# PART II

# Places

Chapter 12

# Comparative Cultural Studies Traditions: Latin America and the US

George Yúdice

Allow me to begin with a disclaimer: I can speak of several cultural studies traditions but it would be impossible for me, even for a team of researchers, to exhaustively cover the terrain implied by "Comparative Cultural Studies Traditions: Latin America and the US." Even in the best of circumstances, that is, assisted by an efficient system of dissemination for cultural studies work, as in the US, one runs into the problem of uneven access: to subaltern public spheres within the boundaries of the nation-state, comprised of peoples who have to deal not only with poor life conditions but also with problematic representations of those life conditions; and uneven access to the panoply of cultural practices of these diverse groups on the part of researchers. The difficulty of learning about the cultural life of diverse groups is multiplied geometrically in Latin America, and not only for US and European researchers; it is equally difficult for local researchers to gain access.

I would like to focus on this differential difficulty and extrapolate from it a larger frame that I will adopt in discussing Latin American and US cultural studies traditions. This frame involves examining the differences in state structures, global market relations and their impact on national consumer economies, the university and culture industry systems, and so on. My reason for beginning this chapter with this frame is that it makes the discussion more manageable, a trade-off, however, for greater specificity. I shall attempt to be more specific in some of the examples I give, which are not to be taken as representative of the entirety of the comparison but rather as illustrative of some significant similarities and differences.

Without such a frame – which focuses on the different circumstances for the study of culture in the two regions – it would be hard to assess how the similarities in the analysis of culture have different functions respective to each region. If I were to limit myself to the legacy of the Birmingham Centre in US cultural studies and to many Latin American cultural-political and research projects, I would have to remark on the saliency of work on the popular and its relationship with mass

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culture industries. Of course, the popular can be construed and analyzed from many perspectives, but what both traditions, at least as I have generally characterized them, have in common, is the shift in the definition of culture from specialized practices, particularly of elites, to everyday life. And in this regard, the methodologies do not differ greatly. In the late sixties and seventies there was a turn to poststructuralist and especially an Althusserian framework for construing the place of the popular. Class was increasingly displaced by the focus on everyday life, especially as the focus of analysis shifted from the ways in which economic and social forces determined the consciousness of subordinate groups to the ways in which, even under the most colonized of circumstances, these groups challenged and resisted these forces, leading to what more recently has become a politics of identity and representation. Ethnography became, for example, an important instrument in determining how this resistance took place. So, without the larger frame of analysis, it would seem that these tendencies had the same significance in both regions. There may be recognition of an asymmetry in the sense that many of the new theoretical and methodological currents have tended to travel from North to South, which is not to say that there weren't perspectives developed in Latin American that traveled North: the consciousness-raising movement characteristic of Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" and of the Christian Base Communities made important contributions to pedagogical theory, as the work of Ira Schor, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and others attests. The dominant tendencies, however, at least according to the frame I am sketching out, point, rather, to an *uneven flow* of knowledge and methodologies. Let me elaborate.

In the first place, as I have already suggested, the market for certain kinds of theory and research is much stronger in the United States and several countries in western Europe. This does not mean that US academics have easier access to Foucault or Bourdieu; on the contrary, certain prestige theorists that comprise some of the key texts of cultural studies, although comparatively more expensive, are readily available in Latin America, precisely because the intellectual cutting edge is still imagined to slice from the North.

Secondly, the reception of these texts, what David Bordwell has called the *SLAB Theory* (Saussure, Lacan, Althusser, and Barthes; we could add many more), differs in Latin America from what the process might be thought to be in the US, where these have had greater impact in the Humanities (particularly English), in which, together with Media Studies and Communications departments, the transdiscipline of cultural studies tends to be housed. Generally the term "Cultural Studies" is rarely used in Latin America. However, there are many longstanding traditions of Latin American cultural analysis for which other terms are used: communications, intellectual history, discourse analysis, interdisciplinary studies, and many other terms used in particular disciplines. Even the term "Humanities" means something else and is not generally used in the division of the disciplines in Latin America. More often than "Humanities," the term "Facultad de Letras" is used, but even that is of recent coinage, dating from the 1920s. The study of culture, including literary and artistic culture, is often

addressed in what in the United States are considered social sciences. Furthermore, since interdisciplinarity has been initiated in regional social science networks like CLACSO and FLACSO, what we refer to here as "cultural studies" is most identified with sociological and anthropological analysis. For this reason, cultural analysis in Latin America is more directly part of the study of civil and political society than in the United States. Add to this the strong social bias in literary studies, as in the work of António Cándido and Angel Rama, which gives the US critic the impression that Latin American theory and criticism are more sociological than aesthetic.

