In doing so he also by implication raises the profound complexity of so many strands of Northern popular culture in a culture of genetic holocaust, slavery and racism.

Elsewhere, however, Martin-Barbero displays blinkers common throughout the discourse of "cultural studies." Justly determined to shake free of monolithic, Eurocentric visions of the industrial working class, he accepts a highly pluralistic concept of "the people" as a source of effervescence, heterogeneity swelling up against an homogenization imposed from above. But equating diversity with subversion disconnects attention from verticality, from an ontological "mythos of the perpetrator" he also discards any precise analysis of changing class composition, thereby throwing the baby out with the bath water. His reaction against Marx thus veers toward a charateristically postmodernist dehistoricization—very evident in recent Anglo-American cultural studies—whereby the collapse of differentiation allows epiphanies systematically structured inequality.

Equally problematic is the de-emphasis of media production and consumption panoplies Martin-Barbero's theory of "mediation." Attention to the strategies of reception and export which the ideological valency of messages can be simply "read off" from the structure of media ownership. However, in his "mediation" with "audience resistance"—now ubiquitous throughout cultural studies—slides easily toward denial of any specificity or determining power of the moment of production. At the extreme, this remotes the concept of ownership into a "commercial cosmos," of contemporary society. By affirming the symbolic reproduction of cultural products, Martin-Barbero undermines the importance of materially appropriating the means of cultural production. But retreat from issues of ownership and control risks circumventing the left's cultural activity within an essentially reactive space, endlessly sabotaging self-definition by the commodity principle. Members of a collective thought by the absence of lamps, books, soap operas, oral poetry and poetic duels, and religious syncretism, to mention only a sampling of topics covered. This entertaining, yet sometimes dizzying, collection of anecdotes provides the backdrop for the important theoretical insights developed by Rowe and Schellng from their own analysis and that of others, most notably Mary-Jean Barlow in "Gender Communication in a Multicultural Society." This is more than a little bit problematic.

Resources for Memory

Michael Boyle Hoffman


A new generation of Latin American researchers is finding a powerful "ontologies of the world" amongst the people of Latin America. Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America by William Rowe and Vivian Schelling marks the first major attempt to outline this emerging body of research and scholarship in an Anglophone audience.

The title of the book alludes to the two primary paths of this research: first, the excavation of the substratum of collective memory as it is embedded in popular cultural practices, the roots of which in some cases extend as far back as pre-colonial times and, second, the exploration of how modernity in a Latin American context is lived and adapted through popular cultural practices, the "mediations"—to borrow a term from Josi Martin-Barbero—by which we mean the "invisibility effects" of these traditions, with mass media and commodity products.

Memory and Modernity not only frames the terms of reference for this new area of debate, but it also offers a comprehensive journey through the terrain of Latin American popular culture, both historically and geographically. Ranging over a wide variety of popular cultural practices, Rowe and Schelling discuss soccer, ranchos, salsera, rock music, popular romance novels, poetry, corridos, books, soap operas, oral poetry and poetic duels, and religious syncretism, to mention only a sampling of topics covered. This entertaining, yet sometimes dizzying, collection of anecdotes provides the backdrop for the important theoretical insights developed by Rowe and Schelling from their own analysis and that of others, most notably Mary-Jean Barlow in "Gender Communication in a Multicultural Society." This is more than a little bit problematic.

Rowe and Schelling contestuate their analysis in the global processes of late-nineteenth-century capitalism where an eclectic array of cultural goods from a wide variety of cultural environments "seems to offer an unbrokable horizon." The result is the tendency to "cultural modernity," which, in its worst case scenario, results in "cultural death" and makes the possibility of dismantling "old forms of marginalization" and making new forms of democratization and cultural multiplicity imaginable.

Rowe and Schelling maintain the tension between these opposing tendencies, warning that with the growing concern in the 1990s about how to adapt "the media" and "the defense of cultural multiplicity," it is important to resist "apocalyptic pessimism" about the former and "attempts to preserve identity" in regard to the latter.

For an Anglophone audience, the context of Latin America offers an opportunity to reconsider popular culture from another historical and cultural vantage point. Rowe and Schelling point out that the history of the relationship between modernity and technology is found in Latin America. One of the areas of greatest interest for the Latin American media is often "taken as a model" for similar experiences elsewhere. To the contrary, Latin America is "the different historical moments at which the culture industry becomes established give rise to crucial differences." Thus, for example, in the case of Brazil, "modernity" arrived with the television rather than with the Enlightenment. The historic difference that marks Latin America "is the force of popular culture," where modernity is not seen as the domination of pre-modern traditions and memories but has arisen through them, transforming the process in the process.

Rowe and Schelling distinguish between three principal interpretive narratives which have been used to circumscribe the role of popular culture. First, is the Romantic version of popular culture as "the people's culture" under threat from industrialization and the modern culture industry. Second, is
The condition of popular culture with mass culture, "either as threat or solution. Finally, the perspective which most closely approximates to an understanding of popular culture with an emancipatory and utopian optimism where the practices of subalterns are practiced as resources for imagining an alternative future society." Rowe and Schelling rec-ognize this as the first step to fully understanding and engaging with the popular culture that folklorists have traditionally thought about and studied. This perspective is evident in the work of Anna Grimshaw, the editor of this anthology, whose "case stud-ies" were specific instances of a larger proj-ect on the relations between the creative possibilities of individuals and societies organized by relations of industrial capi-talism. In his travels from the colonies to the metropole, Grimshaw studied how mass culture organizes elements of the popular and dominant cultures, the social relations which make this project meaningful, as well as the historical evolution of the place of the audience.

This process began in the 1930s with the research for Black Jacobins, James' best known book. The history of Latin America's first war of nation-states in Haiti (1791-1802) is that of a Black people making revolution without an organ-i zation. Of course, the earlier study of aristocratic European cultural leadership in the pursuit of self-governance in the colonies, which was not only vanguard but also such a powerful and important event that it has endured. The 1930s and 1940s witnessed the birth of a new generation of cultural anthropologists, and a new generation of intellectuals. This new generation of cultural anthropologists, and a new generation of intellectuals, were the first to engage with the popular culture that folklorists have traditionally thought about and studied. This perspective is evident in the work of Anna Grimshaw, the editor of this anthology, whose "case stud-ies" were specific instances of a larger proj-ect on the relations between the creative possibilities of individuals and societies organized by relations of industrial capi-talism. In his travels from the colonies to the metropole, Grimshaw studied how mass culture organizes elements of the popular and dominant cultures, the social relations which make this project meaningful, as well as the historical evolution of the place of the audience.