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Relations between Queer Studies and Cultural Studies*

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These notes expound on the imperative to interface emerging masculinist studies in Latin American scholarship with queer studies; indeed, I would argue that it is impossible—intellectually shortsighted—to attempt masculinity studies without such an interface. I discuss some examples of scholarship that I believe exemplify such a judicious interface.

If queer studies emerge in tandem with feminism—and, indeed, enabled to a great extent by the successful challenge to masculinist (and, therefore, heterosexist) privilege undertaken by feminism—masculine studies emerge subsequently to complete the triangle of gender identity. Simone de Beauvoir could declare axiomatically “Woman is made, not born,” and thus it became necessary at some point to make a similar assertion about men. Thus, masculinity, as the ideology of being a man, can no longer be an unquestioned universal but, rather, must be examined as a process, a performance, and a historical contingency. In Latin American studies, the U.S. researcher Matthew C. Gutmann, in *The Meanings of Macho*, provided a founding text in his examination of Mexican machismo,

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with several significant revisions of the record of received popular cultural knowledge, and Robert McKee Irwin focuses more specifically on culture, moving with considerable intellectual ability along a continuum between traditional forms of masculinity in Mexico and the homophobic constructions of homosexuality and effeminacy and a historical record of queer cultural manifestations that have functioned anti-phonically vis-à-vis a hegemonic culture of masculine virility. Alfredo Mirandé provides the necessary perspective of Mexican American culture in the United States, while Ray González's *Muy Macho; Latino Men Confront their Manhood* provides an excellent collection of autobiographical sketches about gender and sexuality of an important range of Latino writers, while at the same time putting the term *macho* under erasure.

Guillermo Núñez Noriego, in *Sexo entre varones* (significantly, now in its second edition) is perhaps one of the most important works by a Latin American scholar on questions of masculinity and homoeroticism. Núñez Noriega writes as a sociologist, and therefore his monograph is limited in scope: he focuses primarily on the sexual practices among men in the state of Sonora in Northwest Mexico. The first edition of *Sexo* included the cover image of some images of Sonoran cattleman culture, most notably a pair of cowboy boots. While cowboy culture constitutes an abiding complex of fetishes for contemporary gay culture, Núñez Noriega's point in his study is that one cannot talk principally about a gay male culture in Sonora, but rather a set of practices, typically centered on the all-male space of the cantina, that involved men who have sex with men, but who do not self-identify as gay and for whom the term homosexual would be distinctly inappropriate. Since Mexico, like most of Latin America, stigmatizes the effeminate man (hence, the reason Manrique underscores the need to make eminent the *maricón* as the paradigm of the effeminate man), men who behave as "real men" rarely have the sexuality challenged and are relatively free to engage unremarked in private—and often, to some degree, public—homoerotic practices with other men. In such a conceptual universe, the dichotomy between gay and straight, homosexual and heterosexual, patriarchal and queer are rendered essentially inoperative. The sort of line of inquiry Núñez Noriega is pursuing, complemented by appropriate literary and cultural references (as does Quiroga) is perhaps one of the most important veins of queer scholarship at the moment for Latin American cultural studies.

João Silvério Trevisan is best known for his *Devassos no paraíso; a homossexualidade no Brasil, da colônia à atualidade*, which came out in a fifth and greatly expanded edition in 2002. Originally published in 1985 (and translated into English in 1986 as *Perverts in Paradise*), *Devassos* rode the crest of the international gay movement



that was hitting its stride twenty years ago at the same time in which, with the return to constitutional democracy in May 1985, it became possible to pursue serious research on queer issues. *Devassos* is now a major bibliographic entry in an inventory of queer Brazilian studies.

Just as *Devassos* was groundbreaking in terms of queer studies in Brazil, *Seis balas num buraco só* is in terms of Brazilian masculinity studies. Trevisan's use of the phrase "a crise do masculino" underscores both 1) the way in which the crisis of masculinity means its subjection to a critical theorizing, and 2) how the traditional gender/sexual supremacy of the masculine has been undermined by that critical theorizing. It may also mean 3) that forces in the postmodern, late capitalist world have rendered masculine supremacy problematical, but it may be difficult to separate that proposition from the previous two.

Latin American masculinity studies from the essential queer perspective that necessarily underlies Trevisan's point of view means three major lines of inquiry: 1) the examination of the construction of the (hyper)masculine personality and the roles it plays in society—this is often executed in large measure through an examination of the deleterious consequences of such a personality, as exemplified by war, domestic violence, sexual abuse, killer capitalism, environmental devastation, and homophobia, among other intense social narratives; 2) the exploration of the spaces within traditional masculinity where its visible face in fact hides, covers over, explains away, or simply ignores male-male behavior that goes against its principles, such as, for example, the highly charged eroticism of most manly sports, the *faute de mieux* mentality that allows men to have sex with other men in all-male settings, the wonderful contradiction by which if a self-styled macho penetrates another man, he retains all of the rights and privileges of masculinity and can never be viewed as to have crossed over into homosexuality, and the way in which male homosociality, in general, must police the homoerotic as though there could never be a continuum between them; 3) the recognition of the ways in which man-on-man eroticism (with or without "real" sex) has emerged from the closet and shattered—at least as far as Latin America is concerned—the image of the *maricón* as the only legitimate homosexual. From this latter point of view, the very paradigm of masculinism becomes deconstructed in a serious threat to the heteronormative binary, which the *maricón*-as-homosexual essentially reinforced. Since mass or popular culture is where often the queer action is, it is not surprising that Trevisan's work, both his use of the Brazilian Carnival, and his reference to sports, journalism, film and similar productions, is of primary importance.

Those of us working in Latin American queer studies often hear from colleagues, the writers themselves, and the Latin American public in general that the discussion of gender and sexuality is trivial—even irrelevant and impertinent—to the appreciation of the artistic quality of a work. This may be so, but it is also, on the part of those who would object to such studies, *quod demonstrandum est*, since nondogmatic professional literary and cultural critics have long ago learned that quite simply everything may be brought to bear on the analysis of the vast enterprise that is culture and its privileged category of literature. Certainly, given the enormous range of scholars working within the large intellectual tent of queer studies, the past twenty-five years have seen the affirmation of an academic inquiry that simply can no longer be ignored.

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