

FROM SANDINO TO MAFALDA: Recent Works on Latin American Popular Culture

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- FROM MAFALDA TO LOS SUPERMACHOS: LATIN AMERICAN GRAPHIC HUMOR AS POPULAR CULTURE.* By David William Foster. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989. Pp. 119. \$19.95.)
- SANDINO IN THE STREETS.* Introduction by Jack W. Hopkins. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Pp. 117. \$24.95.)
- CARIBBEAN POPULAR CULTURE.* Edited by John A. Lent. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990. Pp. 157. \$26.95 cloth, \$13.95 paper.)
- POPULAR CULTURE IN CHILE: RESISTANCE AND SURVIVAL.* Edited by Kenneth Aman and Cristián Parker. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991. Pp. 225. \$39.95.)
- MEMORY AND MODERNITY: POPULAR CULTURE IN LATIN AMERICA.* By William Rowe and Vivian Schelling. (London: Verso, 1991. Pp. 243. \$59.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.)
- STORIES ON A STRING: THE BRAZILIAN LITERATURA DE CORDEL.* By Candace Slater. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. Pp. 313. \$11.95 paper.)
- TRAIL OF MIRACLES: STORIES FROM A PILGRIMAGE IN NORTHEAST BRAZIL.* By Candace Slater. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986. Pp. 289. \$35.00.)

Theoretical Approaches to Popular Culture

In general terms, two dominant views exist regarding the production and consumption of popular culture. One holds that it is imposed from above on subordinated peoples by outside forces of domination. The second perspective sees popular culture as created below structures of domination and from within by subordinated peoples themselves. The first view, the most widely accepted by far, is the one held by mass cultural theorists. It evolved out of concepts developed by individuals associated with the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (founded at the University of Frankfurt in 1923) who later emigrated to the United States. The writings of Theodor Adorno have been particularly seminal, espe-

cially his 1975 reconsideration entitled “Culture Industry Reconsidered” (Adorno 1975). In this essay, Adorno associates mass culture with “culture industry” in order to distinguish mass culture from popular culture, which he considers a spontaneous expression arising directly from the subaltern classes. His somewhat mechanistic analysis of a culture industry betrays his disdain for its manifestations, especially when contrasted with forms of high culture.

In *The Popular Arts* (1964), Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel constructed a useful composite of the mind-set of adherents to mass culture theory, detailing the convictions they share. First, power and techniques to manipulate the culture industry is concentrated in a few hands, although many are employed to carry out its nefarious ends. Hence the ethics of salesmanship and persuasion pervade all aspects of public life. Second, artistic creativity has been snuffed out in favor of cultural products mass-produced for a large, unthinking consumer audience. Third, the worth of individuals in society is judged solely on the basis of their potential as consumers; they are mere passive receivers of cultural products, unable to make judgments and meaningful discriminations. Fourth, electronic and print mass media are increasingly helping to engender a pseudo-world in which our experiences are reorganized into stereotypes and distortions of ourselves and our reality. Fifth, the world created by mass media is unambiguously defined so that subtle distinctions become increasingly blurred. Sixth, folk art, popular art that arises from below, and high art are all being subsumed into mass culture, which does not respect traditions, values, and aesthetics that do not serve its purposes. Seventh, conformity is stressed over true expressions of individuality, and the cult of personality—whether of actors, politicians, or sports heroes—dominates. Finally, consumers live passively in a dreamlike world stripped of their own aspirations and sense of themselves (see Hall and Whannel 1964, chap. 13)

This is indeed a most depressing picture of mass-culture society, in which various cultural products play important roles as commodities designed to maintain a false sense of reality and satisfy passive consumer tastes. But the critical and theoretical view of these products has become more sophisticated and more useful in interpreting them. In terms of cultural texts (using the term broadly to include traditionally defined written texts as well as texts in a wider sense), the last thirty years have witnessed a number of approaches come into fashion and then fade. Structuralism, for example, provided a useful means of breaking a text down into its component formal parts, despite a tendency to conceptualize the reader as “an overly passive recipient of narrative meanings” (see Ashley 1989, 136). Ultimately, however, structuralism’s emphasis on scientifically precise analysis rendered it relatively useless for considering the role of the reader in constructing the text. Some varieties of poststruc-

turalism that emerged in France in the 1960s reacted against structuralism's scientific emphasis and are therefore more useful for considering the popular culture text within the broader context of the reader and the reading process itself. Although the many theories that emerged during this period vary greatly, they seem to share a common sense of a "total culture" in which both readers and texts are shaped (see Ashley 1989, 136).

