

Cultural Studies and Community in Latin@america
a symposium
University of California, Davis/Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
October 15-16, 2009

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In conjunction with the Latin@american Cultural Studies Research Cluster at UC Davis

We respectfully submit this proposal for a UCHRI seminar grant in the amount of \$5000 for a symposium on Latin@ American Cultural Studies and its links to civil society and social activism to be held at the University of California, Davis in mid-October 2009. The symposium will bring together scholars from across the University of California and a group of prominent Latin American intellectuals who have been at the forefront of theoretical reflection on Latin@american Cultural Studies or who have been instrumental in institutionalizing Cultural Studies programs throughout the region. It seeks to open a dialogue about how these scholars have challenged and continue to challenge traditional academic boundaries in order to foment concrete societal change and political action, as well as to foster channels of communication between north and south that will continue to flourish through future events and conversations.

The symposium is an initiative of the UC Davis Latin@american Cultural Studies Research Cluster, which was recently chosen as a “supercluster” in a competitive process by the Davis Humanities Institute. As a supercluster, the DHI has awarded \$4000 in funding in addition to its annual allotment of \$1250 (from the DHI and UCD’s Hemispheric Institute on the Americas) for the organization of this symposium. Other co-sponsorships are listed in the proposed budget at the end of this document.

The research cluster focuses on the interdisciplinary field of Latin@american Cultural Studies, and specifically on contemporary critical debates and new research by scholars working on Chican@/Latin@ and/or Latin American cultural studies in the humanities and social sciences. In the tradition of Latin@american cultural studies, the cluster focuses on issues of political expediency and on power relations within the cultural sphere, topics related to gender and race, and work by women and indigenous peoples. Other themes of analysis include migration, subaltern knowledges, cultural industries, globalization, bilingualism, iconography, memory, and cultural policy. The cluster approaches its topic through a transamerican perspective, and seeks ways to concretely connect academic work with political struggles.

Full Description of the Symposium

Cultural studies has in recent years not only become the dominant paradigm of scholarly inquiry in most disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, but also has been establishing, at a rapid pace, its own institutional spaces in the form of graduate programs, book series, conferences and colloquia, dedicated journals, etc. in Latin

America and within the realm of Latin American and Latin@ studies in the United States (and beyond: Canada, Europe, Australia, etc.). Latin American cultural studies, an inherently transnational phenomenon, has been particularly sensitive to debates on hierarchies of knowledge that privilege metropolitan academic institutions (English language scholarship in particular) over those of Latin America. The field has also engaged in sometimes strident debates about how to maintain the leftist political underpinnings of the cultural studies project, which for some risks becoming a mere manifestation of academic consumerism. Subaltern knowledges and collaborative engagement with social movements, community organizations and civil society have been key subjects of debate. In a much cited essay published in 2003, Daniel Mato argued against conforming to the institutional rubric of cultural studies, positing a separate, more politically engaged and community oriented project that he called “Latin American intellectual practices in culture and power,” which would resist conforming to the demands of the academy.

Five years later, the field of cultural studies in Latin America has gone through a rapid process of institutionalization, with new graduate programs taking shape all over the continent (most prominently in Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Ecuador and Mexico), the graduate program in cultural studies of the Universidad Javeriana being emblematic of the trend. Pioneering graduate programs in cultural studies in the United States (and elsewhere), such as the PhD program at UC Davis, have also begun training Latin Americanists in cultural studies theory and methodologies. Institutionalization requires a conformance to academic structures that traditionally present themselves as apolitical and objectively disinterested, in contrast with the leftist politics and subjective commitment that often ground cultural studies research. Students in these pioneering programs are confused by competing pressures of political urgency and professional expediency that force them to seek an ethical balance that may not be attainable. This accelerated institutionalization, and the transformations it is causing in the formation of the first generation of formally trained cultural studies scholars in Latin America, calls for a revisiting of the debates of 2003.

This symposium, hosted simultaneously by videoconference by the University of California, Davis and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá, will bring together some of the most prominent figures in the debates on Latin American cultural studies and its relationship with civil society to discuss the following questions:

- How can Latin@american cultural studies form productive collaborative alliances with civil society from institutional spaces?
- How can Latin Americanists combine rigorous cultural studies scholarship with social activism?
- How can institutional spaces be used to promote the agendas of social movements and community organizations?
- How can Latin@american cultural studies incorporate subaltern knowledges into the mainstream of the field’s canon of theory and criticism?
- What kind of pedagogical opportunities are presented by the institutionalization of Latin@american cultural studies?