Beyond these terminological and structural differences within the academy, there is also a difference between university-based cultural studies work and that carried on in an array of non-academic settings, sometimes associated with journals, radio stations, community organizations, women's groups, museums, municipalities, and even individual, independent scholars. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been particularly important in making this work possible, since funding sources are scarce. In both these non-academic settings as well as social science-based interdisciplinary programs, there is a tendency to make use of quantitive methodologies for the study of culture, particularly those developed by Bourdieu, but also polling methods developed in the US. This is a reaction, in part, to the dominant tradition of cultural analysis, which is the intellectual essay, some of whose canonized exponents are José Martí, José Enrique Rodó, Gilberto Freyre, José Carlos Mariátegui, José Vasconcelos, Fernando Ortiz, and Ezequiel Martínez Estrada. It is notable, also, that this tradition, which forms part of national and continental self-understanding in Latin America, conspicuously excludes women intellectuals, as well as blacks or indigenous people. Mary Pratt has characterized this tradition as the "National Brotherhood," meaning by this that it had the effect of reinforcing hierarchies, for example, smoothing the cultural terrain for the construction of hegemony favorable to dominant classes and patriarchy.

In spite of these ideological tenets, it should be said that the essayistic tradition is an important forerunner of the new interdisciplinarity that could be characterized as cultural studies in Latin American contexts. The fact that these intellectuals sidestepped and straddled many discourses which are now codified as institutionalized disciplines, made it possible for them to draw the full range of philosophical, aesthetic, and everyday cultural practices into the analysis of social, political, and economic processes. Their weak point, however, was their excessive reliance on speculative approaches, which limited the practicality of their formulations. The lack of attention to questions of gender and sexual orientation continues, even to this day, for example in the work of Néstor García Canclini, the best-known exponent of what is now being called cultural studies in Latin America. Generally, the category of gender is making its way into various disciplines through the participation of feminists, but it does not have the salience that it does in the US. Perhaps this relative lack can be explained by turning to another part of my frame, the political one.

Here in the United States, cultural studies is quickly being consolidated around what has come to be called a *politics of representation* paradigm, which is to say that crucial issues like social injustice based in race, class, and gender discrimination are thought to be reparable at the discursive level. Conversely, certain popular cultural practices and forms, especially music and other highly technified forms such as film and video, as well as the more traditional practice of writing among racial minorities,[1] are thought to have, again on the discursive level, subversive effects *vis-à-vis* the status quo. On this view, multicultural representations are considered viable means to reverse the effects of discrimination. The practice of cultural politics in Latin America, on the whole, is quite different. Representations of certain subaltern groups – say, blacks in Brazil and indigenous peoples in Mexico – on the one hand, form part of the *mestizaje* or hybrid identity that constitutes the "national-popular," or, on the other, contribute to their stigmatization. There *is*, of course, a politics of representation of marginalized peoples, but this is not usually a politics in the service of redressing injustice. US scholars specializing in Latin America, however, are increasingly interpreting the cultural practices of such groups precisely in this way, that is, in keeping with the politics of representation paradigm. One has to wonder whether or not this tendency will make itself manifest in Latin America as well. After all, like other cultural transfers, it is a matter of transnationalization and globalization of prestigious discourses, in this case the projection of a US-inflected politics of identity onto the popular practices of Latin American subaltern groups. There are, however, limits to such a politics of representation, and these are much more obvious in the Latin American context.

