

LATIN AMERICA, SEXUALITIES, AND OUR DISCONTENTS

Claudia Schaefer
University of Rochester

LA MODERNIDAD ABYECTA: FORMACION DEL DISCURSO HOMOSEXUAL EN HISPANOAMERICA. By Héctor Domínguez Rubalcava. (Xalapa, Mexico: Universidad Veracruzana, 2001. Pp. 160.)

THE SEXUAL WOMAN IN LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE: DANGEROUS DESIRES. By Diane E. Marting. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001. Pp. xiii + 345. \$55.00 cloth.)

LUSOSEX: GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING WORLD. Edited by Susan Canty Quinlan and Fernando Arenas. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002. Pp. xxxvii + 317. \$22.95 paper.)

TORTILLERAS: HISPANIC AND U.S. LATINA LESBIAN EXPRESSION. Edited by Lourdes Torres and Inmaculada Pertusa. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003. Pp. 279. \$24.95 paper.)

OF DISCIPLINE AND DISCIPLINES

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, the long view of academe's discovery of 'sexuality' opens onto a vast panorama, one populated by both marvels and monsters; it is one in which, with increased fervor, sexuality and its textual representations have been encoded as privileged sites of radicalism and resistance. Whether readers have found moments of optimism or pessimism in individual studies, such as we find in the reviews of Elaine Showalter's (1990) masterful considerations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in *Sexual Anarchy* where "myths, metaphors, and images of sexual crises and apocalypse" (3) related to things corporal come center focus, academic publications are also part and parcel of global capital. They circulate, frequently and not surprisingly even more so than the bodies addressed in their pages. The reign of the marvelous includes those utopian dreams of inclusions and crossovers, of borderless worlds and supposedly limitless individual freedoms, of appropriating the power to 'name' who

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one is and what one wants, of the efficacy of humanistic research in the realm of the material and the 'real.' But, like the free-market economies touted as the end-all of western culture over the past two decades, those same fantasies of free-flowing goods and overtly sexualized bodies are accompanied by the darker shadows of the monstrous that constantly remind us that persistent vestiges of cultural fears still haunt our landscapes (and our psyches). Paradoxically, the very same optimistic visions of global promise carry with them the harsh realities of the international sex trade, sexual tourism, and the visible victims of "the writing of hatred on history" (Eisenstein, 21). The exacerbation of inequality in global terms and the theoretical constructs that are built around and inside it are significant factors for framing our discussion of academic books in the new millennium. Our deepest fantasies explored on paper are also our darkest nightmares on the streets of our nations.

Academia cannot and should not be immune from these fears and from the acts of violence they provoke, whether the violence is embodied discursively or materially. After all, institutions, and the individuals whose labor sustains and supports them, are the fraught vessels in which local cultures and global economics meet. What have the outcomes of these intersections been? Is there a way to negotiate the pictures of ourselves and others that we hold in our minds, the books we write about them, and the constant reformulation of the physical world that figures in both? That is to say, the question at hand is how over the past three decades the intellectual turn from sexual politics to gender performance, from the materiality of the flesh to the spectacle of the stage or page, has responded to such challenges of modernity and globalization of which academic institutions form an intrinsic part. As Román de la Campa accurately and boldly situates this query within the cultural studies debates arising at the end of the twentieth century, it is incumbent upon us to scrutinize "the unforeseen cultural anxieties that are rehearsed in the political realm with a corresponding demand for higher education to provide both meaning and resistance to those very pressures" (164). "Both meaning and resistance" is the crux of the matter; at this difficult juncture of production as positive and negative (critique), the vision of simultaneous linguistic articulation and disarticulation holds our attention. In as much as the rhetoric of globalization fuses market forces and intellectual production into "a performative doctrine" (149) of visible, innovative artifacts, the 'proof' that one is intellectually active, the old saw of publish or perish has never been more materially true, even as the process becomes filled with such new and threatening contradictions. Apparent in the books under review, especially in the collected volumes edited by Torres and Pertusa, and Quinlan and Arenas, is the engagement of Latin Americanists with many

