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What's Left for Latin American Cultural Studies?

In 1997, well-known Latin American cultural studies critic Néstor García Canclini wrote that Latin American cultural studies was suffering from an illness: an illness that was destroying the discipline's ability to function as an effective source of Left critique. Despite the proliferation of conferences, publications, and critical "debates," he lamented, the field was far from dynamic:

The proliferation of little debates amplified on the Internet could give the appearance of a dynamism in cultural studies, but—as tends to occur in other areas with supply and demand—so much abundance, circulating globally, tends to exhaust itself quickly; it doesn't leave time to prove new concepts and hypotheses in long-term research, and we end up rushing to imagine what will be used in the next season, what model we will propose for the next international conference. ("El malestar" 45; my translation)

For García Canclini, Latin American cultural studies had lost its edge, had succumbed to the nonempirical, abstract theory model of the United States, and had been overtaken by an urge to produce trendy work that would gain attention at conferences. In essence, cultural studies had failed to live up to its promise. While perhaps a bit overstated, García Canclini's position echoed an ongoing concern that Latin American cultural studies might be little more than an intellectual apology for engaging in serious political critique.¹

García Canclini's essay was followed by three collections that addressed key questions: What is Latin American cultural studies and how can it best function as a motor for effective Left political critique? And like García Canclini's piece, at the center of each of these projects was a series of polemics, provocations, and debates: How does the colonial/neocolonial condition structure knowledge hierarchies in ways that make the theoretical innovations of cultural studies potentially problematic when applied to the Latin American context? To what extent is it necessary to interrogate the subject position of the scholar who purports to be a Latin American cultural

studies practitioner, especially when the scholar is housed in a US institution? How can one square the pre-1960s precursors and autochthonous sources of Latin American cultural studies with the specific genealogies of Birmingham School and Frankfurt School influences in the region? What exactly should be the methods, objects of study, and intended outcomes of Latin American cultural studies scholarship? And perhaps most importantly, in what specific ways can Latin American cultural studies shape and advance Left political projects in the region?

What makes the common thread through this series of questions noteworthy in this case are the differences in the contexts of publication and the intended audiences of the three volumes. The first, edited by Mabel Moraña, grew out of a 1998 conference hosted at the University of Pittsburgh, a university that has been at the center of innovative Latin American cultural studies. Published in Spanish through the Chilean editorial house Cuarto Propio, *Nuevas perspectivas desde/sobre América Latina: El desafío de los estudios culturales* (New Perspectives from/about Latin America: The Challenge of Cultural Studies) offered essays that delved into a number of the central polemics facing the field since the 1980s. The second volume, *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Ana Del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo, offered English readers the first comprehensive collection of major Latin American cultural studies essays. Trigo's introduction to the volume made clear the critical intervention that had also shaped the project. One goal of the collection was to "map out, from a critical perspective, the concrete sociohistorical and geopolitical circumstances as well as the specific problems and the relevant polemics that make up the field in dialogue and in contest with other theoretical and critical discourses" (1). Thus, in addition to a selection of core readings, the volume offers critical introductions to each section by the editors that analyze the project of Latin American cultural studies. And the third volume, *Diccionario de estudios culturales latinoamericanos*, edited by Mónica Szurmuk and Robert McKee Irwin, was a binational project between Mexico and the United States that attempted to offer to a Spanish-reading, primarily Mexican audience a useful taxonomy of key words particular to Latin American cultural studies. The first of these volumes was certainly the most theoretical of the interventions, but all three shared a commitment to surveying the field while also interrogating its limits.