One version of mass-culture theory that was dominant in Latin America in the late 1960s and 1970s (and is still found today) is the thesis of cultural imperialism, a corollary of the dependency theory of economic development in vogue among social scientists and economists fifteen to twenty years ago. The cultural imperialism thesis focuses on the role played by various cultural industries and mass media—radio, television, *fotonovelas*, comic books, music, newspapers, advertising, and so on—within the underdeveloped economies and societies of Third World nations. Although advocates of this view of relationships between dominant and subordinate countries in the socioeconomic, political, and cultural sphere clearly adhere to the Frankfurt School's concept of mass culture as imposed from without and above, they do not share Adorno's disregard for "low culture." Believers in cultural imperialism are suspicious only of those forms of "low culture" that are manipulated by powerful economic interests in order to promote capitalist consumerism (such as Latin American *fotonovelas* or U.S. television soap operas).

Armand Mattelart, one of the formulators of the thesis of cultural imperialism, views as essential the process of ideological transference—of attitudes, behavior, and life models—that accompany developed countries' economic penetration and imperialist foreign policies. He considers cultural imperialism to be a model of organization of power that seeks homogenization, demobilization, disorganization, and subsequent consensus: "A people deprived of its culture, its customs, its own style of life, is just as defenseless as if it had been robbed of its raw materials" (see interview, Torrecilla 1980, 69). Mattelart warns against viewing cultural imperialism as a kind of *deus ex machina*, a conspiratorial external force that manipulates domestic cultural industries. In his view, each underdeveloped society has a state apparatus that is highly adapted to its particular culture and class structure and generates cultural messages not perceived as foreign. In generating cultural messages, transnational and multinational corporations and interests are much more important than the foreign governments of developed countries.

Differing radically from all these theoretical approaches that tend to view popular culture as a cultural phenomenon imposed from above is the view that conceives of popular culture as arising from within and below. John Fiske, a proponent of this approach, believes that popular culture "is made by subordinate peoples in their own interests out of resources that also, contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the

dominant" (Fiske 1989, 2). Part of popular culture always remains beyond the control of hegemonic forces because it is a culture of conflict that always "involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and . . . not those preferred by the dominant ideology." Creators and consumers of popular culture thus have the choice of either resisting or evading structures of dominance. Fiske offers as examples of this choice the female fans of U.S. rock star Madonna who resist patriarchal meanings of female sexuality by constructing their own oppositional ones. Surfers, in contrast, avoid structures of dominance by "evading social discipline, evading ideological control and positioning" (Fiske 1989, 2). Fiske would agree with deconstructionists in asserting that meanings can never be identified in a popular culture text but must be constructed within wider social life and in relation to other texts. Moreover, popular texts are inadequate in themselves and become complete only when taken up by individuals within their everyday culture. Readers find meaning in these texts only when their textual messages are relevant to the readers' everyday lives. Fiske views "relevance" as central to popular culture in minimizing the differences between text and life, between aesthetics and everyday experience. Relevance is produced for readers from the intersecting of the textual with the social (Fiske 1989, 6). Those who are subordinate (for Fiske, the majority of producers and consumers of popular culture) retain semiotic power in their ability to construct oppositional meanings (1989, 10). This potential to resist semiotically differentiates Fiske's conception of readers from those envisioned by Frankfurt School Marxists, structuralists, and poststructuralists like Adorno, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, and Pierre Macherey.

Fiske's optimistic view of the production and consumption of popular culture as having the power to construct oppositional meanings is at least partially shared by Argentine anthropologist Néstor García Canclini. His analysis is also inspired by the writings of Althusser and Antonio Gramsci as well as by more contemporary Marxist theorists of popular culture such as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, Jean Baudrillard, and Pierre Bourdieu. García Canclini's 1982 study, *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo*, examines the transformations that indigenous Mexican arts, crafts, and popular festivals have undergone in the context of late capitalism in a developing industrialized economy. Like Fiske, García Canclini believes that culture not only represents a society but serves to "reelaborate" social structures and invent new ones (1982, 43). He demonstrates how, over the past few decades, Tarascan and other Indian production of arts and crafts and celebration of their festivals have lost their symbolic meaning partly through being reified in museums and reproduced for economic purposes by dominant capitalist interests. García Canclini's program for initiating a counterhegemonic basis for popular cultural forms includes organizing the producers of these forms—in fact, the

entire popular sector—into cooperatives and unions, thus allowing indigenous groups to reassert their former control over the means of production and distribution. A related process would be reappropriating the symbolic meaning of their products, which involves strategies for taking progressive control over the spaces and mechanisms of distribution by removing their products and festivals from museums, governments stores, and tourist markets (García Canclini 1982, 161).