of the tensions and contentions mentioned as the contributors attempt to locate their studies of desires and resistance, empowerment and “shamelessness,” cross-dressing and “impossibilities,” within historical as well as contemporary contexts. Their answers to the questions implied by the subtitles of the volumes—just what *do* we have to say about lesbians, gender, and sexuality in the United States and the Hispanic and Portuguese-speaking worlds and, perhaps, to whom are we saying it?—vary widely. Our entrance into the twenty-first century opened the doors to media access to all of the contradictions between first-world nation-building and the discourses on globalization that accompany them, providing an open invitation to master diverse and challenging cultural practices and reflect on them. Bodies in space may be homeless, displaced, dislocated, disoriented, but the challenge of this brave new world is to find language to articulate arguments about them. In the search for ties amid these fluid spaces, sexuality has successfully competed with those old cast-offs of race and class to remain at the center.

SEX AND ACADEME

The heritage of 1970s feminism provided us a (real and metaphorical) speculum with which to plumb the recesses of physical bodies and, by association, the social bodies they inhabit. Biological processes and social constraints on human beings became the focus of intellectual study, as did the thematics of sexuality discovered, salvaged from the oblivion of moral censorship, and explored in archival as well as contemporary sources. In search of both “their bodies and themselves,” to paraphrase a now well-known popular how-to book, scholars took a step back (away from, not backward) from a visual possession of the flesh they inhabited to a recognition of how they looked when they did so. In short, sexuality as an area or field to be studied was a combination of the celebration of the parts of the human body and an equally celebratory ceremony of publishing one’s findings (or of inviting an audience to participate in a collective learning experience, as did performance artist Anne Sprinkle in her cross-country show that interested both college students and ‘regular folk,’ the so-called proof that sexuality is what binds us all together).

Beginning in the 1980s, cultural theorists such as Baudrillard asked us to look at the social body in a mirror, focusing on the collection of objects we had taken at face value, and individually, in earlier reflected images of the world around us. We could use his theories, he wrote, to see if such objects were indeed decipherable in other, perhaps closer, ways than we might have previously imagined. So his metaphor of the careening automobile’s rear-view mirror opened a larger frame on what

had already materially passed by us, and we could discern in the traces left behind—farther away but somehow nearer to us with the tools of theory—a paradox of sorts when we think about it. As we accelerated past the material reality of the body in consumer culture, headed toward our inevitable date with holographic representation and the virtual world, we could recognize our past (our bodies, ourselves to be celebrated and mourned simultaneously as pieces of what has been left behind) yet turn our heads toward the future looming ever closer to us. Somehow, in the process, we lost sight of our place in the present. The intrinsic “resistance” of sexualized texts (or bodies) to social coercion, physical constraint, or forced invisibility; the libidinal energy unleashed at the mere reference to sexual acts and physical desires; the positing of *jouissance* as the ultimate power of the individual against the state; all were issues on the academic banquet table for our consumption as hungry intellectuals. During that decade, theory was discovered as the device for ‘naming,’ as the language through which physical beings might find a voice and a space and where the socially-coded terms masculine and feminine took the place of male and female (what the mirror had showed us). Starting at the self, the spectacular human body became, pardon the expression, the greatest story ever told even as new tales of therapeutic invasions and storms in the desert were just a couple of years away.

