow her to flee to another place, for example nature, as John or Janie do in *Their Eyes*. As she cannot hope for help in the physical, social world, her world can only develop inwardly, but there "only the coldness grew numerous."<sup>64</sup> In fact, the only time she oversteps her boundaries is when, sick as she is, she talks back to John: "Ah ain't going' tuh hush nothin' uh de kind. . . Me and mah chillun got some rights."<sup>65</sup> Her reassertion of the self shows her self-awareness and also the power she gains from family space, as well as her position in transparent social space, but she clearly overrates it – which is also indicated spatially initially as John is towering over her and she is lying in the bed below him: she is stopped abruptly by John hitting her. John's act shatters her world so badly so that Lucy begins preparing to die, which is indicated by her giving her only property, the bed, to Isis. She never leaves the bed again; the room remains frozen in that scene, the countdown implied by the descending movement of a spider on the ceiling.

Besides the tree metaphor, the trope of the road signifies for Hurston the possibility of self-fulfillment. The nonplace-like road possesses a dual function for Hurston's women, representing also the horizon for them. Several times Janie contemplates roads – e.g., at Nanny's and then at Killicks's place. But even beyond engendering expectations for her, roads symbolize a space-off for her outside built environment. Female private places (that is, back yards and natural

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62. Melissa Gilbert, " 'Race,' Space, and Power: The Survival Strategies of Working Poor Women," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88.4 (1998) 595–621, p. 616.

63. Hurston, *Jonah's*, p. 116.

64. Hurston, *Jonah's*, p. 115.

65. Hurston, *Jonah's*, p. 128.

environments) share a common aspect, which is their detachedness from transparent built environment.

Furthermore, the open space of roads also symbolizes a qualitative difference in these women's strategy of (also culturally bound) opposition. Namely, by escaping to roads, while moving away from built environment, the female subject (a) sets up a nature-culture binary (culture meaning masculine social space); and (b) abandons the social in favor of the individual. In fact, as Janie's movement becomes analogous to the dancing body, "presentic movement [of which] interrupts the historical time-frame and creates a space of 'wide-openness' – an unlimited and undetermined time-space of unforeseen possibilities."<sup>66</sup> Roads are liminal places and embody a space of action, where Hurston's female subject is free to establish herself.

It must be acknowledged, however, that Janie's habitus based on her vision conditions her sense of place at these open places. Both times she sets out on roads she does so for men, Starks and Tea Cake; that is, Hurston determines the subjectivity of her female characters closely in relation to men. Nevertheless, Janie's liberation is explicit when she breaks away from Killicks:

The morning road air was like a new dress. That made her feel the apron tied around her waist. She untied it and flung it on a bush beside the road and walked on, picking flowers and making a bouquet. . . From now on until death she was going to have flower dust and springtime sprinkled over everything. A bee for her bloom. Her old thoughts were going to come handy now, but new worlds would have to be made and said to fit them.<sup>67</sup>

The wonderful contrast between the refreshing dawn and the apron, a symbol of masculine socialization of women into domestic space, makes palpable Janie's new consciousness, as she temporarily obtains "masculinist hypermobility."<sup>68</sup> Also the high degree of her sense of liberation emerges clearly in the act of getting rid of the apron and collecting flowers in a free and childlike manner. Her spontaneous behavior and "nondirected and nonlimited movement"<sup>69</sup> can be compared to the naturalness of improvisational dance, in which, as Elaine Clark-Rapley evaluates it, the "dancing body moves within space, inhabits space," whereby "the body

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66. Elaine Clark-Rapley, "Dancing Bodies: Moving beyond Marxian Views of Human Activity, Relations and Consciousness," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 29.2 (1999) 89–108, p. 104.

67. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 31.

68. Geraldine Pratt and Brenda Yeoh, "Transnational (Counter) Topographies," *Gender, Place and Culture* 10.2 (2003) 159–166, p. 160.

69. Clark-Rapley, p. 104.

is the apex or point of reference."<sup>70</sup> Her sense of place inhabits space for a short time through her reaching back and recuperating her vision. The "nostalgia for fixity"<sup>71</sup> apparently counters Braidotti's concept of the nomad; however, it is this vision that urges Janie to undertake the quest for self in a "[mode] of definite, seasonal patterns of movement through rather fixed routes"<sup>72</sup> that yet reasserts nomadism in this context too. Fixed routes bear special importance also in this scene from the point of view of Hurston's geopolitics. When it is narrated that "Janie hurried out of the front gate and turned south,"<sup>73</sup> not only is the direction of Janie's pilgrimage indicated, but also, by way of contrast, the region where African Americans can attain what Janie experiences in the following moments.