I have given a snapshot of these three volumes in order to show that Latin American cultural studies continues to be a field of work

driven by ongoing polemics that revolve around the urge to identify the ways that such scholarship can be a part of meaningful political intellectual activity. It would be safe to say that Latin American cultural studies is unthinkable apart from Latin American Left intellectual work. But if we take for granted the idea that all cultural studies work, be it British or US or Latin American, stems from Marxist critique, then highlighting the centrality of Left thought for Latin American cultural studies doesn't seem to help frame the specific contours of this line of critical work. If Latin American cultural studies shares a common theme and common goal with its global counterparts, it is precisely to use cultural critique as a way of advancing a Left political agenda. From that common position, though, flows a series of questions and concerns that have driven the field since its first formal instantiations in the 1960s and 1970s: questions of method and subject matter, of the proper place from which to do cultural studies work, and of the type of value it can offer for both critical theory and political activism have been a constant source of dialogue and debate. My goal in this essay is to trace, briefly, some of the key connections between Latin American cultural studies and Left politics to give readers less familiar with this line of work a sense of how these traditions have developed in relation to key historical shifts. The essay then moves to consider some of the current challenges to the Left work of Latin American cultural studies, especially as they are articulated in response to neoliberal forms of capital. One of my key arguments is that Latin American cultural studies, has had to confront the ways in which neoliberalism, as both ideology and economy, necessarily adjusts the ontological frameworks—such as the working class, the subaltern, the nation, the popular, the postcolonial, and *el pueblo* (“the people”)—that have tended to organize Left political resistance. Given the fact that neoliberalism emerged as a force for social restructuring in Latin America at least a decade prior to its appearance in the United States and Europe, some of the insights of Latin American cultural studies scholars might well offer productive critical avenues for cultural studies scholars working outside the Latin American context.

Understanding the current moment in Latin American cultural studies requires recognition that there are effectively two schools of thought on how best to trace the genealogies of cultural studies work in the region: one that focuses on the direct connections between what might be called “official” British cultural studies and its instantiations in Latin America and another that focuses more on cultural studies as a critical practice. We might think of the difference as genealogy

versus methodology. The first, much less common position is the one that traces the specific appearance of Birmingham School and, to a lesser extent, Frankfurt School and Gramscian theories in the region and locates the arrival of these theories roughly in the 1980s (Del Sarto, “The 1980s” 162). As Neil Larsen has written, “As far as I know, cultural studies in its ‘authentic’ form appeared for the first time in Latin America in the decade of the 1980s” (75; my translation). But this narrow view becomes even more muddled when we note that some of the field’s leaders themselves were engaged in the type of work one might call cultural studies well before they self-identified—if they ever did self-identify—as cultural studies practitioners. As García Canclini explained in a 1996 interview, “I became involved in cultural studies before I realized this is what it is called” (“Cultural” 164). Del Sarto suggests, in a move that complicates the genealogy school of thought, that an even more complex question has less to do with the influence (and citation) of Birmingham theories than with the extent to which the practice of Latin American cultural studies can be read in a parallel fashion to the British case (165). The neo- and postcolonial context of Latin America would radically differentiate cultural studies work in the region from the postimperial context of Britain in the 1960s, which was itself undergoing a form of economic and cultural colonization from its former colony, the United States. Anxieties about the commodification of culture, the onslaught of US mass culture, and unprecedented global flows of capital that took place in Britain at the time of the appearance of Birmingham cultural studies might appear to parallel similar worries in Latin America, but such apparent overlaps “cannot be lightly transposed to Latin America” (166). One significant difference that cannot be overlooked is the fact that in Latin America, cultural studies is always imbricated in a far more complex constellation of power structures. While British cultural studies concentrated on the cultures of the working class and reimagined the role of high literature in the construction of a social imaginary, such concerns were accompanied in the Latin American context by, for example, the struggles of indigenous groups. Those struggles were only rarely coupled in Latin America with those of the urban working classes, even though many of the features of their disenfranchisement overlapped. Add to that the structural differences between a postcolonial society and a major world power, and it becomes clear that the Left projects of cultural studies in Latin America and Britain would necessarily differ.