As we entered the decade of the 1990s, the ontological pillars on which modern western society had been constructed fell into rubble at our feet. Statues and monuments to leaders, movements, and promises, all were pulled down in the name of openness and the end of economic borders. The buffer zone of the so-called Second World of the Soviet Union disappeared almost overnight, leaving the First and the Third Worlds to meet eye-to-eye in what was harkened as the triumph of a totalizing vision of cultures, economies, and bodies. (Who would blink in this encounter is not difficult to imagine as local anxieties grew into global terrors, and new nationalisms based on the language of fear emerged to police real bodies.) Local byways quickly streamed into virtual highways, the technology gap loomed deep and wide, and academic pluralities were born: desires, sexualities, Hispanisms, feminisms, and masculinities all began to share the all-encompassing campus spotlight. Rather than those old (and so-called worn-out) clichés and buzzwords of class, race, and specificity (read as bound-to-the-nation in the old sense) as markers of identity, performativity began to define who one was at any given moment. As Céspedes shows us (Torres and Pertusa, 147), gender performer Carmelita Tropicana inherited the public venue of Annie Sprinkle in the Cuban American scene of the 1980s and 1990s, combining sensational images of personal identity, trans-nationality, and schizophrenic celebration in place of bodily ‘awareness.’

In a movement parallel to the streaming of goods across invisible lines of territorial division which—strangely—became fortified even as they were declared abolished, one was imbued with the (theoretical) power to take on and then divest a body of ‘legibility’ (the word belongs to Marjorie Garber) or meaning at will. Sexual practices were like new pieces of clothing in which to perform, then discuss, then reformulate into other acts, the more unexpected the better. Permanent tags—the act of naming, previously—disappeared in favor of slippage, impermanence, masquerade, purposeful misunderstanding as defiance. Looks came and went, consumed and left behind until no mirror could possibly find their remnants. Any expressed desire for self-recognition among the global carnage was the admission of a need for the past, a nostalgic cry for what had been lost. The term “morph”—as root of both verb and noun—came into fashion. Visuality in the media seemingly contradicted invisibility, whether political, social, or sexual—and our “vested interests” (Marjorie Garber 1992) as intellectuals were projected onto screen images or in print publications. Texts were no longer written on bodies, but bodies themselves were texts to be read and re-read by “[a] new generation of readers armed with novel and traditional critical tools... in scholarly research” (Torres and Pertusa, 1–2). Contradictions were the privileged signs of intellectual belonging and participation; signs of coherence marked being left behind or, in terms of forming a new canon, being left on the margins.

As academic studies of the performative identities of the 1990s attest, the quirks and flourishes of global identity had hit home: theory moved; it was transportable and ubiquitous and universal in some strangely inexplicable way. Gender was being ‘bent’ on stage and in film, in novels and poetry, and there had to be a way to talk about it. Theories of sexuality proposed and explored by Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, among the most popular proponents, could be applied to any and all; as Walter Benjamin argued almost a century earlier: the original is dead, long live the copies! The diverse and multiple occupied our line of sight, and “the performative dimension of writing [about all these activities] . . . does not simply transmit a thought or a content but performs an action, takes up a stance . . . , providing an experience as it structures experience” (Culler and Lamb 2003, 3–4). Geography had opened up and, with it, so did overt, generic venerations of sexuality à la Madonna (imitated in Latin America by Gloria Trevi or a young Shakira or any number of other wannabes), or Olga Tañón, or Ricky Martin or, for that matter, Juan Gabriel. Political parties might remain in power for seven decades (as witnessed in Mexico), but globalism liberated us all to release our libidinal urges in protest (or so goes the theory). To paraphrase the title of Fernando Arenas’s article on Caio Fernando Abreu, theory offered a way to write our

experiences of these “small epiphanies” (Quinlan and Arenas, 235) and give readers, one hoped, a second layer of experience on top of the first.