In the first place, it must be recognized that a politics of representation is generally accompanied by some compromise at the material level, for example, universal participation in consumer capitalism, at least at the level of cheap commodities. Intervening at the level of representations can serve a compensatory function in societies like the US where, despite the problems of homelessness, lack of access to healthcare, and downward mobility, the basics of the vast majority of the population are met. That is not the case throughout Latin America. Secondly, while it is not the norm for the US state itself to manage cultural production (we are, supposedly, a society with relatively little state intervention, although we are certainly feeling the increasing presence of state power in decision-making on cultural issues despite conservative hype about the benefits of shrinking government), the state in most Latin American countries is *directly* involved in guiding the cultural, at both the elite and popular levels. In fact, it might be said that it has been a general practice of so-called developing countries to protect their cultural patrimony and their culture industries because that is one of the means by which "consensus" has been enforced. The refunctionalization of samba in the 1930s for the purposes of inscribing blacks and mulattoes into an obedient workforce in the project of Brazilian modernization is a case in point.

Although the formation of national identity differs from country to country in Latin America, there are some constants in the way modernization, representations of subaltern races, ethnic and immigrant groups, and what we might call dependency are articulated. This common form of articulation differs radically from the national solutions adopted in the US and makes all the difference in understanding the study of culture in Latin America. If in Britain Arnold, Leavis, and Eliot differentially privileged the power of high culture to form citizens, and in the US the emphasis came to fall on mass culture, in Latin America, the nation was a hegemonic culture with a base in the popular. This tradition goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century, and focused on literature as the means to create a culture autonomous from that of Europe. Andrés Bello (1847), like José Martí, argued that Latin America would have no proper culture until it had a clearly defined literature, based on local practices, that did not imitate European models. This tradition was still alive in the work of Angel Rama, who throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, until his death, strove to prove that Latin American culture was on a par with that of Europe and the US, for, according to him, ever since late nineteenth-century *modernismo*, Latin America was fully integrated into the global forces of capitalism, which he understood, in part, as the driving force to which culture responds. Of course, this response only expressed itself then, according to Rama, in the symbolic and therefore compensatory form of literature, for it was only in this sphere that a Latin American practice could be said to be on a par with that of the metropolitan countries.[2] Latin America's integration into capitalism had its own flavor which, anticipating such notions as that of reconversion or hybridity, he called *transculturation*, after Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz.

If early on elite cultural studies focused on literature, race was the terrain on which the relationship between nation and state was negotiated in studies of popular culture. Actually, the problem of race as a complicating factor in the definition of Latin American identity and the main element of identity politics goes back to the moment of the conquest. (I must acknowledge, at least parenthetically at this point, that gender was as important a factor, in view of the fact that very few Iberian women accompanied the conquistadores and the colonizers, making the problem of miscegenation a markedly gendered one; however, this is ground that, with few exceptions, has lain fallow until the present.) More specifically since the twenties and thirties, when intellectuals in most Latin American countries began to examine the issue of race consistently as the major factor in the definition of culture – national culture (*la patria chica*) and continental culture (*la patria grande*) – new insights into the interaction of *race, popular culture*, and *North–South relations* (traditionally characterized as imperialism) developed which to this day are far from being recognized in other cultural studies traditions. The work of the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui, the Brazilian Gilberto Freyre, and the Cuban Fernando Ortiz – who coined the term "transculturation" as a corrective to the unidirectional notion of "acculturation" – involves a "holistic," if not organicist, kind of analysis which

draws on class, regional economics, immigration, religion, popular music, literature, and other cultural practices, where "popular" refers, more etymologically, to "people" (of the working classes) than to market popularity, that is, mass culture. Interestingly, such "holistic" analysis of culture was possible in this essayistic tradition because modes of knowledge-production were not clearly and disciplinarily defined at the time in the Latin American context. Of course, many of the analysts of popular culture were also elites, organic intellectuals, as it were, in the service of the new national-capitalist projects of modernization; others, like Mariátegui, worked on behalf of the oppressed.