Especially in the context of Janie's cyclical patterns of movement, also paralleling blues methodology,<sup>74</sup> roads for Hurston thus become indeed a metaphor of a particular nomadism in the search of self and place embedded in a region of cultural space. The transformation of roads renders this connection palpable: they carry Janie south and disembody into a landscape, where there is "Wild cane on either side of the road hiding the rest of the world [and] People [are] wild too."<sup>75</sup> Whereas roads north from the Everglades are framed by houses, modernism, and, in general, masculine transparent space, here the boundaries between nature and culture are deconstructed, as Ann R. Morris and Margaret M. Dunn point out about contemporary Florida, "[t]he migrant workers on the muck govern their lives by the crops; the Seminoles in the glades watch the earth for signs."<sup>76</sup> The symbiosis is also depicted by the roads as they become akin in their nature to the surrounding landscape: "Dirt roads so rich and black that a half mile of it would have fertilized a Kansas wheat field."<sup>77</sup>

For Janie, Eatonville grants similar aspects of social upward mobility to Lucy's. She becomes the "bell cow" for the community, but ultimately it means incarceration into overmythicized middle-class femininity with all its ambiguities in an African American community in the Deep South, and physical and social limitation. In

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70. Clark-Rapley, p. 103.

71. Braidotti, p. 22.

72. Braidotti, p. 22.

73. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 31.

74. See Maria V. Johnson, "The World in a Jug and the Stopper in (Her) Hand': *Their Eyes As Blues Performance*," *African American Review* (1998). Bnet. 19 Sept. 2004 <<http://www.findarticles.com>>.

75. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 123.

76. Ann R. Morris and Margaret M. Dunn, "Flora and Fauna in Hurston's Florida Novels," in *Zora in Florida*, ed. Steve Glassman and Kathryn Lee Seidel (Orlando: University of Central Florida Press, 1991), 1-12, p. 5.

77. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 123.

the first place, however, her status as a satellite of Starks's marks the confutation of her subjectivity envisioned in the tree trope. Starks's "homo economicus" nature disenchanting Janie's resurfacing dreamwork revealed in the ecstatic moments under the oak tree in Killicks's yard and on the road just before. Shortly after their arrival in Eatonville her spatial practice, in the manner of Michel De Certeau's walking-like reinscription of space,<sup>78</sup> is shattered as "the new lumber was rattling off the wagon and being piled under the big live oak tree."<sup>79</sup> It is surely not by chance that the timber is hauled exactly under a tree characterized in this way. The "live oak tree" stands for Janie and her sense of place as a direct continuation of both earlier visions under trees; the reference to its size embodies the amplitude of her expectations, which are reborn and, at the same time, threatened by desacralizing industrialization. Moreover, the rattling sound contrasts sharply with both the alto chant of bees and the homely atmosphere under the tree in Killicks's yard.

The threat of annihilation to the tree engendering Janie's subjectivity is overridden when "Jodie moved his things and moved downstairs."<sup>80</sup> After this Janie is beginning to really reinscribe space (also via body politics right after his death, as she reclaims her body with her "exhibitive and performative" hairstyle<sup>81</sup>). After Janie's long-term subversion, spatial inversion shows that Starks's is losing its power over Janie, while Janie is getting hold of the heart of the house: the private spheres. The meaning of the house changes ultimately with Starks's death, and, as also Gaston Bachelard explains the nature of houses, the house grows to symbolize the self as it is turned into "*felicitous space*."<sup>82</sup> This can first be detected when Janie is afraid to go home alone at night: "it was no place to show her fear there in the darkness between the house and the store."<sup>83</sup> An "architectonic closure" takes place in the narrative as the house comes to signify security; it has become a private place for her, and the embodiment of her extended self, or as Bachelard puts it, the "topography of [her] intimate being."<sup>84</sup> It becomes the symbol of the pear tree in blossom that is waiting for a bee to sink into the sanctuary of her bloom.

The progress of Tea Cake in winning Janie's heart is paralleled clearly with Tea Cake's advancing toward the house and entering it. First he appears in the store; the

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78. See Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

79. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 38.

80. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 77.

81. Evelyn Newman Phillips, "'Doing More than Heads': African American Women Healing, Resisting, and Uplifting Others in St. Petersburg, Florida," *Frontiers* 22.2 (2001) 25–42, p. 38.

82. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. xxxi.

83. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 94.