As the bodies of labor from those developing nations (no longer called the Third World but the one in progress whose objective was, of course, the model of the First) migrated in the direction of economic promise, the eroticized bodies of their compatriots were on display for the consumption of the global economy. Academics embraced the latter as signs of freedom, democracy, and icons of personal expression; theory bent down to retrieve popular culture from its relegation to oblivion, and sexuality-as-media spectacle became the new coin of the realm in global economics. For academia, the stage was set. Conferences and symposia were the liberating sites of outing (artists and theorists alike), even though doing so on the streets of Bogotá, or San José, or Buenos Aires, or Guadalajara might not be as easy (or advisable). Sexuality-turned-performed identity increasingly received privileged space as a position from which one might critique societies, from the commonwealth status of Puerto Rico to the politics of Castro’s Cuba, and from right-wing agendas in the Southern Cone to Vicente Fox’s triumph over the PRI in Mexico. Only the critique was not staged for a local but a global audience: it was a media event that posited satellite TV or the financial resources to travel as a prerequisite; it also implied a knowledge of that language shared by those talking about such issues. Even as politicians took the oath of office, and much was made of the “*Sólo para mujeres*” nightclub performances in Mexico City, the two realms remained separate. For some in Mexico, this entertainment was proof of having arrived at the doorstep of the First World. For others, it was undisputed evidence of the road of sexual tourism that needed to be taken to get there.

ACTS OF INTERPRETATION

Not only have intellectuals caught on the horns of the dilemma of intellectual ‘visibility’ found promising sources in the cultures around them, but they have also returned to previous times and places in search of sexualized images as markers or indices of undercurrents of rebellion in what have appeared to be wholly traditional, mainstream, even long-canonized texts. Still more prevalent among critics in the U.S. than those in Latin America, “[r]adical” representations of “transgressive female sexuality” (Torres and Pertusa, 1) have been rooted out in the writings of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and in María Luisa Bemberg’s cinematic interpretation of the nun’s life (*Yo, la peor de todas*), as they have been found in recent Spanish novels, writings of early modern Spain and colonial Spanish-America, and Brazilian *modernismo*. Conjecture about the sexuality of Sor Juana (or, similarly, about twentieth-

century icons of so-called gender-benders in Latin America—such as Frida Kahlo—as seen from the North) has caught on more broadly in U.S. publications than in studies by Mexican critics. André's entry in the *Tortilleras* anthology, for instance, builds a bridge between Octavio Paz's rendition of the life of Sor Juana and Argentine director Bemberg's appropriation of the text, exploring but concluding that questions regarding her "sexual tendencies will probably forever remain unanswered" (163). One imagines that the desire to ask such questions emanates from that general intellectual sphere we have been discussing, from that cultural space whose inquiring "earnestness" (Culler and Lamb, 7) is laudatory and, if truth be told, usually not in doubt to those who inhabit its spaces. If, as Culler and Lamb posit, theory implies experimentation (11) in the best sense of gleaning information from a rigorous process of investigation, information which can then be taken 'elsewhere' for exposure to additional trials, then one might find applications crossing cultures and academic borders into some more general discourse. (And so the answer regarding Sor Juana would contribute to a larger framework of inquiry.) If the 'experiment' is the end in itself, this is a different notion of the currency of theoretical inquiry. In fact, it evokes the "authority" (Culler and Lamb, 4) of the performer of the writing, it imbues the 'translator' of the experience or the provider of an additional experience with credence, and it authorizes or validates the topic of the writing as well. (This attests, once again, to what we have called sexuality as the privileged site of academic politics.)

There is, despite the difficulties of acquisition and costs of purchasing the theoretical material outside the United States, evidence of inroads by theory into the work of Latin American critics. References to theoretical books on sexuality and personal identity from the likes of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Teresa de Lauretis, and Shoshana Felman appear in recent bibliographies alternating with studies on cultural and social "intersections" by Nelly Richard, and with linguistic or narratological readings in long-standing Latin American journals such as *Texto Crítico*. That an intellectual from the Centro de Estudios de la Mujer en la Historia de América Latina (México, D.F.) centers her discussion of the Peruvian novelist Laura Riesco within the context of a feminist tradition, from Virginia Woolf to Gabriela Mistral, not only reveals the proclivities of the research institute itself but also a trend in recent academic publications on texts by and about women. Feminism is still the tool to study women's subjectivity and identity in many if not most Latin American venues; discourses on sexuality are less frequent and, with few exceptions, are seen as foreign to many local cultures. First World feminism, as attested to by Julia E. Murphy, belongs to a certain community even as it has been declared the basis of a global conversation. "Gay" and "straight" in quotation marks are

not autochthonous categories, as much as “postcolonial” seems also to come from elsewhere.