The Practice of Latin American Popular Culture

I will begin with William Rowe's and Vivian Schelling's *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America*, the broadest and most theoretically sophisticated treatment of Latin American popular culture of all the works under consideration. Their introductory chapter deals with problems related to definitions and forms of popular culture and provides a useful discussion of the various theoretical positions vis-à-vis this cultural phenomenon in general and its practice in Latin America. Rowe and Schelling confirm that popular culture is easy to identify yet difficult to define, particularly when labeled as the culture of the subaltern classes and assumed to carry implied opposition to dominant classes or groups.

They then critique the three main interpretative narrative currents underlying the assumptions about the history of culture. Rowe and Schelling reject as nostalgically romantic the first view that peasant or rural culture has been degraded or forgotten since the advent of industrialization and the modern culture industry. In Latin America, the two worlds of traditional and modern culture are not separate but often coexist side by side. The second view that popular culture can only become a form of mass culture, itself a product of steady and inevitable industrialization, is discarded as simplistic in failing to take into account the inventiveness of popular classes in creating their own version of modernity. Rowe and Schelling are more partial to the third interpretation, utopian in nature, which holds that popular culture can be emancipatory in helping form a future society. Although the authors recognize that this third view has its limitations, it nonetheless becomes the basis for most of their analysis in subsequent chapters.

Rejecting the Manichean and apocalyptic view of mass culture typical of Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School, Rowe and Schelling do not perceive mass culture as destroying all that is pure and authentic about popular culture or as mechanistically manipulating a passive audience. At the same time, they acknowledge mass culture's tremendous power to erase the popular memory of the subaltern classes, to bring on what they call "social amnesia."

Rowe and Schelling thus provide a valuable critique of often flawed assumptions about folklore and mass culture. Regarding folklore, they

warn against accepting the common view of folklore as a static practice pertaining to the past and emphasizing aesthetic rather than practical and symbolic aspects. This tendency to backdate folklore often results in ignoring its differences from one region to another and assuming that folklore is disappearing rather than continuing to thrive despite industrialization. Regarding mass culture, Rowe and Schelling reject Adorno's view that its emergence spells the end of popular culture or that popular culture can only become a form of mass culture. This concept of mass culture envisions the audience as passive. Rowe and Schelling draw instead on the works of Jesús Martín-Barbero, a Colombian mass culture theorist whose new studies have helped shape a refreshing consideration of the role of mass media in Latin America. Somewhat like John Fiske, Martín-Barbero "demonstrates the need to pay attention to the cultural characteristics of the receiving public and to see the mass media as vehicles or mediations of particular moments of the 'massification' of society, and not its source" (p. 8). Martín-Barbero has shown how Latin American audiences exposed to the mass imagery of television continue to believe and participate in symbolic systems that combine precapitalist and capitalist worlds. For example, Afro-Hispanic and Indo-Hispanic beliefs and traditions can serve to mediate the audience's response to a fotonovela.

Unfortunately, however, the thinking underlying the organization of *Memory and Modernity* is not made clear. As Rowe and Schelling state, they have concentrated their descriptive material in the second chapter in order to offer examples from disparate regions of the continent and to show the changes undergone by popular culture in this century. Chapters 1, 3, and 4 are conceived more as individual essays that explore the history of popular culture, how it has been appropriated politically, and its relations with so-called high culture. Chapter 1 offers a historical view of the "continuities and discontinuities" of popular culture in Latin America from the colonial period through the early twentieth century. Chapter 3 continues this history, emphasizing how populist political movements have made use of popular culture in the twentieth century. Chapter 4 examines the interplay of popular and high culture in the works of prominent twentieth-century Latin American writers.

Rowe and Schelling wisely have not attempted to give a full history of popular culture in Latin America, a future project well beyond the scope of *Memory and Modernity*. Instead they have tried to provide "a chronological view of key processes and moments" that could assist others in such an endeavor (p. 17). The emphasis in Chapter 1 falls on what they identify as some of the historical continuities in the cultural life of the popular classes that, according to their definition, would be synonymous with popular culture itself.

Rowe and Schelling draw on three key concepts to map a partial history of the cultural life of the popular classes: acculturation, *mestizaje*,

and transculturation. Acculturation is defined as “a one-way process of conversion substitution of native cultures by European ones” (p. 18), while transculturation involves the mutual transformation of both cultures. Mestizaje “assumes a synthesis of cultures, where none is eradicated.” In Rowe and Schelling’s view, none of the three concepts alone can explain the history of Latin American culture, least of all mestizaje, which tends to obscure power relations by promoting a false picture of cultural harmony. The culture of the popular classes interacting with European culture has undergone varying degrees of acculturation, mestizaje, and transculturation in different areas over time.