84. Bachelard, p. xxxiii.

next time they meet, he accompanies Janie to the house onto the porch, which, by then, signifies the outer layers of her social, public self, or, as Clare Cooper puts it, the "public exterior";<sup>85</sup> the same evening he is allowed closer when they do the washing up together in the kitchen<sup>86</sup> – the latter representing in many cultures "both a sacred and functional space"<sup>87</sup> a transitional space outside the private. The third time he enters the "intimate interior"<sup>88</sup> by walking into the living room without asking to play the piano. This time he ends up playing with Janie's hair as if with the strings of a musical instrument.<sup>89</sup> It is there he confesses his love for her while Janie is standing at the newel post, blocking the way leading up to her bedroom. The fourth time Tea Cake visits Janie "they went inside and their laughter rang out first from the kitchen and all over the house."<sup>90</sup> The fact that their laughter fills the entire house indicates that Janie's vision of the tree and a bee finds physical materialization. The texture of the embodied self becomes the house at that moment. One expects what also happens: the next morning they are in bed, "Tea Cake almost kissing her breath away."<sup>91</sup>

The major breakthrough in Janie's development comes when in the Everglades "her soul crawled out from its hiding place."<sup>92</sup> From the point of view of spatial analysis, this "exteriorization of the mind"<sup>93</sup> signifies that Janie's metamorphosis is completed. The passage shows how Janie grows to make her last dynamic move: to identify with the nonplace-like or, from another angle, liminoid open space. The curve of her final development becomes visible in the difference between the exaltation in her bedroom with Tea Cake and this scene. It is reported that in the bedroom "after a long time of passive happiness, she got up and opened the window and let Tea Cake leap forth to the sky on a wind."<sup>94</sup> Here, despite her sense of happiness and liberation, Janie remains in enclosed space and built environment, which stands in sharp contrast to Florida's Southern open landscapes. She opens the window, a clear spatial indication of the dissolution of

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85. Clare Cooper, *The House as a Symbol of the Self* (Berkeley: U of California, 1974), p. 131.

86. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, pp. 97–98.

87. Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "'Women's Significant Spaces': Religion, Space, and Community," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 19 (1999) 159–170, p. 163.

88. Cooper, p. 131.

89. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 99.

90. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 103.

91. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 103.

92. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 122.

93. Malin Zimm, "The Dying Dreamer: Architecture of Parallel Realities," *Technoetic Arts* 1.1 (2003) 61–68, p. 67.

94. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 103.

the previous inner fortification that she had built up in an answer to Starks's harassments ("She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. She went inside there to see what it was"<sup>95</sup>). Outgoing in Casey's sense represents the beginning of her subsequent transformation into Braidotti's nomadic subject as Janie is able to "free the activity of thinking from the hold of phallogocentric dogmatism, returning thought to its freedom, its liveliness, its beauty,"<sup>96</sup> or, from another (African American) angle, the last move in completing her blues performance. Still, similarly to Lucy, for whom this is the most she can reach, Janie does not leave the bedroom (the house of her self) to meet the outside world in order to materialize her vision, uniting body and soul, in the exterior context. At this point she is only able to persist on the level of mental and spiritual endeavors metaphorized by her looking up to the sky, but remaining standing on the earth in a room. The importance of Florida for Janie lies in finding a space-off, where she manages to unite body and soul and to contextualize herself in a cultural space that does not discard her unitary originary subjectivity, but enhances it.

Her space-off is still intact when Janie reaches the final stage of her development in her marriage with Tea Cake. Todd McGowan argues that Janie can obtain momentary freedom after she kills Tea Cake,<sup>97</sup> but regarding even the subtlety of previous frameworks that Janie is forced into, her act of killing Tea Cake signifies rather Hurston's suture of her own disappointment with marriage into the novel, and in this way, the momentary shattering of Hurston's "metaphysical optimism."<sup>98</sup> I must agree with Selwyn R. Cudjoe, who claims that "a person is not complete until she locates herself fully in her time (history) and her place (geography)."<sup>99</sup> Janie reaches, via transpatial migration across the Southern landscape, an "amorphous" state of existence "connected to many identities,"<sup>100</sup> that is, not simply gendered first and foremost, but, unlike Sarah N. Gatson's identification of amorphous individuals, she reconstructs her self by finally "validating self [and] rhetorically reconstructing the past"<sup>101</sup> in her sovereign private place: her back yard.

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95. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 67.

96. Braidotti, p. 8.

97. Todd McGowan, "Liberation and Domination: *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the Evolution of Capitalism," *MELUS* (Spring 1999), Bnet. 11 Apr. 2006 <<http://www.findarticles.com>>.

98. Eshelman, "Postmodernism."

99. Olga Idriss Davis, "A Black Woman as Rhetorical Critic: Validating Self and Violating the Space of Otherness," *Women's Studies in Communication* 21.1 (1998) 77–89, p. 79.

100. Sarah N. Gatson, "On Being Amorphous: Autoethnography, Genealogy, and a Multi-racial Identity," *Qualitative Inquiry* 9.1 (2003) 20–48, p. 40.