Unlike the August–November 2001 special issue of *Hispanic American Historical Review* dedicated to “Gender and Sexuality in Latin America,” if sexuality is convened as a pertinent issue in many Latin American journals, it is rendered ‘differently.’ By this, I mean the topic is subscribed ‘academically’ or ‘textually,’ avoiding a contentious political link to social context and, with it, the possible threat of rebuke by governmental financiers, particularly in federal universities. The publication of an article or a book issued south of the U.S. border would most likely not include the terms “Tortilleras” or “Lusosex” as do two of the volumes included here; although the colloquial categorization of lesbians as “tortilleras” emanates from a Latin American context, it is still not an in-your-face weapon of intellectual resistance there. Arenas and Quinlan are quick to point out that their anthology of essays is situated squarely within the academic disciplines of gay and lesbian studies as they have developed in the United States. Stating that the motivating force behind the publication of this volume is the “wish to fill a gap with regard to the place occupied by sexuality—as a field of cultural inquiry—in Portuguese-speaking societies” (xiii), quite similar to the project set out by Torres and Pertusa for Hispanic and U.S. Latina lesbians, the language in these two collections reflects that academic bias. Despite the noted appearance of bookstores, cooperatives, some publishing opportunities, and performance collectives for work produced by women, gay men, lesbians, transgendered and bisexual constituencies, the editors of both tomes distinguish the theoretical basis of their work from those material activities carried on elsewhere. Arenas and Quinlan focus squarely on the fact that in Brazil “it can be argued that social activism around gender and sexuality issues is much more prevalent than academic theorization” (xvi) and, on the next page, that “[g]iven the urgency of addressing certain basic needs such as peacekeeping and infrastructural rebuilding—in Angola, after more than two decades of civil war, peace continues to be elusive, and in Cape Verde a severe shortage of natural resources poses particularly daunting developmental problems—(hetero)sexuality, as a public object of discussion or political debate is a rare occurrence” (xvii). What these editors term “nonmaterial politics” (a phrase unfamiliar to this reader) seems to be the converging point of these academic articles as well as the ‘resistance’ factor of the articles themselves.

There is no doubt that gender and sexuality are on the global table, but the way they are prepared for public consumption is as different as who has access to them. As the introduction to *Tortilleras* clearly distinguishes from the outset, Latina lesbians outside the U.S. are less visible, more “veiled” (1) than their U.S. counterparts. So the silences

are filled in, uncovered, and celebrated by scholars looking for undercurrents of resistance, different in look perhaps but similar in intent to trends in the United States (these subterranean waves are viewed as fundamentally 'political' as they are considered by many academics writing about them). While there is a wealth of published evidence that "[b]y the end of the twentieth century, a previously silenced subject, lesbian and gay Hispanic writing, came out of the closet" (2), and assuredly there is much more to come as writings and performances flourish, might we need to distinguish the word "subject" as a marker denoting the academic space into which we are entering, thereby postulating from the outset a space not equal to that of everyday life? If so, sexuality's 'nonmaterial political' clout may be more evenly restricted across the Americas than one might suspect, and its function as an intrinsically activist scenario is at best limited to the needs of the U.S. academic market.