It was in the twenties and thirties that new state forms were being shaped for Latin America's entry into the post-First World War global economy as producers of import substitutes. This new role required a new interpellation of the citizen as worker, and since the most likely workers were of a different race (indigenous, black, or of mixed race) or ethnic (immigrants), the result was an authoritarian state (e.g, Peronism in Argentina, Varguism in Brazil) that drew its legitimacy for its modernizing projects from popular sectors in the face of opposition from the traditional oligarchy. Regarding cultural studies, the question is not so much whether this populism effectively empowered the "popular" sectors but rather that it put on the agenda of any social analysis and policy the issue of popular culture, even to this day when it is studied in terms of social movements rather than on the exclusive basis of class. The Latin American experience has in fact yielded a great contribution to contemporary social theory in the recognition, already expressed by Gramsci, that politics, "legitimate" knowledge and culture are wedded in the process of hegemony, which as Ernesto Laclau explains, functions basically as the *articulation* of "non-class contents – interpellations and contradictions – which constitute the raw materials on which class ideological practices operate." In other words, the "cultural" is the terrain of conflict and articulation of "legitimate" and contestatory knowledges. It should be pointed out that Laclau's early work on populism is inscribed within and revolutionizes an Argentine tradition of analysis of populist politics. It is only later that his work, in collaboration with that of Chantal Mouffe, is seen as inspired by the British cultural studies movement.

The other main cultural studies issue that derives from the Latin American experience is the notion of cultural flows, particularly North–South, as regards technology, science, information, the media, intellectual and artistic trends, and market relations. Already in the 1880s José Martí, wrote insightfully on the cultural shifts being produced in the North–South axis. Of course, Martí, like most other Latin American culture critics until recently, reduced this relation to one of "cultural imperialism." Lately a "transnational" analysis of cultural flows has yielded important insights into more general social and political processes. For example, US mass media, rather than simply being seen as colonizing Latin America, have in many cases been perceived to have the effect of producing contradictions in communities in which, say, gender equality just was not part of "common sense." This has led a new generation of cultural critics since the

mid-seventies to coin such terms as "cultural reconversion" (Néstor García Canclini) and the "mediations" of differential reception (Jesús Martín-Barbero). By focusing, for example, on consumption and other means of cultural mediation, they have been able to gauge how and to what extent the diverse groups that make up Latin America's cultural heterogeneity interact with one another and what prospects there are for subaltern groups to gain a greater participation in the distribution of knowledge, goods, and services.

The study of the relation of culture to social movements also has a long history. In the early sixties there developed a trend known as *conscientización* throughout the continent. Its purpose was to challenge state policy, elitist institutions, and the social stratification which they fostered on the basis of "legitimate" knowledge and to further the cause of popular sectors of the population. This was done by creating alternative institutions and seeking the alliance of traditional institutions like the church and the educational establishment in legitimizing the knowledges embodied in popular practices. The movement was dedicated not only to the study of culture but even more to the redefinition of culture in keeping with non-elitist, popular criteria. As such it operated multidisciplinarily, encompassing pedagogy (Paulo Freire), political economy (Marxism), religion (Liberation Theology), grassroots activism (Base Christian Communities among urban and rural working classes and student organizations), ethnography, journalism, literature, and other cultural practices. Most significant was a new expressive mode that emerged from this movement: *testimonio*. Giving testimony involved the production of popular knowledge that touched on a range of what would be different disciplines in other cultural configurations: social history, ethnography, autobiography, literature, political analysis, and advocacy. Specifically, this knowledge countered the "legitimate" knowledge that justified modernization, that is, social, political, and economic restructuring after the model of European and North American development, a restructuring which was having deleterious consequences among popular sectors. This challenge to developmentalism, furthermore, underscores a longstanding epistemological resistance in Latin America to knowledge flows from North to South that function to integrate the region at a disadvantage and for the benefit of United States economic policies.

Much of the discussion in this chapter hinges on the question of value: that is, value in the production, circulation, reception, transformation, response, etc. of knowledge and cultural forms in general. Ultimately, how these processes are mediated in and through power relations determines value. And these power relations cut across class, race, gender, geopolitical, and other boundaries. Recognition of this is what constitutes the current crisis in knowledge and its legitimation, not only in the North but in the South as well.