In terms of US cultural studies, yet another distinction that marks a fundamental difference between the fields is the way in which cultural studies was institutionalized relatively quickly, losing much of the political incisiveness of the Birmingham project. In contrast, in Latin America, cultural studies was always already a far more aggressively political project than its US iteration. This is so because it was conceptually inseparable from the ongoing resistance to the legacies of colonialism—the crisis of representation within and across nations and the entrenchment of massive inequities and injustices both within the region and vis-à-vis its colonial and neocolonial context—and was also responsive to the pervasive sense of urgency that shaped most Left intellectual work. To appreciate this context, it is necessary to factor in the second, more common narrative of cultural studies in the region—the one that largely maps its appearance according to the genealogies of Latin American critical thought. Most Latin Americanists would argue that cultural studies work in and on the region predates both the Frankfurt and the Birmingham schools. As Ríos explains, what we now call Latin American cultural studies had its origins in the tradition of the Latin American critical essay, which from the 1820s—the post-Independence period—to the 1960s revolved around interrogating “five cognitive constellations: neocolonialism, modernity and modernization, the national question, the popular, and identities/alterities/ethnicities” (15). That said, the 1960s and 1970s were an especially intense time for Latin American intellectual and artistic work, much of which exhibited critical practices that one might describe as “cultural studies.” In addition to the social and political movements of the time, not the least of which was the Cuban Revolution of 1959, a series of artistic and intellectual interventions erupted during this period: Brazilian Paulo Friere’s pedagogy of the oppressed, Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart’s scathing analysis of US cultural imperialism in Chile via Disney comics, and the development of dependency theory that accompanied the Latin American literary boom, the new song movement, the New Latin American cinema, and the first publications of *testimonios*.²

From the perspective of remapping this history, it is useful to note that the major innovations of cultural studies in the United States and Britain were tempered in the Latin American context by the fact that there really never was any question that culture *mattered*. And here “culture” referred to a range of practices, from highbrow boom literature to mass media as well as popular and folk forms. Since the

moment of the conquest, there has been an intellectual tradition dedicated to analyzing the role that culture plays in both resistance and repression. At the center of cultural studies thought about the region is an ongoing concern with cultural imperialism, with the problem of autochthonous and especially indigenous culture, with the legacies of colonial languages and social structures and their influence on ways of thinking, and ultimately with the problem of how to create oppositional culture using the tools of the master (i.e., the hegemonic West). What changes in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s is an emphasis on the study of ideology and superstructure, increasing attention to the media and other forms of mass culture, a utopian faith in *el pueblo* and its culture, and an intense reconsideration of the aesthetics of revolutionary art via readings of the Frankfurt School and Louis Althusser. The role of Gramscian thought and the crossing of disciplinary boundaries that were also hallmarks of cultural studies in the United States and Britain would be less visibly influential in Latin America in large part because similar ideas had already taken hold through the work of intellectuals like José Carlos Mariátegui, who is often considered the Latin American Gramsci, even though they were contemporaries, and Fernando Ortiz, who developed the idea of transculturation. Such work was later enhanced by that of Roberto Fernández Retamar, whose theory of revolutionary society as Calibanesque would become essential to ideas about postcolonial cultural resistance, and Antonio Cornejo Polar, who developed the notion of cultural heterogeneity.

It would not be until the 1980s and 1990s that the US academy and Latin American intellectuals would really begin a dialogue in terms of cultural studies and in tandem with debates about the applicability of postmodern and postcolonial theories in the region. This period was marked by the influence of Indian subaltern studies on a core group of Latin Americanists, among them John Beverley and Ileana Rodríguez, who founded the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group in 1992. The group's "Founding Statement," which appeared in *boundary 2*, explained that their goal was to attack "the limits of elite historiography in relation to the subaltern" (112). Thus begins the era when Latin American cultural studies becomes inseparable from subaltern and postcolonial studies.

As Trigo notes, this period is noteworthy also because cultural studies of the region shifts its locus of activity from Latin America to the United States ("The 1990s" 347). The fall of the Berlin Wall, the

intensification of neoliberal economic policies, especially in the United States, and the era of *high* postmodernism dovetailed with massive institutional support for Latin American studies in US academies. Beverley's *Against Literature* sparked a wave of research on *testimonios*, subaltern studies, and other forms of "popular culture," and volumes like George Yúdice, Jean Franco, and Juan Flores's *On Edge* set a new trend for research on the ties between culture and the state. In this period, Latin American cultural studies as it was practiced in US institutions began to influence the work of non-Latin Americanists to an unprecedented degree. It is worth remembering the canon debates that took place when Stanford altered its "great books" class in 1988 to include the possibility of reading Guatemalan Rigoberta Menchú's testimonial; or recall the massive rise in border studies—where borders were both territorial and ideological—that was influenced by the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa and other Latino studies scholars. Theories of multiculturalism, of the popular, of postcolonialism, of cultural hybridity and contact zones, and of post-three-worlds-theory geopolitics were all intensely affected by the innovations of Latin American cultural studies.

