

Towards Queering the Curriculum

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My original statement was the preface to an essay analyzing queer studies in Latin America since the 1980s; this essay (the complete version will appear in a special issue on queer Latin American studies of the *Revista Iberoamericana*) is complemented by another one, which will probably be forthcoming in Cuba (!) articulating six points for a queer studies agenda in Latin America in the next decade.

The purpose of these essays is to contribute to the discussion, not only of the place in the study of Latin American cultural production, of a queer-marked textuality and the sort of rigorous academic research appropriate to it, of a queering of the curriculum. By this is meant an approach to the various levels of the canon (including what might be excluded from the canon) to decenter patriarchal heteronormativity/compulsory heterosexuality, toward an inquiry into the legitimacy—or the lack thereof—of a ground zero of heteronormativity and heterosexism. Just as feminism has decentered masculinism and its attendant sexism, queering the curriculum decenters heteronormativity and its heterosexisms.

In keeping with such a decentering, my comments at the April 14 symposium set out to expound on a number of other areas of study designed also to decenter usually unquestioned assumptions about Latin American cultural production. The ones I specifically addressed were:

- Jewish studies, not just in the sense of recovering a cultural production marked in one way or another as Jewish, but in the questioning the presumed ground zero of Christian culture for Latin America, a presumption that affects pre-Columbian culture, spheres of immigrant culture (Jews and other religio-ethnic groups), and current religious patterns that are Protestant, Mormon, Pentecostal, not to mention atheism.
- Brazilian studies, not just in the sense of a proper record of the Portuguese-language cultural production of Brazil, but in the questions of the presumed centrality (and often exclusivity, for Latin America) of a cultural production in the Spanish language. That is, Latin American is often used unquestioningly as a synonym for Spanish-language America.
- Chicano/Latino studies, not just in the sense of a proper record of the cultural production of U.S. Chicanos/Latinos, but in the questioning of what the border is between American studies and Latin American studies. Do Chicano/Latino studies belong to one or the other, or are they both at the same time? Does it matter whether Chicano/Latino production is in English or in Spanish—or in Caló? João Guimarães Rosa's metaphor of "a terceira margem do rio" (the third bank of the river) is useful here. Latin American studies programs have often struggled shamefully to disown or to tame Chicano/Latino studies.
- Linguistics, as it relates to the study of the primary material medium of literature, language. One does not want to question the fields of applied and theoretical

linguistics, but rather to inquire into, exactly, what knowledge of linguistic theory, linguistic ideology, and linguistic variation constitutes important—indeed, imperative—knowledge for literary/cultural studies. It is, to me, inconceivable that one could study literature and culture without advanced intellectual notions of language in general and the Spanish and Portuguese languages (in all their varieties) specifically.

- Finally, a proper attention to the urban reality of Latin America. As the Argentines say, “Dios está en todas partes, pero únicamente atiende en Buenos Aires.” What does this mean for an understanding of the urban primacy and how, then, do we compute that primacy in a reasonable study of national literatures? One never knows if “Mexican” means the nation or only Mexico City, and there is the ever-present slippage between “Argentine” and “Porteño” to refer to the same thing: the Greater Buenos Aires area.

There is much to debate about these points, including the very tenor in which they are formulated and the degree to which they are accurate. My point is not to set the parameters, but simply to play an opening card in the debate.

Hispanic Issues On Line: Debates

Hispanic Issues On Line (HIOL) is an open-access, refereed scholarly electronic publication devoted to the study of Hispanic and Lusophone cultures. ISSN 1931-8006
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