In short, coming out into academe and the widespread integration of discourses on sexuality and gender into the U.S. college curriculum seems to respond to a market-driven need to prove to one's colleagues that "undertheorizing and underanalyzing lesbian identities and practices" (3) will not occur in this course or this article. Asking whether similar intellectual processes are occurring in Latin America seems to entangle one in the relative merits of mimicry when it seems all the more urgent to part the clouds of bliss surrounding the promotion of public performance and cast a glance at the possible impact of U.S. studies of sexuality in the Portuguese- or Spanish-speaking world on those actual, 'material politics' of those societies. To whom do we direct our intellectual engagement with lesbian families or interracial erotics, with silent pleasures and tomboy tantrums, with the abject body of modernism, or queering the nation through dance (paraphrases of entries in the Torres and Pertusa collection and to Domínguez Rubalcava's book)? While Domínguez Rubalcava's publication on abjection and modernity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin American writings seems a noted exception to our discussion, it is only so at face value. The writer has turned to an academic press to publish his study, and his theoretical discourse is firmly rooted in education, training, and now practice in U.S. academe. As argued in his introductory remarks, the need to render a wealth of untranslated material into Spanish ends up making the bodies in question less 'intelligible' than they could be (30) since the parenthetical use of the word *cathexis* as the synonym of *energía libidinal* explains little to the reader and does not go far to explain the relationship between abjection and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin American societies in which Augusto D'Halmar, Porifirio Barba Jacob, and Salvador Novo were entangled. Leaving aside the fundamental confusion of modernism, modernity, and *modernismo* in

Domínguez Rubalcava's study, his project on a negation of the rhetorical formulation of the masculine subject reverts to a linguistic analysis of the prose and poetry of the three writers despite its proclamation of the importance of Judith Butler's theories of performativity to produce such a negation. The author begins a process of refiguring inherited literary tropes, but he never successfully links resignifying with the utopian spaces of "la zona abyecta de la cultura" (37). Had he actually and consistently performed such a reading of the subjects created through and by the journalism and poetry of these writers, the book would have participated more centrally in the theoretical tendencies described above. Since it shifts toward discourse analysis after the preliminary discussion of theory, and the body of the poet is pinned down as an "articulador de signos" (80) with the process of "somatización" (95) indicating the disappearance of the flesh with the appearance of the word, Domínguez Rubalcava's argument never integrates how these aspects of "the great crisis of modernity" (12) fit with the new economies of exchange referenced in the first chapter. And his definition of modernity as a de-ideologization of aesthetics, and a withdrawal of writing from the laws of the marketplace (15, but contradicted later on) does little to clear up the fundamental confusion of the book.

DESPERATELY DESIRING DIFFERENCE

Now over the past two decades some interest has evolved in reading women's bodies and their ritualized performances as contestations of Renaissance world-views among academics in Mexico, for instance, and the historical distancing establishes the academic credentials of these studies, as well as their non-threatening nature. But as a writer on these subjects one would be hard pressed to find readers off campus, or neighbors willing to share their thoughts on the subject unless a theoretical language was shared. Given the restrictions on educational resources of the Third World (the term still functions to refer to a material society based on global economics and class), despite dreams of global progress, the reality of such a broad community is nil. But the lack of bodies is not the only reason. The encoding of such work as foreign to a local culture, as something belonging to the peculiarities of U.S. academic culture, results in a reading of sexuality as truly other. Others talk about these topics; others write in English about such things. Otherwise why would the terms be so difficult to translate culturally and make people twist and turn to fit them into different contexts: queer, transgendered, heteronormative, gay, even the term gender? Linguistically speaking, theories on sexuality and gender are other idioms from other places. They are languages that only academics speak or write to describe practices of human bodies (which, in the end, are the only