During this period, the practice of US scholars' setting critical trends for Latin American cultural studies soon became interregional, when García Canclini, Nelly Richard, and Beatriz Sarlo's work in Latin America began to establish key critical paradigms in the field. Richard's *Revista de crítica cultural*, which she began publishing in Santiago in 1990, became one of the leading journals of the field, with regular contributions by scholars working in Latin America and the United States. García Canclini's *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (*Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, 1990 [2005]) and his *Consumidores y ciudadanos: Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* (*Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts*), 1995 [2001]) merged sociology, anthropology, and Left cultural theory in ways that would have a profound influence on the field, especially via his theory of hybrid cultures where hybridity marked temporal as well as ontological cultural contact. Sarlo, like Richard, combined cultural studies with postmodern theory, applying these perspectives to an increasingly mass-mediated Argentine society. Her *Escenas de la vida posmoderna: Intelectuales, arte, y videocultura en la Argentina* (*Scenes from a Postmodern Life*, 1994 [2001]) would establish trends for the analysis of mass culture in the region.

The critical boom in Latin American cultural studies of the 1990s quickly took the form of heated debate, with many of the earlier proponents of cultural studies distancing themselves from a practice that they felt had become methodologically sloppy and politically problematic (Trigo, “The 1990s” 363). At the core of these conflicts was the concern that these new critical trends had again attempted to produce a “technology of knowledge” about Latin America for the benefit of the US academy (*ibid.*). And scholars like Walter Mignolo argued that even “the idea of Latin America” was itself the legacy of colonialist epistemes, that it was not “discovered, but invented” (xix). Trigo explains that a number of scholars working in Latin America “adopted a defensive stance, denouncing the inequality in the transnational distribution of theoretical labor, the reification of Latin America as object of study, and the banality of a critical production less concerned with the pursuit of knowledge than with the seizing of power” (363). Much was made, for instance, of the fact that this new Latin American cultural studies often neglected the intellectual history of Latin America and imported Western theory in order to apply it to Latin American contexts. On the other side of this debate were accusations of essentialism, since any effort to trace a lineage of Latin American thought was suspected of retrograde and potentially reactionary tendencies. It is worth remembering that this was the moment of “postnationalism” in the US academy, and any gesture toward authenticity or nationalism or regionalism was often criticized as a return to the oppressive epistemic structures of the enlightenment.

Following the 1990s, the next wave of work encountered the challenges that stemmed from the increased institutionalization of Latin American cultural studies as students began entering programs and acquiring degrees in the field both in the United States and in Latin America. In 2003, Richard worried at the moment of founding a master’s degree in cultural studies in Chile that the growth in degree programs and institutional spaces for this type of work had created “an overly bureaucratized version of cultural studies that seeks a satisfying equivalence between the governability of politics, the administration of the social, the maneuverability of the cultural, and the applicability of knowledges” (445; my translation). What would be the critical cost, Richard asked, of taking a field that had been on the margins of academic work and giving it an institutional home?

This brings me to the question with which I framed this essay: What’s left for Latin American cultural studies? First, as I hope to have sketched out by now, the Left project in Latin America is always

confronting a series of battles that stem principally from the region's specific conditions of postcoloniality. Slight lines, then, between Indian subaltern studies, between working class studies, indigenous studies, ethnic studies, and mass culture studies exist, but any effort to map the ways in which these issues circulate in Latin America will always have to balance between common struggles and divergent contexts. One of the most significant questions that has been taken up by Latin American cultural studies scholars is the question of the actual constituency that frames Left politics. Who makes up *el pueblo*, and what is the popular? As Jon Beasley-Murray has argued, Latin American cultural studies is paradigmatically populist, and its populism constitutes its political limitations (149). The answer, he suggests, is to move away from the populism model toward one that reconfigures the collective subject in keeping with Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's concept of the multitude. The postmodern multitude suggests a radically different organizational structure from that of modernism's *el pueblo*, he explains, and it allows for a better understanding of how the state produces *el pueblo*.