Chapter 3 focuses on populism and how popular culture has been utilized as an essential aspect of national identity in twentieth-century Latin America. As in other parts of *Memory and Modernity*, Rowe and Schelling employ Gramsci’s concept of hegemony and the extent to which culture is used as “a main strategic factor in the gaining and maintenance of state power, in the sense that cultural allegiances are an essential factor of social power” (p. 152). The authors first examine how the hegemonic debate played out in Peru in the 1920s, when various political forces were contending for power. Rowe and Schelling focus on José Carlos Mariátegui as a key intellectual who recognized the need to forge an alliance between the Indian population, which he defined as the proletariat in the Marxist sense, and the working class. Like Gramsci, Mariátegui perceived the central role that a new utopian myth could play as a unifying force. Peruvian Indian traditions therefore became an integral part of constructing such a myth.

Rowe and Schelling turn next to populism in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. They highlight how Mexican political leaders after the revolution of 1910 went about consolidating state power. Rowe and Schelling point to three essential ingredients of this consolidation and Mexican populism’s resistance to change: the mechanisms of power in the political culture, the role of education in gaining the allegiance of the popular classes, and Mexican intellectuals’ elaboration of the idea of cultural identity.

The last part of this chapter examines briefly how popular culture has been used politically in Nicaragua and Cuba to produce very different results from those achieved by populist governments in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. For example, Rowe and Schelling point out how the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN), when it formed in 1961, revived the popular legacy of Augusto César Sandino and amalgamated it with the new Marxism of the recent Cuban Revolution and also how the FSLN later embraced the liberation theology. These and other elements made up a broad social and cultural revolution that focused on including the popular classes. Only time and historical perspective will tell whether the FSLN succeeded in creating “egalitarian and social and economic

structures and the political education of ‘the people,’” as Rowe and Schelling claim (p. 175). The ultimate success or failure of such a program, however, does not negate the efforts of the FSLN leadership to create a dynamic form of popular democracy that recognized the important role of culture in formulating new policy.

Rowe and Schelling begin Chapter 4, an investigation of cultural divisions through artistic creation, by warning against the pitfalls of using the hierarchical categories of “high” and “low” culture, which tends to polarize discussion. They point out that repressive Latin American governments (like the Chilean regime of Augusto Pinochet) have applied the high-low hierarchy in attempting to suppress the popular classes. In contrast, the culture industry and the electronic media in many countries have promoted cultural homogenization, in which hybrid cultural signs “flow across social, ethnic, and nation-state boundaries, and the notion of high culture as a separate sphere becomes impossible” (p. 196). Rowe and Schelling show how this hybridization has taken place by exploring several literary texts, beginning with national narratives like Domingo Sarmiento’s *Facundo*. Cultural practices of subaltern groups have played central roles in the narrative art of writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Juan Rulfo, Augusto Roa Bastos, and José María Arguedas. Other novelists, like Manuel Puig, have chosen to incorporate mass culture into their literary works.

The longest and richest chapter in *Memory and Modernity* is the second one, “The Faces of Popular Culture.” Rowe and Schelling discuss diverse forms of popular culture found in both rural and urban contexts. They demonstrate how the different “faces” are largely determined by the position occupied by each region “on the periphery of the world capitalist system” (p. 49). For example, rural forms of precapitalist popular culture developed very differently in the Andean region, Mexico, and Brazil. Rowe and Schelling point out that in the Andes, so-called modern cultural practices were often processed through precapitalist Indian practices in what the authors identify as a good example of transculturation. Mexico presents a different set of issues of cultural plurality. In a country that has officially recognized its peasant cultural traditions as marks of its national identity, the folk production and urban and tourist consumption of native artifacts have caused them “to be increasingly decontextualized and resignified on their journey to the museum and the boutique” (p. 65). Artifacts have rapidly lost their original religious meanings and have acquired aesthetic and secular ones for consumers. At the same time, the producers of these artifacts have increasingly demanded industrial products like butane gas stoves and aluminum cooking pots.

The second part of Chapter 2 covers urban contexts of popular culture. Rowe and Schelling again draw on Jesús Martín-Barbero’s research on “massification” in Latin America in seeking to dispel the notion that

culture industries like radio, television, and print media suddenly descend on unsuspecting native populations. As Martín-Barbero has shown, a culture industry does not produce a mass society. Massification results instead from a long, slow process of “prior establishment of mass cultural experiences, through the constitution of the single national market, the consolidation of the state and the making of unified national cultures” (p. 98). Like Martín-Barbero, Rowe and Schelling take sharp exception to the assumption made by Adorno and Max Horkheimer (another member of the Frankfurt School) that the industrialization of culture brings about mass deception.