material things we all share). So although Esther Cohen's (2003) wonderfully engaging *Con el diablo en el cuerpo* confronts head-on the notions of bodily possession and women's sexuality as stages on which counter-normative popular practices might find space, its origins in the Seminario de Poética del Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas de la UNAM, in the section entitled "Problemas de la alteridad," hints at the globalizing of discourses on these subjects but their subsequent restriction to local contexts. The use of the concept of abjection by Domínguez Rubalcava, and of alterity by Cohen, are emblems of the circulation of texts; perhaps we might even take them as one of the "signs taken for wonders" that Franco Moretti interprets as the celebrations of the modern we should reexamine carefully. Cohen deciphers the ceremonial appropriation of blood and images of witchcraft by women as indicators of delegitimizing discourses based on sexual power rather than on hermetic or Cabbalistic philosophical traditions of the time. Rebel or scholar? In this she, Domínguez Rubalcava, Marting, Torres and Pertusa, and Quinlan and Arenas all embody our global dilemma: wondrously, theories on sexuality and gendered bodies cross unbounded horizons and make their way around the world. As Culler and Lamb (2003) assure us, they are the only way we have of getting a grasp on the totality of the world around us; they are a "common language" (9) that paradoxically restricts entrance to that commonality, not by some intrinsic difficulty of the linguistic signs themselves but by the realities of global inequalities of access. So, monstrously, where do theories and performances of sexualities and genders take us? When Quinlan and Arenas lament the absences in academia, the lack of "work" on lesbian desire or transgendered identity, the need to complete the field with its missing parts, they end the introduction with the celebratory hope that this volume might "instigate new research" and "open up spaces for greater dialogue inside and outside of academia" (xxx). As well-researched, enticingly written, and lavishly illustrated as many of the pieces are, the audience for this performance of the "contributors" is, at least for the time being, and whatever the utopian desires we may hold and yearn to see come true, other "contributors."

Such ellision of staged rebellion and sexual imagery (copulation with the devil, for instance) in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries explored by Cohen is mirrored in the "displacement" posited by Marting in her rereading of Latin American Boom novels. In search of textual evidence for social revolution in the narration of the sexual activities of female characters, Marting's look at the "sexy, radical sixties" (1) posits literature as a weapon (as does Luisa Valenzuela whose "change of weapons" is Marting's metaphor for the crossover of power-wielding). In her book, she argues for sexuality as the floodgate for political change, including, alongside the new woman, new visions of race and class

distinctions hitherto carved in stone. In this, she seems to seek a link between some of the characters inspired by the tenets of the New Left during the 1960s and the declaration of the end of race and class distinctions by the forces of globalization during the 1990s. As Marting writes of the “artists associated with sexual freedoms in Latin America” (4) we might wonder who is doing the associating? We also might take note, as Baudrillard suggests, that an alternative view is possible: that sexual revolutions might produce, in fact, not wholehearted festivals of freedom but instead “ambiguous repercussions” (10).

Amid the critic’s own “euphoria” (37) over the new freedoms for women (although one might ask which women?) that biomedical technologies brought beginning in the 1960s, a mirror—seemingly neither the speculum, Baudrillard’s, or Hollywood’s screen but more innocent and unquestioning for this author—is held up to that fundamental myth upon which so much cultural and political activity of the 1960s was predicated. That rests, in short, on the turn to sexuality and its public expression as the greatest of all weapons against the bourgeoisie. We might ask her just why should we, in all places and all times, understand that “erotic freedom precedes (and signals) freedom in other areas” (9–10)? Rather than decode the complexities of relying on such utopian visions for looking back at rather utopian times (which, paradoxically ended up with some of the greatest political repressions of modern history), Marting develops an overly-generalized theory of displacement and analogy in which sexuality and politics are two-sided mirrors that cannot be unglued. (Here I ask if we might establish a parallel between the twenty-first century intellectual’s hopes for shaking up society through the sexually spectacular and the acclamation of sexuality as discontent forty years earlier.) In her introductory presentation of the sexual woman in Latin American literature, Marting writes: “Displaced from representing women in general to representing other groups in a national landscape, newly sexed women characters in their demand for pleasure tend to represent groups that demand new, less repressive social structures” (39). Just how might the “new sexuality” of women suddenly freed from motherhood and family obligations on the pages of novels by Miguel Angel Asturias, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortázar or Carlos Fuentes (his novella *Aura* is enticingly but briefly mentioned) suddenly shift gears into the politics of the poor or the sex worker (*las sexoservidoras*)? I read prostitution not as sexuality but as economic exploitation, whether narrated by the woman or by her clientele. With this I do not mean to imply that “dangerous desires” (the subtitle of the book) cannot embody some kind of threat to a coherent narrative of stability in which those who do not conform do not exist, or that suddenly all literature should abandon aesthetics for politics. That would be as off base as its opposite (as if the desires of politics were suddenly