Beasley-Murray's piece builds on the work of subaltern studies, which also attempted to reconfigure the ways in which political projects understood the construction of repressed social groups. In that work the subaltern was always that which could not be represented, for once representation took place meaningfully, the subject was no longer subaltern. But what is most important to remember here is the fact that subaltern studies was very much a project that originated in a moment when the Latin American Left was in crisis. The blow that defined much Left scholarship during this period was the repression of the Nicaraguan revolution and the recognition that the sorts of struggles that had been waged there were no longer a useful model for future political action. As Beverley explains in *Subalternity and Representation*, part of the impulse for Latin American subaltern studies was the sense that nationalism had been exhausted as a viable platform from which to organize political change (6). The colonial and national periods had given way to the era of neoliberalism, an economic strategy that would forever change the function of the state and the ideological force of the nation. With neoliberalism comes deregulation, privatization, and the cult of the market. While it may have often been the case that in Latin America the rights of the market had trumped the rights of the citizen, there had still been a long tradition of constructing semiprotectionist national economies. Thus the market shifts of neoliberalism brought with them radical adjustments

in the connection between the state and its population. As argued by Gareth Williams in *The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America*, the response to those shifts then required a reformulation of the space of the masses, the popular, and *el pueblo*, since it no longer made sense to imagine national antidotes to economic programs that operated cross-nationally with a force not seen in centuries, if ever.

While some scholars, like those of the subaltern studies group, felt that one way to address the Left crisis caused by these changes was to look at how the subaltern had been represented and how technologies of academic knowledge had produced the very inequities they purported to address, others grew immensely frustrated by what appeared at times to be an obsession with representation—an obsession that ignored actually existing political realities. Larsen claimed, in contrast to theories of post-nationalism, that the nation remained an essential space from which to think political struggle, and he suggested that the overemphasis on representation—especially in relation to the subaltern—had muddied the possibility of thinking through the connections among culture, society, and Left politics (see *Determinations*). What the interventions of Beasley-Murray, Beverley, Williams, and Larsen have in common, though, is the idea that the future of Left work on Latin American culture requires rethinking the idea of the popular and *el pueblo*, since the idealized ideas of these groups that had come out of 1960s struggles no longer applied in the context of the 1990s and after.

If the Left—as an idea and as a practice—is a moving target in the region, then the idea of what is left for the Left work of cultural studies in the region is even more so. One thing seems clear in the range of recent work that takes up the question of how culture creates the ideological spaces through which and in response to which Left politics can be staged and can be squelched: the transition to neoliberal capitalism, where everything in society is assessed according to the market, demands entirely new frameworks through which to think of political resistance. Latin America has been living with neoliberalism since the 1970s, and it provides a base from which to observe, analyze, and critique the ways that free market fundamentalism alters the frameworks through which we consider political action. As Latin Americanists well know, the history of neoliberalism and of the practices associated with the “Washington consensus” begin in Chile under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet and the “other” 9/11. Scholars who study neoliberalism today in the United States and

Europe can gain insight from their counterparts working on Latin America who have known for some time that neoliberalism is as much an ideology as it is an economy. Neoliberalism depends on destroying the notion of the civic subject, and it advances a particular form of economic despotism that is unchained to geographic territories. Its ideological force, though, comes when its visions of disposability—in terms of goods, resources, and people—become taken for granted in everyday life.

Neoliberalism in the region has offered particular challenges to cultural studies scholars, since deregulation and privatization have substantially altered the spaces within which mass media flows. Most countries in Latin America, for instance, no longer have film quota systems to protect national cinema, and deregulation has greatly affected radio and television as well. A significant consequence of these changes has been the argument by media scholars like Jesús Martín Barbero that the actual source of a cultural product consumed in Latin America is of less interest than how the product is mediated by the audience and transformed. Meanwhile the country-specific search-engine functions of Google contrast the use of the Internet by the Zapatistas in Mexico and call for new approaches to the open-access and transnational cultural spaces opened up by the World Wide Web. Globally networked indigenous activism also offers entirely new ways to think about the connections between the local and the global.