Rowe and Schelling also counter the thesis of cultural imperialism that was commonly applied to the media in Latin America in the 1970s by attacking one of its main theses—that the public’s passive reception of media images and messages erases its collective social memory and leaves it vulnerable to new consumer and ideological messages. The authors rightly reject such a simplistic formula on three counts: it fails to take into consideration the amount of social memory carrying over from earlier forms of mass culture; it ignores the receiving public’s active participation in constituting the message; and the public may resignify the messages by bringing to its reception of messages strategies for handling everyday conflicts in society (p. 107). The idea is that although the public cannot claim ownership of the media, it can exercise control over the social meanings conveyed and thus preserve social memory to some degree.

I turn now to a few studies of specific forms of popular culture in Latin America. The first, *Sandino in the Streets*, is the result of a collaborative effort by four contributors: Joel Sheesley provided both color and black and white photographs and a pithy interpretative essay on the popular images of Sandino; Wayne Bragg edited the book and translated excerpts from Sandino’s memoir, *El pensamiento vivo*; Ernesto Cardenal contributed a short prologue; and Jack Hopkins situates the reader in the political and social revolution partly inspired by Sandino in his introduction, “Nicaragua: The Context of the Revolution.” The body of *Sandino in the Streets* is organized into eight sections based chronologically on Sandino’s life and the armed guerrilla resistance he led against the U.S. invasion force and the Nicaraguan National Guard headed by Anastasio García Somoza. Each section features several photographs and translations from *El pensamiento vivo*.

Sheesley’s essay, “The Image of Sandino in the Streets,” focuses on multiple levels of meaning in the thousands of public images representing Sandino. Sheesley notes that the composite image—made up of professionally produced posters, stenciled images, and even hasty sketches—became a point of convergence for many national and political themes: “Calls to patriotism, to defense, to national integrity, to exercise the right

to vote, to peace, to production, and to cultural and global awareness have all relied on the image of Sandino for support" (p. xxi). Before the FSLN insurrection of 1979, this image served as a sign of resistance and defiance of repressive established authority; after the Sandinista victory, the image was used to help consolidate revolutionary gains and to promote nationalism and pride. Sheesley comments perceptively on the different aesthetic meanings taken on by Sandino and his image. He is at once a folk hero and a national hero, a people's symbol and a party symbol (p. xxv). As Sheesley observes, the appearance of Sandino's image on walls, doors, and other public surfaces can be interpreted as artistic expression, historical witness, political propaganda, national honor, and even mythological longing.

The use of Sandino's image, appropriated for purposes of resistance by a revolutionary force and later transformed by an established party into a progressive symbol of national unity, would seem to corroborate Fiske's view that popular culture is a culture of conflict constructed by subordinate peoples in their own interest. The image of Sandino has historically carried oppositional meaning, having been born out of the struggle to free Nicaragua from foreign and domestic oppression. Curiously, Rowe and Schelling do not discuss the image of Sandino analyzing the Sandinistas' use of popular culture to consolidate and advance their revolutionary agenda. Such a discussion could have provided another example of how the Sandinistas went about promoting expressions of popular democracy, in addition to creating *talleres de poesía*, centers of popular culture, the literary crusade, and popular theater groups.

A second study of Latin American popular culture is Candace Slater's *Stories on a String: The Brazilian Literatura de Cordel*, which appeared first in 1982 in hardcover. The paperback edition published in 1989 adds a preface in which the author reflects on the changes undergone by this form of popular culture in the intervening years. Although many other studies of *literatura de cordel* have been made, Slater's treatment without is a doubt one of the most thorough and theoretically sophisticated.

The pamphlet stories in verse known commonly by readers and critics as *folhetos* or *literatura de cordel* are largely found in Brazil. These "stories on a string" (so-called because they are hung from a string for display in markets and other public places) were once limited to North-eastern Brazil. Due to demographic and technological changes, they have now spread to other regions, especially to major cities in the South like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Brasília.

Development of the *literatura de cordel* as an economically viable body of literature was delayed until the late nineteenth century largely because of the paucity of potential buyers who were literate and the lack of an effective distribution system. Once both these conditions were met, economic viability quickly transformed the cordel into a definable popu-

lar phenomenon. At the same time, the increasing economic prosperity of Brazil's northeastern interior attracted printing presses to its commercial centers. Mass migration from rural areas to urban centers in the past twenty-five years has also included cordel poets leaving Northeastern Brazil to relocate in coastal cities like Fortaleza and Recife as well as in major cities to the south.

Rustic hand presses located in houses and small shops have steadily given way to large, technologically advanced presses associated with powerful commercial interests devoted to making profits. This trend has also altered cordel literature in major ways, as large-scale distributors have supplanted local distribution networks and poet-performers have become less and less involved in marketing their own products. Although it is still possible to see poets chanting the traditional *toada*, this highly rhythmic poetic subgenre is rapidly disappearing as a form of popular expression. At present, three publishers produce some 40 percent of all the folhetos that are printed each year, and only one of these is a traditional regional press.