101. Davis, p. 80.

While it is the shared experience in gendered space and praxis reinscribing space that connect women in Hurston's fiction too, for Janie these also represent ways to distance herself from masculine space and other women likewise. Her feminine spatiality renders her subjectivity autonomous; however, she hybridizes properties of masculine space and transposes them into the feminine, unlike other women of the Eatonville community. Clear instances of the latter are the games she plays, such as checkers and shooting, as well as the man she is associated with – all of them transgress boundaries. In fact, a "deconstructive playfulness"<sup>102</sup> characterizes the praxis she devises in her new spatial framework.

Tea Cake in this framework occupies a subordinate position which is also spatially expressed, even if his position can be seen as ambivalent: he never settles, so socially he is placeless and marginalized, but his freedom derives exactly from his social exclusion and his consequent physical mobility. In a systematic practice of thirding, Janie, by associating with him, transgresses, but, at the same time, transcends the boundaries of social space, especially its class and gender constraints. On Starks's side Janie acquires previously a middle-class status and later the prestigious position of a well-to-do widow, who is supposed to maintain proper gender relations, while remaining in gendered space. Tea Cake represents the negation of gender ideology by being younger and poorer, and through his praxis and gender conceptions, particularly in contrast to other males courting Janie.

By choosing Tea Cake, Janie inverts masculine space by the de-reconstruction of gender,<sup>103</sup> which becomes really visible in the figure of Hezekiah, who helps out in the store: Janie, the owner of the store, standing higher in the social hierarchy than the seventeen year old boy also because of her age, develops the habit of playing checkers on the porch, which previously was a tool in Starks's hand in her subordination (on one occasion Starks orders Janie, "Go fetch de checker-board *and* de checkers,"<sup>104</sup> meaning that Janie is not intelligent enough to play a male's game), while Hezekiah ("the best imitation of Joe" in his habits, at which "she laughed outright"<sup>105</sup>) remains in the store to work instead of Janie.

By letting Janie reassert her subjectivity through hybridization and through drawing a map of "counter topography"<sup>106</sup> in physical space, Hurston distances her character from her community via bordercrossing, and particularly from the race, gender, class ideology that penetrates the African American community. Janie in-

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102. McGowan, p. 1.

103. De Lauretis, p. 24.

104. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 71.

105. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, pp. 87, 88.

106. Pratt and Yeoh, p. 163.



verts both gender and class conventions by transgressing gender boundaries imbued with class ideology, and Hurston exerts a powerful critique of “the race” by ironically separating Janie from mainstream ideals also in space. By allowing Janie to enact her vision, Hurston subverts “controlling images”<sup>107</sup> of the black female, and proposes an autonomous subjectivity which is yet embedded in a sociocultural space.

Autonomous subjectivity can be detected in the fact that Janie is able to form a communal space with her friend. However, Hurston deconstructs female transparent space individually and socially already before the Everglades. Hurston’s strategy is not to construct an entirely new, alternative universe, which is ultimately proved by the devastation in the Hurricane scene, but to build in fissures in masculine and female transparent spaces. In the focal point of these schisms one can detect the genuinely individual that is able to shape nurturing social relations as well.

It is Southern black cultural space, where Hurston’s female characters ultimately reach the horizon of their female subjectivities and sense of place. It is not that gendered space becomes overridden, but rather that Hurston constructs a space in which gender relations are embedded in a pluralist context. On the muck in *Their Eyes* female and masculine spaces are juxtaposed in natural heterotopia and, at the same time, intertwined not to abolish gender, but to form an integrated space (from a womanist perspective) of a large variety of mosaics. Janie’s overalls undergird this statement as they symbolize a “nice bit of cross-dressing, signifying equality and sexuality in gender terms. . .”<sup>108</sup> Thirthing renders possible for Janie, for instance, what previously only men have power to do with women: in an inverted, yet parallel scene with *Jonah’s*, Janie “cut him [that is, Tea Cake] short with a blow”<sup>109</sup> in a fit of jealousy; and after they make love, “she had to crow over the fallen Nunkie,”<sup>110</sup> just as John in *Jonah’s* “held Lucy tightly and thought pityingly of other men.”<sup>111</sup> This shows the neatness of the mechanism of integrating feminization, problematizing the supposed homogeneity of social space, and effecting polyvalence. For Hurston feminine space-off cuts across gender lines and class boundaries, and it is realized idealistically in the geographic region of Florida, where spacing off is not a matter of life instinct only, but a possibility of choice.

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107. Rupert Simms, “Controlling Images and the Gender Construction of Enslaved African Women,” *Gender and Society* 15.6 (2001) 879–897, p. 879.

108. DuPlessis, p. 25.

109. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 131.

110. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, p. 132.

111. Hurston, *Jonah’s*, p. 111.