Yet another productive avenue of critical engagement has been the linking of the punishing forms of the state with the demands of neoliberalism. Innovative work from scholars like Diana Taylor analyzed the performance of punishment during the dictatorship in Argentina (1976–1983) that took place both on stage in plays and on the public stage in everyday life. This work has translated into recent analyses of neoliberalism in the United States in the post-9/11 moment. One of the best examples of this trend is the analysis in Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*, a book that argues that neoliberalism depends on the “shock doctrine”—on linking a disaster and the resulting collective shock it causes to the introduction of economic policies that are friendly to the market and hostile to civil liberties and state protections. The practices of what Klein calls “disaster capitalism” became clear for many in the United States after 9/11/2001, but as her work shows, Latin America had experienced these shocks well before, notably on 9/11/1973, when socialist president Salvador Allende was overthrown by Augusto Pinochet in a military coup. The increasing visibility of the neoliberal state as a source of punishment, population control, and

policing has also led to a growth in theories of Latin American biopolitics, influenced by the work of Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben. A recent example of this line of research is Hermann Herlinghaus's *Violence without Guilt: Ethical Narratives from the Global South*, which studies such forms as the *narcocorrido*—border songs about narco-trafficking—to suggest that they offer a revised representation of the biopolitics of the border.

I'd like to close my thoughts on Latin American cultural studies and what's "left" for it by suggesting that the next phase of work is likely to take up the boom of Left governments in the region, all of which entered via a democratic process. As the overt and covert US military influence in the region gave way to "dollar diplomacy," a number of Latin American nations found themselves led by governments that self-identified as left or socialist. Venezuela, Brazil, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina, and Cuba became part of the "pink tide" of the twenty-first century socialism movement. While the actually existing Left politics of these governments has been analyzed and critiqued, and while not all of these governments were able to remain in power, it remains clear that this is an unprecedented moment for Left politics. Never before have so many countries in the region been led by governments on the Left, and never before have so many countries in the global south been led by Left governments that came to power peacefully. The institutionalization of the Left that has taken place during these administrations will likely be one of the main areas of focus for future work on Latin American cultural studies. What remains clear, though, is that the images of guerrillas rising up in arms is now nothing more than a bourgeois fantasy used to sell posters of Che Guevara.³ The currently existing forms of political activism have taken on new modes of organization that no longer track to the idealized ideas of indigenous resistance movements and guerrilla groups, and they no longer take place wholly within the nation-state. These transformations call for new ways to engage the power imbalances that stem from neoliberal free-market practices, which themselves have restructured the idea of the state's subjects. In an era of change for the Left—when Left groups have public sites on the Web and Left leaders from the region are actually heads of state—one thing remains the same: Latin American cultural studies will continue to be guided by polemics, internal debates, fashionable trends, and a permanent desire to create new forms of academic knowledge and new modes of critique capable of advancing an ever-changing, constantly in question Left project.

Notes

1. Some of the ideas developed here were expressed in earlier form in my essay “Cultural Studies and ‘Latin America’: Reframing the Questions.”
2. Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogía del oprimido* (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) was published in 1970, and Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattlert’s *Para leer al pato Donald* (*How to Read Donald Duck*) was published in 1971. Argentine Raúl Prebisch’s dependency theory was developed in the 1950s, but the theory continued to be advanced well into the 1960s and 1970s. Key works of the Latin American literary boom were *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) in 1967 and Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*) in 1963. Influential leaders of the new song movement were Violeta Parra, Víctor Jara, and Mercedes Sosa. Their music became an essential part of many Left political movements across the region. Highlights of the New Latin American cinema included Brazilian Glauber Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God, White Devil*) in 1964 and Cuban Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (*Memories of Underdevelopment*) in 1968. Also during this period of intense cultural creativity one of the first major testimonials was published: Cuban Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un cimarrón* (*Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*) in 1966.
3. The commodification of the guerrilla image has even been mocked by Subcomandante Marcos himself, who jokingly plays with his own figure as a masked avenger of justice.

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