Most scholarship on the literatura de cordel has been descriptive, focusing on its origins, development, types, poets, and themes. Some recent studies can be loosely classified as structural analyses. Although the latter represent an improvement over previous studies, they tend not to take into consideration economic, social, and cultural factors that have affected the folheto's transformation from a largely popular art form into one that is now being mass-produced and mass-distributed. Moreover, structural studies frequently ignore the genre's performance aspect and the response and involvement of the audience. Slater's *Stories on a String* gives some attention to these two aspects as well as to the reasons for its transformation. But as she readily admits, her structural approach does not take into account the performance context of the folheto nor the larger cultural framework in which it functions (p. 57). She does not ignore this context altogether, however. Drawing on Althusser, Slater concludes that the ideological manifestations in the folheto, as in other art forms (popular and otherwise), are not passive reflections of a particular political and economic reality. Rather, "they are normally a far more complicated representation of largely imaginary relationships between men and the circumstances in which they find themselves" (p. 211). Slater's view that the literatura de cordel deals with values and not facts is only a step short of Rowe and Schelling's categorization of it as another form of popular resistance that sustains "the capacity of the oppressed to dream of a better world, to defy society by playing with its language, but also functions as a reservoir from which original visions of reality spring" (p. 97).

Slater's study of Northeast Brazilian literatura de cordel led to her literary ethnographic study of the Padre Cícero stories, *Trail of Miracles: Stories from a Pilgrimage in Northeast Brazil*. A Roman Catholic priest,

Padre Cícero Romão Batista lived and ministered to the faithful of his church in Juazeiro, in Northeast Brazil, until his death in 1934. Juazeiro subsequently became the site of the largest Christian pilgrimage honoring a non-saint. Slater taped stories about this celebrated priest told by 250 residents of Juazeiro and 500 pilgrims. Her study thus draws on more than 150 hours of taped narration and a selected transcription exceeding 2,000 pages. Slater's composite picture of the many versions of Padre Cícero's miraculous works provides a valuable social document of popular religious beliefs. It also demonstrates that a highly personalistic patron-dependent system has survived in Northeastern Brazil despite the dramatic socioeconomic changes of the past few decades (p. 3).

The first part of *Trail of Miracles* summarizes the essential aspects of Juazeiro and provides information about the storytellers and the conditions for storytelling. The second part presents the repetitive aspects or patterns found in the tales told by residents and pilgrims alike. Slater concentrates on twenty stories most frequently recounted by both groups. Her structural analysis of the stories resembles that of the folheto as she draws on some of the same theorists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss. The third part zeroes in on the differences between residents' and pilgrims' tales by focusing on three tales that deal directly with a specific historical personage or event. Slater's conclusion compares the best-known stories to the large assemblage of tales, reemphasizing "the extent to which dissimilarities between residents and pilgrims can be seen both as separate steps in an evolutionary process and as two essentially comparable ways of achieving the same goal" (p. 5). *Trail of Miracles* also includes two appendices, the first a numerical breakdown of the storytellers with whom the author spoke, and the second providing the Portuguese original version of the texts that appear in the main part of the study, translated into English by the author.

Slater recounts the obstacles she encountered in carrying out her ethnographic study: the often difficult physical conditions under which she interviewed storytellers, how she was regarded by the storytellers, her own uneasy sense of being a voyeur, her ambivalence toward the miraculous content of most of the stories, her tendency to jump to conclusions about what she was hearing, and her gender. Many of Slater's experiences are no doubt common among anthropologists in the field for the first time.

Slater observes that Padre Cícero was not only a personal friend of many inhabitants of Juazeiro and its environs but also a symbol of resistance to oppression for his contemporaries, many of whom were struggling against tremendous socioeconomic odds. Fifty years later, his followers (residents as well as pilgrims) continued to associate his suffering at the hands of ecclesiastical and civil authorities with their own. Slater also provides insightful commentary on the inherent conservatism of the

tales and on how they reflect the storytellers' sense of powerlessness, encourage people to abdicate responsibility for their own lives, and ultimately foster dissension and exploitation from above (p. 230). Her analysis suggests the riskiness of assigning to popular culture form a role as either agent of change or guardian of the dominant order. As Fiske and Rowe and Schelling point out, forms of popular culture take on different guises and can be used as instruments of oppression or liberation in various social, economic, political, historical, and cultural matrices.

David William Foster's *From Mafalda to Los supermachos: Latin American Graphic Humor as Popular Culture* is a short but intelligent semiotic study of representative examples of graphic humor in Latin America. Foster includes Uruguayan Hermenegildo Sábat's book of drawings *Al troesma con cariño*, Argentine Roberto Fontanarrosa's comic strip *Las aventuras de Indoro Pereyra*, Argentine Joaquín Salvador Lavado's editorial cartoon *Mafalda*, the Argentine illustrated magazine *Superhumor* and its comic strip *Sol de noche*, the Argentine comic strip *Las puerfitas del Sr. López*, the Mexican comic book *Los supermachos*, and Peruvian Juan Acevedo's comic strip *¡Hola, Cuy!* Two introductory essays on the study of popular culture in Latin America and the principles of text production are followed by a limited sampling of each of the manifestations selected for analysis.