Many are the Latin American social scientists and cultural critics who write about this paradigm crisis, often inserting it within the global crisis of modernity. One of the very few research centers currently dedicated to cultural studies in

Latin America, the ILET (Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales), founded in Mexico in 1976, with annexes in Buenos Aires and Santiago, focused on transnational flows of communications, information, gendered identity images and lifestyles and their relation to the breakdown of formal politics, the new social movements, democratization, and the increasing importance of the cultural for integration into transnational ways of life. It could hardly be said, then, that culture corresponds to the "way of life" of the nation as a discrete entity separate from global trends. Chilean sociologist José Joaquín Brunner elaborates further, that what may seem like a crisis in modernity in the European or North American setting is in fact the norm in Latin America. He rejects the idea that modernization is inherently foreign to a supposedly novohispanic, baroque, Christian, and *mestizo* cultural ethos, which becomes inauthentic, according to Octavio Paz, as it is "colonized" by other ethical values. Brunner rejects such an essentialist notion of Latin America. Rather than an inherent magical realism, which the literati have put forward to legitimize the contradictory mixtures, these are generated by the differentiation in modes of production, the segmentation of markets of cultural consumption, and the expansion and internationalization of the culture industry. Latin America's peculiar forms of hybridity, then, are not to be celebrated for their marvelous qualities nor denounced as inauthentic; they are, rather, the features that characterize the emergence of a modern cultural sphere in heterogeneous societies (Brunner 1987: 4).

Mexican anthropologist Guillermo Bonfill also refers to a crisis in paradigms in assessing the viability of anthropology in the current context. He argues that anthropology in Mexico emerged as an adjunct of the Cardenista state's project of national integration. What, then, is the space for anthropology now that the state is brokering Mexico's integration into a transnational arrangement, most immediately the Free Trade Agreement, which was just the first stage in Bush the Elder's Enterprise for the Americas Initiative, courted by many Latin American governments?[3] So long as anthropologists were an integral part of the state's national project, they were able to have some leverage over policy decisions. Now, Bonfill suggests, anthropologists ought to "ally with society," that is, alter their relation to their informants and involve them in projects at the service of communities and social movements (Bonfill 1991: 88–9).

Such a "reconversion" of the anthropologist's practice has important repercussions on cultural studies. Bonfill's suggestion is already being carried out, in fact, by other social scientists who conceive of cultural studies not only as the study *of* culture, but the intervention in and collaboration with the struggles of the new social movements. Here the interrelations between politics, cultural politics, identity formation, institution-building, and the reconversion of citizenship come together. For example, Elizabeth Jelin (1991) and other members of CEDES (Centro de Estudios de Estado y Sociedad) have been working recently with victims of human rights violations in Argentina. Jelin's premise is that the concept of citizenship in a democratic culture must take into consideration

symbolic aspects such as collective identity and not just a rationalized rights discourse. In this regard, she comes quite close to Nancy Fraser's concept of the correlation between identity and the struggle over needs interpretations. According to Fraser, the conflicts among rival needs claims in contemporary society reveal that we inhabit a "new social space" unlike the ideal public sphere in which the better argument prevails. The struggles over needs interpretations involve the viability of experts who oversee state bureaucracies and other institutions that administer services, the legitimacy of claims made by groups on the basis of a cultural ethos, and the " 'reprivatization' discourses of constituencies seeking to repatriate newly problematized needs to their former domestic or official economic enclaves" (Fraser 1989: 157). To Fraser's spheres we would also have to add the traditional aesthetic enclaves which would relegate individuals' practices, on the basis of taste, to elite or popular forms, regulatable by state apparatuses.

To continue with Jelin, she posits three domains in which citizenship is produced: (1) the intrapsychic, which is the basis for intersubjective relations; (2) public spheres; (3) state relations with society, from authoritarian to participatory ones, taking into consideration as well forms of clientelism, demagogy, and corruption. The main question is how to foment a democratic ethos. Jelin's answer is by expanding public spheres, that is, those spaces not controled by the state in which practices conducive or oppositional to democratic behavior are constrained or promoted. The proliferation of public spheres will ensure that more than one conception of citizenship (rights and responsibilities) prevails. As such, the task of the researcher is to work in collaboration with groups to create spaces in which the identity and cultural ethos of those groups can take shape. Such a cultural studies project, then, becomes part of the struggle to democratize society just as the state is brokering free-market policies, such as the privatization of all public and cultural space.