- What strategies of publication and dissemination of scholarly work are most appropriate for collaboration and dialogue beyond the limits of the academy?
- How can the cultural studies facilitate cultural agency in subaltern communities?
- What is the role of the public intellectual in contemporary Latin American culture?

Participation

Among the international scholars we hope to have participate in the symposium are: Daniel Mato (Universidad Central de Venezuela), Nelly Richard (Universidad de Artes y Ciencias Sociales, Santiago), Beatriz Sarlo (Universidad de Buenos Aires), Rossana Reguillo (Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Oriete, Guadalajara), Catherine Walsh (Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito), Víctor Vich (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú), Heloísa Buarque de Holanda (Universidade Federal de Rio de Janeiro), Eduardo Restrepo (Pontificia Universidad Javeriana), and Jesús Martín Barbero (Universidad Nacional de Colombia).

We also plan to involve multiple UC campuses in the event by inviting participants from across the system. These may include: Juan Poblete (University of California, Santa Cruz), Horacio Legras (University of California, Irvine), Francine Masiello (University of California, Berkeley), Chela Sandoval (University of California, Santa Barbara), Marisol de la Cadena (University of California, Davis), Norma Klahn (University of California, Santa Cruz), José Rabasa (University of California, Berkeley), and Angie Chabram Dernerseian (University of California, Davis).

Other scholars will participate in Bogotá: Chloe Rutter (Universidad de los Andes), Marta Cabrera (Universidad Javeriana), Juan Carlos Segura (Universidad Javeriana), Francisco Ortega (Universidad Nacional), Susana Wapperstein (Universidad de los Andes)

While all of these scholars work within the inherently interdisciplinary rubric of cultural studies, their backgrounds are diverse both in terms of their doctoral degrees and their departmental affiliations: Spanish, Anthropology, Chicano/a Studies, Communications, Philosophy, Comparative Literature, etc.

We hope to attract large audiences in both Davis and Bogotá and to open a *true* dialogue among the participants and audiences gathered in both spaces. Symbolically, the dual location of the symposium illustrates the bridging of north and south that we seek to foster and discuss. In fall 2008, Professor Irwin co-taught a graduate seminar at UC Davis with Professor Marta Cabrera of the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá. The seminar took place via videoconference, with groups of students in each location. Moreover, the Davis Humanities Institute used videoconferencing technology on a large scale in its February 2008 conference “Beyond the Book: Humanities Scholarship in a Digital Age,” and has agreed to assist with this aspect of our symposium. Consequently, the technology to carry out our event is already in place, as is a formalized collaborative exchange between UC Davis and the Javeriana. (As a side note and an indicator of this

collaboration, the Latin@american Cultural Studies Research Cluster was awarded a Seed Grant from UCD's Office of International Programs with which it was able to send six UC graduate students to present their research at a graduate student symposium at the Javeriana in September 2008.) Some panels will take place in Davis, others in Bogotá. Videoconferencing will allow face to face interactions that would not otherwise be possible and will facilitate fruitful interchanges among participants and audience members in both locations.

Additionally, we plan to publish the proceedings of the symposium in *Tábula Rasa*, a journal published by the Universidad Colegio Mayor de Cundinamarca in Bogotá. This peer reviewed journal, published semiannually and indexed in numerous major international systems, is available online in open access format, and therefore will allow for an extensive international distribution. Publishing in such a venue will make the proceedings of this event available to a wider community of scholars and activists interested in the topic. Our hope is that the publication will become an important reference that will have transformative effects on pedagogy and wider conversations about Latin@american cultural studies.

Goals for the UC

There are several goals particular to the UC that we would like to attain by means of this symposium:

- 1) in the short term, the members of the Latin@american Cultural Studies Research Cluster (UC Davis) wish to think through and discuss issues that are central to our field in order to better inform our own research projects and establish networks with colleagues interested in similar issues across the UC system
- 2) we wish also to assemble key players in the field in order to generate a focused discussion among UC scholars and their international colleagues
- 3) we plan to publish the proceedings of the event in open access format in order to make the material of discussion available to all interested scholars in the field, and to publicize its publication widely
- 4) we aim to generally fortify UC's connections with the Latin American academy in terms of future opportunities for collaboration and exchange with Latin American universities, particularly in the area of cultural studies
- 5) through these activities, we hope to establish UC's reputation as a major player in the international dialogue on Latin@american cultural studies
- 6) we also hope to use this forum to establish a more central presence of Latin American thinking within the context of cultural studies at UC Davis as a first step toward a long term goal of enhancing UCD's graduate program in cultural studies by giving it a more international profile, in terms of both its student population and its course content