From Mafalda to Los supermachos is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to encourage a deeper understanding of one form of popular culture. Foster rightly points out that it is no longer sufficient to limit scholarly exposure to Latin America to forms of so-called high culture such as symphonic music, gallery art, poetry in little magazines, and experimental theater, particularly because Latin Americans are inundated daily with the products of culture industries that mass-produce films, television and radio programs, newspapers, comic books, and magazines. Foster discusses briefly the gradual erosion of folk art and the emergence of mass culture forms. He implies that popular culture, which impinges on daily lives, comprises phenomena that may have remote folkloric origins and varying degrees of authenticity. While Foster does not make distinctions among folk, mass, elite, high, popular, official, and academic culture, he is correct that popular culture (presumably some amalgam of these other forms of culture) has generally been ignored as a field for serious academic research partly due to a traditional bias against mass forms. *From Mafalda to Los supermachos* seems designed to convince skeptics that popular culture is a legitimate field for scholarly research and can be examined intelligently.

Foster posits that popular culture phenomena belong to complex symbolic processes. Hence comes the fruitfulness of a semiotic study focusing on the processes "by which texts create meaning, their structural organization, and their production within the context of the cultural and

ideological codes of a society" (p. 7). In a second brief chapter, Foster dismisses as inadequate the techniques of content analyses and ideological interpretation that have characterized nearly all writing on Latin American popular culture. Yet his own "selected bibliography" excludes examples of semiotic and other kinds of approaches, such as Slater's two structural studies. Foster offers as an alternative investigation based on the structural and theoretical principles of text production.

One limitation underlying the studies that Foster criticizes as well as his own semiotic study is their failure to take audience response into account. As Fiske has pointed out, consumers of popular culture can choose to resist or evade the messages embedded in the consumed product, whether it be Madonna or Latin American graphic humor. Moreover, Foster's semiotic approach does not take into account the idea that the relevance of a message for readers results from the intersection between the textual and the social. As noted, readers have the semiotic power to construct oppositional meanings. Foster frequently speculates on how would-be readers might respond to the strips, comic books, and drawings he analyzes, but in the end, what he presents is only speculation and not based on empirical evidence of audience response.

I now turn to a collection of studies of various aspects of one country's popular culture. As implied by the title, the essays collected in *Popular Culture in Chile: Resistance and Survival* subscribe to the view of popular culture as made from within and below structures of domination by subordinated peoples themselves. Kenneth Aman states in his introductory essay that "popular" is synonymous with Chile's poor, its subaltern classes who have borne the yoke of political dictatorship and economic hardship. Their cultural and political expressions are consequently equated with popular culture, which is defined as a complex of "values, customs, organizational forms . . . , daily routines and social pressures . . . shared by masses of working class, underemployed, and unemployed citizens" (p. 2). One might quibble with a footnote in which Aman defines *popular* in English as a cognate of *popular* in Spanish—the Spanish sense of the word connotes "folk" as used by García Canclini and others. But at least the word is used consistently throughout this collection of essays.

Popular Culture in Chile is divided into two parts: the first provides historical perspectives and the second discusses dimensions of popular culture. The two broadly conceived essays that make up the first part are designed to offer an overview of popular culture in the Chilean context. Gabriel Salazar's "The History of Popular Culture in Chile: Different Paths" clearly achieves this objective. He paints with broad strokes the development of cultural and political forms among Chile's dominated classes throughout its history. Cristián Parker's "Christianity and Popular Movements in the Twentieth Century" might have been more appropriately placed with the second group of nine essays, most of which

discuss a specific manifestation of popular culture. Rejecting the inflexible Marxist definition of religion as "the opium of the people," Parker views popular religion as resulting from the symbolic production of subordinate classes.

The essays in the second part of *Popular Culture in Chile* deal with a wide range of issues. Tomás Moulián's "Political Movements and Popular Culture" explores how two of Chile's most significant political movements, the Christian Democrats and the militant left, might go about regaining the loyalties of the masses, which were lost during the Pinochet dictatorship when political opposition was all but eradicated. Luis Razeto's "Popular Organizations and the Economy of Solidarity" examines how an informal or "popular" economy in Chile has become a social safety net for the poor and the working class. Teresa Valdés's "Being Female and Poor: A Double Oppression" is based on extensive interviews with poor women in the Santiago area. Carolyn Lehmann's "Bread and Roses: Women Who Live Poverty" recounts how the author and other women established Casa Sofía in a *población* to try to meet the literacy and mental health needs of poor urban women. José Weinstein's and Juan Eduardo García-Huidobro's "Men of the Street, Women of the Household: Youth in Popular Sectors" concentrates on gender differences between poor young men and women. They conclude that neither men nor women exert much control over their destinies.

