France since the 1960s. Why is his work not given the same weight as that of other cultural theorists because such work is somehow unimportant to the commitment to the formation of complex theories of class and social structure and this goes against the grain of liberal assumptions.

One of the major criticisms leveled at cultural imperialism is that it is an attack on national culture. How Tomlinson claims that Marxist theorists have difficulty dealing with the topic and draws instead on Benedict Anderson's description of nation as a historically constructed "imagined community." Tomlinson makes another sharp distinction, this time between culture and politics. His point is that politics (the nation) does not relate one-to-one with culture (ethnic) and other differences within the nation. This theoretical distinction is central to the preoccupation of the direction of an important Marxist thinker on national culture. Gramsci's whole point was to show the implications of a "national culture." What Gramsci wanted to point out is that popular culture is more or less linked with one of several competing versions of national identity and how this is part of the struggle for power, cultural-political hegemony of the ruling bloc.

Tomlinson repeatedly refers in his book to "capitalist modernity." This is part of his argument for a shift in attention from space (geography and imperialism) to time (traditional and modern cultures). His account of capitalist modernity places very little emphasis on class struggle. He also neglects class and anti-colonial struggle as processes which form and transform the collective identity. This is also true of Marshall Berman, he focuses on the personal experience of modern culture which provokes a crisis of meaning of the level of the individual. At this point it becomes clear that Tomlinson actually has no sense of the collective nature of culture and that by "culture" he exclusively means processes of individual self-understanding and the different experiences.

Tomlinson are not cultural at all, but are issues of existence of the meaning of life: the purpose of one's own birth, life and death. This leads to the conclusion of Tomlinson's book. His argument in the end is that people feel in the developing world is not cultural imperialism or media imperialism, not even capitalist culture, but the transition from a traditional to a modern society. The key difference between the two is that in traditional society Tomlinson imagines that existential issues about the meaning of an individual's life do not arise. Following a traditional lifestyle by definition means not questioning it because it is not one possible life but the only life. It is only in modern society that choices and possibilities open up and with that the individual existential questions of the meaning of it all.

This is, of course, exactly the position of pre-1960's anthropology and sociology of development: Levi Strauss was enthusiastically read in the 1960s because he broke with this and insisted that the intellectual activity of "modern" societies was the same as that of "modernity" societies. Against the implicit nature of notions of primitive modernity Levi Strauss showed that the intellectual activity of storytellers and artists and makers in "pre-modern" societies has the same characteristics as modern science. Tomlinson has fallen back into the older position of an absolute difference. In sociology and the new field of media studies in the 1960s it was said that traditional societies were characterized by the social-psychological absence of "empathy." For Daniel Lerner, traditional societies remain "undeveloped" because they were only because their members could not even imagine that their lives (or anybody else's life) might be different. Tomlinson ends by taking the same position.

Victorians Sensibilities or Vicarious Criticism?

By Alison Hearn

Celebré Oláguaquía, Megalopolis, Minneapolis University, Minnesota Press, 1962.

Megalopolis, a collection of five essays, takes as its topic the postmodern "state of things." In each essay Oláguaquía explores aspects of the contemporary postmodern 'condition' and gives examples from the urban scene as she perceives it. Examples range from shopping malls, to World Fairs, to religious icons, to junk art, to Brazilian carnivals. The purpose of the book, Oláguaquía claims, is "to describe how such an apparently finite project is postmodernist, understood as the glorification of consumption, does in fact enable the articulation of novel and often contradictory desires."

Each chapter is just such a "description," with liberal amounts of orthodox postmodern theorist thrown in for good measure. Oláguaquía unflinchingly laments for the good, or moments of decay, the "theatricality" of contemporary life, in the signifying practices and products she describes. But ironically, she is at her best when focusing on the base, more violent and compromised aspects of postmodern culture.

The conclusion of Megalopolis is a summary of the standard theoretical constructs of contemporary postmodern theory. What does the "cultural homo" mean and the exhaustion of modernism?" The "celebration of difference in cultural identity" is the new "consumption as an autonomous practice," the "collapse of time into space," and "ref-" or practical component, in a postmodern world with a veritable smorgasbord of pop icons?

Perhaps the most central and, definitely, the most poignant of these formulations is Oláguaquía's description of the "vicarious" sensibilities of the postmodern world. High technology has intersected with the directness of experience, highlighting the radical split between subject and object. This split is, itself, a result of "the breaking down of traditional referentiality." Our experience in postmodernity, is always and necessarily, indirect. In a state of "perceptual "existence" the experience of "vicarious" sensibility is likened to the "fancy of confusion Madame Bovary and Don Quijote developed between themselves and the characters of the literature thought they so loved to read.

Unfortunately, the concept of vicariousness and identity confusion comprise a more fitting description of Oláguaquía's work. Megalopolis is postmodern in its sensibilities. Somehow Megalopolis, as either cultural theory or criticism for Oláguaquía, is both more taut and taut, which is to say that it is both flat. Oláguaquía is obviously wrestling with a confusion between her "postmodern critique" and the "kitsch" and "kitsch" and "kitsch" and "kitsch" and "kitsch."

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The B/L List
of Recent Latin American Cultural Studies

Compiled by Alan O'Conor

Néstor García Canclini. Las culturas populares en el capitalismo (Mexico, Nuevas Imágenes, 1990).
One of the key works of Latin American cultural studies. It examines the continued importance of traditional handicrafts (pottery, weaving, etc.) in a semi-industrial context. Handicrafts provide an economic supplement in the countryside which sometimes allows families to avoid migrating to the cities. They are a popular commodity and are often produced by women. Traditional handicrafts are important in the tourist industry. For an urban audience, they are also an expression of cultural identity and are used in Semenida (the name of the business) and in recent Latin American theory, such as that of Marxs-Barbosa.

Rubén Martínez, The Other Side: Final Limits, Guerilla Dances and the Time of Earth's “B” Rail (London, New York, 1993). A book of linked essays, journals and poems written about El Sombrero de Miéndez and Los Angeles. The community and the community’s production of land and the land are presented as a way of writing challenges on the nature of landscape itself. A new form of landscape is produced on the land and on its meaning. The title is a reading for those who are the “other way” and geographical tourism emerges to several points in the book.

David William Foster, Gay and Lesbian Themes in Latin American Writing (University of Texas, 1995). This thoughtful book is the first overview of queer Latin American writing. Analysed thematically, it discusses the work of about two dozen writers.