I will give one more example of cultural studies work which takes a different but complementary tack from that of Jelin. Néstor García Canclini (1991) and a team of researchers from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana carried out a study of the effects of the Free Trade Agreement on education and culture. It is a policy analysis which takes into consideration such aspects as political economy not normally included in the kind of cultural studies that predominate in the US. To give just one example from this work – which has separate sections on the free trade agreement's likely impact on education, diverse culture industries, technological innovation, intellectual property and author's rights, tourism, and border culture – Mexico's publishing industry will be adversely affected as the state opens up primary school textbook production (96 million per year) – which has been its responsibility – to competitive bidding. What complicates the matter is that bidding will be allowed to foreign publishers, thus making it unlikely that Mexican companies will be able to compete either in terms of cost or quality (1991: 111). More important on the level of the cultural is the decentralization of the educational system foreseen in the plans to privatize;

rather than the state providing subsidies the communities themselves will have to buy them for their students, as in the US. This means that the communities will control the content of the textbooks, an aspect of the plan which the Catholic Church is eager to see put into effect. The church has already launched an attack on sex education and other ethical matters that until now reflect a relatively liberal position.

As is evident from this one small example, the cultural repercussions of the free trade agreement are potentially enormous. Although taking a different approach, the group of artists, writers, culture industry executives, journalists, academics, etc. brought together by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Montevideo also assessed the impact of an impending trade agreement, the formation of MERCOSUR (a regional market initially comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay) (Achugar 1991). I bring this up only to give another example of the increasing recognition that cultural studies must go beyond a politics of representations in which power is understood almost exclusively as a function of symbolic manipulation. If the example of the new cultural studies work in Latin America has anything to offer the Anglo-American traditions, it is this recognition that state and civil institutions, policy-making bodies, political economy, trade agreements, and so on are indispensable for a viable cultural studies. Furthermore, they underscore the role that the cultural critic can take: not just standing on the sidelines celebrating the supposed subversiveness of another media-manufactured rock star or sitcom, or condemning state policies without taking the trouble to intervene more directly in institutional politics. I am thus gratified to see in Routledge's *Cultural Studies* reader, an essay by Tony Bennett entitled "Putting Policy into Cultural Studies" which runs counter to just about every other essay in the book. Since cultural studies should be about "examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within, relations of power," Bennett advances "four claims regarding the conditions that are necessary for any satisfactory form of engagement, both theoretical and practical, with the relations between culture and power" (p. 23). I think these claims are quite consistent with the selection of Latin American cultural studies work that I have reviewed here. They are: "*first*, the need to include policy considerations in the definition of culture in viewing it as a particular field of government; *second*, the need to distinguish different regions of culture within this overall field in terms of the objects, targets, and techniques of government peculiar to them; *third*, the need to identify the political relations specific to different regions of culture so defined and to develop appropriately specific ways of engaging with and within them; and, *fourth*, the need for intellectual work to be conducted in a manner such that, in both its substance and its style, it can be calculated to influence or service the conduct of identifiable agents within the region of culture concerned" (p. 23).

Aside from cogent criticisms of this policy-oriented approach, such that it might become subordinate to state dictates, a problem that has certainly affected many Latin American cultural studies researchers, especially before the ongoing

privatization, this approach can serve to strengthen the "politics of representation" typical in the US. It is not usually thought that so much of what constitutes identity is in part due to pressures from the state. If in Latin America the focus of cultural studies has moved to questions of citizenship in the wake of authoritarian dictatorships and a transition to democracy under the difficult circumstances of free-market policies, which heighten social conflicts, in the US in this same period, the state itself has collaborated in the shift from questions of citizenship based on rights discourse to one based on interpretability of needs and satisfactions, as I have argued above.

There have been numerous debates in the past two decades over whether identity is an essence or whether it is socially constructed. Generally, most cultural studies approaches subscribe to a constructionist view. However, the constructionist view has remained unsatisfying because it cannot account for experience. I am not speaking about experience in the sense in which Hoggart uses it to refer to working-class culture. His usage of the notion does smack of essentialism, about the authentic ways to be working class. The turn to subcultural work at the Birmingham Centre dispelled that approach by focusing on how identities are constituted in the process of hegemony. But that approach was not adequate enough to account for experience or the *performances of experience* which have become the most important artistic expressions of the day, replacing literature, concert music, and the "art" film as the preferred aesthetic practice of the cognoscenti.