Maximiliano Salinas's "Love and Rural Popular Culture" is the only essay in the collection focusing on rural culture. He describes how the theme of love, which he views as a social phenomenon, holds people together and sustains them amid poverty and rapid social change. Sergio Martinic's "Popular Education: The Viewpoint of the Participants" examines the rise in informal and spontaneous educational efforts that supplanted the largely politicized Chilean universities after the 1973 coup against Salvador Allende. Martinic focuses on the rise of *centros*, research institutes, and a variety of unorthodox educational forms attempting to deal with the needs of less affluent Chileans. Carlos Ochsenius's "Popular Theater and Popular Movements" outlines popular theater's history in Chile and samples its variety. He includes a section on audience reception and describes how communities often intervene to alter and adapt theatrical productions to local needs. Isabel Donoso's "Human Rights and Popular Organizations" relates how poor Chileans have organized to protect themselves from political persecution and violations of human rights. Aman's closing essay, "Toward a Theory of Popular Culture: Some Chilean Excursions," shows how European theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu have influenced conceptualization of the theory and practice of Chilean popular culture. Aman notes, however, that no consensus exists among Chilean scholars.

Unlike Aman and Parker's edited volume, *Caribbean Popular Cul-*

ture is a collection of essays that seems to lack a unifying theme. Editor John Lent makes only a halfhearted attempt to bring conceptual order to the ten essays examining a broad range of popular culture in the non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean. He correctly states in his preface that little scholarly attention has been given to popular culture in this region, a situation this compilation of essays is intended to address. The various essays deal with Carnival, music, radio, and sports in countries and territories in Trinidad, Jamaica, Tobago, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and other parts of the Caribbean.

The first chapter is devoted to a representative rather than exhaustive review of the literature on Caribbean popular culture. Lent's survey is useful, but his exclusion of advertising, television, and magazines is regrettable. The explanation that these studies can be found listed elsewhere is unconvincing, especially in a volume that purports to offer an overview of various forms of Caribbean popular culture. Another element detracting from an overall acceptable review of the literature is Lent's tendency to confuse definitions of popular and mass culture. He seems to exclude mass communications from popular culture without explicitly addressing the issue but compounds the confusion by including two essays on radio.

The seven books reviewed here manifest the intense scholarly interest in Latin American popular culture that has developed over the past twenty years, since it was ignited in 1971 by Ariel Dorfman's and Armand Mattelart's *Para leer el Pato Donald: comunicación de masa y colonialismo*. These seven books also reflect the increasing theoretical sophistication of recent studies, despite the tendency to continue using largely discredited critical paradigms.

Rowe and Schelling's *Memory and Modernity*, the most provocative of the lot, is important because it draws on the ground-breaking studies of Jesús Martín-Barbero, whose work is relatively unknown in the United States and England, even among scholars of popular culture and mass communications. Future studies in these fields should take into consideration his two books, *Proceso de comunicación y matrices de cultura: itinerario para salir de la razón dualista* (written about 1987) and *De los medios a las mediaciones*. In them he provides a useful analytical review of diverse theories about mass communication up through the late 1980s. Drawing broadly on theorists as diverse as Marshall McLuhan, Roland Barthes, and Jean Baudrillard, Martín-Barbero proposes a sophisticated approach (which he calls a "nocturnal map") to mass communications and popular culture. As Rowe and Schelling explain, this approach establishes and considers the "articulations between the *operations*—of withdrawal, rejection, assimilation, refunctionalization, redesign; the *matrices*—of class, territory, ethnicity, religion, sex, age; the *spaces*—habitat, factory, neighborhood, prison; and the *media*—micros like cassette recordings and photog-

raphy, mesos like the record or the book, macros like the press, radio or television" (p. 13).

In addition to Martín-Barbero, Latin American intellectuals like Néstor García-Canclini, Oswaldo Capriles, Alvaro de Moya, and Héctor Schmucler have brought considerable respect and theoretical sophistication to scholars' understanding of Latin American popular culture and mass communications during the past ten years. An essential criterion by which future studies in these fields should be judged is the extent to which they bring Latin American theorists' works to the attention of scholars in non-Latin American countries. This approach might serve to stimulate interest in publishing English translations of the works of at least some of these theorists. After all, the day has arrived when these Latin American theorists' perspectives must inform studies of popular culture and mass communications across the "Third World."

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