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Javier García Liendo. El intelectual y la cultura de masas. Argumentos latinoamericanos en torno a Ángel Rama y José María Arguedas. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2017.

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Abstract

Review of Javier García Liendo. *El intelectual y la cultura de masas. Argumentos latinoamericanos en torno a Ángel Rama y José María Arguedas*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2017.

Keywords

Intellectuals, mass culture, Latin America, capitalism, Ángel Rama, José María Arguedas

Javier García Liendo. *El intelectual y la cultura de masas. Argumentos latinoamericanos en torno a Ángel Rama y José María Arguedas*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2017. xiv + 243 pp.

Javier García Liendo's best accomplishment in *El intelectual y la cultura de masas* is his emphasis on capitalism as a force that transformed the means and distribution of culture and, therefore, the limits and possibilities of the intellectual as a public voice and organizer of society and culture during the second half of the twentieth century. Capitalism, however, is not a unifying force, but a common socio-historic ground that developed unevenly in Latin America, according to the degree and nature of industrialization based on demographics, geographies, and industries. Within this framework, García Liendo evaluates the cultural endeavors of two seemingly dissimilar figures, José María Arguedas and Ángel Rama, and shows the common threads between them: their interest in, as well as both optimism and anguish towards, the transformation of a lettered and popular culture to a society permeated by the dynamics of mass culture. Throughout the book, the reader learns of a common paradox in their intellectual trajectory: how cultural promoters and intellectuals can use the inner workings of the cultural apparatus to produce a heterogeneous common culture within the landscape of the nation (Peru, Uruguay) and/or Latin America.

The introduction opens with well-crafted anecdotes about Arguedas' and Rama's encounters with massive audiences, laying out the theoretical framework for the subsequent analysis in the following four chapters. Aware of the dense archeology and polysemous nature of concepts such as mass culture, cultural space, intellectual practice, and intellectual (as a cultural organizer), García Liendo carefully delimits his use of these terms. For instance, mass culture is a phenomenon understood in terms of reception, production, and communication, in which culture is a commodity and industrial product aimed at reaching larger audiences and creating social imaginaries and cultural communities. While it might have been more logical for García Liendo to combine the introduction and chapter 1, using the anecdotes of the former to develop the use of the concepts in the latter, the division may be explained by an intent to give the non-specialist reader a better understanding of the theoretical, historical, and regional scope of the book. Given the nature of his project, García Liendo incorporates the vast corpus of the Marxist archive in studies about culture, intellectuals, and capitalism (e.g. Gramsci, Benjamin). In fact, Gramsci's hegemony serves as one of the principal narratives of the book because Arguedas and Rama, as the author states, sought to take advantage of the production of mass culture within the spheres of the market and the state. In doing so, they aimed to create cultural materials and social imaginaries that counterpoise the hegemonic and stratified colonial view historically characteristic of Latin America.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on Rama's publishing practices while re-reading his classic work *The Lettered City*, originally published in 1984. García Liendo analyzes Rama's ideas as they shaped two of his publishing endeavors in the 1960s in Uruguay, the publisher *Arca* ('Ark'), and the feuilleton *La Enciclopedia Uruguaya* ('The Uruguayan Encyclopedia'). According to the author, Rama saw the increasing distribution and consumption of print culture during the first half of the twentieth century as a contributing factor in the creation of a popular culture without the input of intellectuals or the State. The increase in literacy and the growth of cultural industries transformed this popular culture into a mass culture. Rama then intervened to introduce the contents of literary and scholarly culture into this mass culture market by creating publishing outlets that de-homogenized cultural, social, and historical narratives. The upshot of these chapters is twofold. First, Rama saw in the dynamics of the market and mass culture an opportunity to expand what was historically an elite cultural audience. Second, García Liendo provides a new reading of Rama's classical work, in which he proposes a process of transformation and interaction between lettered, popular, and mass culture, which Rama did not explicitly articulate.

Chapters 4 and 5 center around Arguedas. García Liendo masterfully uses the expansion of the road infrastructure in Peru as an analogy to highlight the efforts of the promoters of print culture, noting that both served to connect the national geography beginning in the 1910s. For the author, Arguedas saw these changes as an opportunity to modify the hegemonic national discourse, which was articulated around *hispanocriollismo*. He first used print culture for promoting indigenous languages and the cultural traditions and practices known as folklore, creating alternative cultural spaces and stimulating a common popular culture. Yet by the 1960s, the confines between the urban, the Andean, the indigenous, the *criollo*, and the national were reshaping. Roads allowed massive migration from the country and the highlands to the cities—mainly Lima. In this context, Arguedas promoted new technologies and the diffusion of popular music among the migrant communities of the city. The author examines how Arguedas saw in this popular/mass culture, known as *lo cholo*, a locus in which technology, capitalism, and Andean music could produce a counter-hegemony to *hispanocriollismo*. The fifth chapter closes by arguing that Arguedas's optimism was complemented by his pessimistic observations that this same system caused poverty and misery in these communities.

García Liendo's approach exemplifies a trend in Latin American studies that re-evaluates intellectual and literary figures in light of capitalism and its dynamics of representation, production, and distribution of culture. Some of the best insights of the book come when the author presents short but perceptive parallels between Arguedas and Rama and other intellectuals in Latin America who sought to take advantage or shape the dynamics of mass culture. The book does a

terrific job of using Latin America as a historical horizon to analyze the dynamics between mass culture and intellectuals, rather than conceiving of it as a defined object of study. Furthermore, *El intelectual y la cultura de masas* avoids the risk of falling into a binary framework (market-state, nation-Latin America). Instead, the author shows how the study and analysis of intellectual and cultural work are subjected to the changes and nuances of social, economic, historic, and cultural processes. The book closes by glossing two questions. How do cultural critics periodize culture? How can cultural critics and historians delimit intellectual work? These two questions not only signal a possible future for the study of mass culture and intellectual work in Latin America, but also summarize the work the author has already accomplished with regards to Arguedas and Rama.

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