It is very difficult at present, I think, to draw a clear line between the prevailing understanding of identity politics and what I am calling performance of experience. They coincide in many if not most instances. But let me try to distinguish. Identity politics in the United States has its origin in the struggles of the civil rights movement, which as Michael Omi and Howard Winant characterize it, was the first true expression of democratization in the United States.[4] By this they mean that unlike the pre-Second World War period in which racial minorities were limited to a *war of maneuver* – "a situation in which subordinate groups seek to preserve and extend a definite territory, to ward off violent assault, and to develop an internal society as an alternative to the repressive social system they confront" (p. 74) – civil rights transformed the character of racial politics to one of political struggle or a *war of position*, which necessitates the "existence of diverse institutional and cultural terrains upon which oppositional political projects can be mounted" (ibid.). Civil rights, in other words, became an emergent and established position in the struggle for hegemony, to the point that the transformation of the cultural-political matrix enabled other subordinated groups to wage their own wars of position. Of course, the state and the economy were implicated in this struggle for hegemony, with the result that many state institutions and policies were transformed and the consumer and culture industries learned to wage their own marketing of position. Identity groups in the United States, as we now understand them, began to enact or

perform as such in the public spheres, "authoring themselves," as it were, in the process. Identity necessarily became a practice, a performance, a deployment across the institutionalized terrain of the social formation because performing it was the means to appropriate by reaccentuating or reconfiguring the genres available for social participation: forms for negotiating all aspects of life from health, education, and housing to consumption, aesthetics, and sexuality. In fact, as new theories of the public sphere hold, not only identity but the very understanding of "needs" and "satisfactions" is open to interpretability and performativity.[5]

Such an authoring process goes beyond the limits of the term constructionism, which emphasizes the pressures of institutions and economy. It also goes beyond the notion of interest group, whose already given self-knowledge enables it to seek social and political gains. Of course, identity groups engage in interest politics too, but the new or reinvented identity groups author and perform their identities contingently. What I have said up to here can, perhaps, hold for all identity groups in the US. However, part of the understanding of performing identities contingently means that different groups will do so on quite different bases. Michael Warner, the editor of a key book on queer theory, cautions against the knee-jerk disposition to "identity parallelism," that is, the idea that all groups marginalized on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, class, etc. are somehow equivalent.

> Different conditions of power give rise to different strategies that cannot always be made homogeneous. Sometimes alliance politics can force important corrections; many themes and organizational efforts in gay politics have been used on the model of white, middle-class men in ways that are only beginning to be apparent. But strategic requirements may differ even where people act in the best faith. Because queer embodiment is generally invisible, for instance, it occasions a unique politics of passing and knowing, building into many aspects of the queer movement a tactics of visibility – classically in the performative mode of coming out, or "screaming," and more recently in "outing" and the in-your-face politics pioneered by Queer Nation and ACT UP. Considerable stress, both within these organizations and in relation to other political groups, has resulted from the fact that these new tactics of public display respond in a primary way to the specific politics of queer embodiment.[6]

Indeed, the particularity of embodiment is the crucial criterion in understanding performativity. I cannot imagine the same kind of display by a straight chicano male on the basis of his chicanoness or maleness or straightness. Generally, blacks and chicanos and women do not go through the ritual of "coming out" as such. However, there are different kinds of performativity that have to do with styles of dress, gesture, speech, and so on that are part of the performance of identity among all identity groups. The difference, I think, harks back again to the fantasies that underpin performance, what all of these aspects of display mean in relation to desire and fantasy.

Attending to fantasy helps shift the politics of identity from its emphasis on correcting representations to understanding that performativity is not just adopting a role (as in conventional sociology) nor becoming a simulacrum in the Baudrillardian sense. In the first place, fantasy is an "imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfilment of [desire]."[7] In this regard, I would venture to argue that in contemporary US society, in which the media and consumer culture have placed the question of identity in the public and in which "needs" and "satisfactions" are not givens but phenomena to be interpreted and struggled over, fantasy is no longer limited to the private psyche but projected on the screen of the social. Desire is, precisely, the operator in this situation, "appear[ing] as the rift which separates need and demand" (Laplanche & Pontalis, p. 483). After all, identity groups attempt to satisfy their demand for recognition on the basis of how they can project their ethically legitimated needs across the social and political terrain. Secondly, since no group is in control of the politics of "needs interpretations," the process of this social fantasy must be ongoing, subject to the compulsion to repeat. Thirdly, the above would seem to indicate that fantasy as the process through which identity and politics interface is not easily made to produce the kinds of cognitivist and political readings sought by the more Marxist-oriented strains of cultural studies. Jacqueline Rose is helpful on this point:

> Fantasy and the compulsion to repeat – these appear as the concepts against which the idea of a more fully political objection to injustice constantly stalls. It seems to me that this is the ground on to which the feminist debate about psychoanalysis has now moved; but in doing so it has merely underlined a more general problem for political analysis which has always been present in the radical readings of Freud. Which is how to reconcile the problem of subjectivity which assigns activity (but not guilt), fantasy (but not error), conflict (but not stupidity) to individual subjects – in this case women – with a form of analysis which can also recognise the force of structures in urgent need of social change? (Rose 1986: 14)

It seems to me that identity politics has found a way of dealing with the impasses that have always frustrated political interpretations of aesthetic culture. The performativity that characterizes US identity politics and which is a prime, though undertheorized, object of analysis of cultural studies, is premised on the expansion of fantasy, the imaginative dimension that has always been attributed to art, to the entirety of public space. This, of course, comes at a cost, for the major result is, perhaps, the absolute eradication of the private, where traditionally aesthetic activity was supposed to inhere.

I don't have the space to elaborate on this, but suffice it to say that the culture wars in the US have to do with this transference of the performance of the aesthetic from private to public experience. Classical aesthetic theory defined artistic practice as constituting the realm of freedom. But that freedom is

precisely what is at stake when fantasy becomes subject to political pressures. Of course, it has been argued, as has done Terry Eagleton, that such freedom was always an illusion that covered over bourgeois dominance, a kind of "prosthesis to reason" or a proxy for power.[8] But rather than think of it in terms of freedom, it may be more productive to characterize it as the signs of satisfaction and demand that structure fantasy, that structure identity.

I would like to conclude with a brief summary of the points I have tried to make. I have tried to characterize how several strains of the Anglo-American cultural studies tradition have construed aesthetic culture. Because it has always been an overriding concern of this tradition to attend to questions of politics and power, aesthetic culture has been variously understood in relation to class conflict, hegemony, resistance, subversion, and so on. In the tradition of German idealism that extends from Kant through Hegel and on to Lukács, Adorno, and Jameson, aesthetic culture has also been interrogated as a heuristic device for what Jameson calls "cognitive mapping," a heuristic device that allows subjects to know the structures of realities that are not permeable to experience.[9] I have tried to understand contemporary aesthetic experience in the US partly in relation to this political and cognitivist tradition, departing from it, however, in recognition of modes of experience that are not subordinated to these categories.

## Notes

1 It is an interesting phenomenon that as traditionally prestigious cultural practices such as literary writing have over the past half century lost their pivotal position in shaping national identity, minority and other subaltern groups have increasingly adopted these practices. This is most evident in the United States, where the group-formative writing of Latinos and African-, Asian-, and Native Americans is at the center of the multicultural movement's attempt to deconstruct national culture and reconfigure it as manifold. This tendency, however, is also evident in many Latin American countries where, at least in the critics' views, the cultural practices of popular sectors – peasants, workers, shantytown dwellers, urban youth, and so on – should be put on a par with prestigious cultural forms. One important result of this movement has been the emergence of *testimonio* as a sanctioned literary form. See Yúdice 1990 and 1991.

2 See Angel Rama, *Los poetas modernistas en el mercado económico* (Montevideo: Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias, Universidad de la República, 1967); *Rubén Darío y el modernismo (circunstancia socio-económica de un arte americano)* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, col. Temas, no. 39, 1970); *Las máscaras democráticas del modernismo* (Montevideo: Fundación Angel Rama, 1985).

3 The eagerness to get on Bush the Elder's good side was so strong that President Carlos Menem of Argentina sent troops to the Gulf War, despite vociferous protests by the citizenry.

4 Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), p. 75.
5 For an account of the politics of "needs interpretations" in the context of the public sphere, see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," and George Yúdice, "For a Practical Aesthetics," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80, 129–45.
6 Michael Warner, "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet," *Social Text* 29 (1991): 13. This special issue of *Social Text* on queer theory is comprised of a selection of essays published by the University of Minnesota Press in a book-length volume.
7 L. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 314.
8 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 16.
9 Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 349.

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