dangerous to the novel!). What I ask is how and where might what Susan Bordo calls the “unbearable weight” of the body in western culture be classified as lifted off society because women called the (sexual) shots or initiated foreplay in sexual fictions. And why is it that one could propose that in the variances of Spanish-English translations “we find literature’s greater political importance in Latin America than in the United States” (11)? How can it be that literature or performance is both more political (as proclaimed in *Lusosex* and *Tortilleras*) and less political (*The Sexual Woman*) within the same academic establishment? What presuppositions does the statement that “[b]y extension, writing about sex questions everything” (20) rest on? Are these the truly ‘dangerous desires’?

EROTIC BLISS, INTELLECTUAL RAPTURE, AND THE NATION

One factor in common among the books considered is the paradox of embedding sexuality within discourses on the nation, while globalization tells us this category is no longer valid. One of the cultural anxieties underlying intellectual debates on sexuality is that one might be taken as an imperialist if theoretical language is applied indiscriminately or unreflectedly to any and all works under analysis regardless of country and culture of origin. So the editors and majority of contributors to *Tortilleras* and *Lusosex* are equally careful to spell out the limits of terminology and cultural models, covertly inviting participation in an open process of naming. Torres and Pertusa end their prefatory remarks with the assurance that “the range of texts analyzed in this anthology interrupts an inclination to configure a monolithic Hispanic or Latina lesbianism” (13), yet globalization tells us every day that we are all members of that famous village that four decades ago Marshall MacLuhan predicted would come about as a result of technology and the media. Breadth and diversity, inclusion and democracy, lesbianisms and Latinas and Hispanisms, all point to an economic system that has, in reality, masked a backlash of national discourses in defense. As Eisenstein (1996) reminds us, “pluralizing has never been egalitarian” (66) and this is the preoccupation that Baudrillard may be hinting at in his reference to the “ambiguous repercussions” of sexual revolution. If we agree with both Baudrillard and Marting that the pill uncoupled sexual activity from procreation, in the first critic’s view as the first step toward those ambiguities and in the second’s as a giant leap toward social liberation in general, then what now? For Baudrillard, if not for all of the intellectuals who in these four volumes have assiduously questioned the meaning of sexualities and gender performances across the Americas, the second phase of revolution is antithetical to the first. In the twenty-first century, he affirms, “it is reproduction that

is liberated from sex; . . . [as a result of biotechnology], sex . . . becomes extraneous, a useless function" (10). Most of us know that phone sex and other technologically mediated forms of bodily expression are prevalent today, and perhaps theorizing sexuality is academia's parallel mediation. What troubles the writer of this review at this moment are the contradictions at the core of our discussion: if academia and society, sexuality and the body, politics and performance signal separate spheres in the giant global economic sphere maybe we are not so much "being difficult" as Culler and Lamb phrase it but going our own separate (liberated) ways. Even as they cautiously resist ahistorical portraits and monolithic representations of men and women in Latin America, and among U.S. Latinos/as, these four studies on sexuality and (now, increasingly) gender identities reflect a trend toward globalizing the notion of the supposed political clout of such endeavors. This compartmentalization suggests, if not an implicit understanding of the forces at work in academe, an intellectual reflection of them as one of the shadows haunting sexuality as a field of scholarly study.

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