

In her essay on Guatemala's apparel industry, Thomas pulls together two projects, one exploring the "pirates" criminalized by Guatemala's participation in international Intellectual Property law, the other project an historical development of a highland garment producer and household industries. Clothes are deeply wrapped up in Guatemalans' sense of modernity, and those "pirates" who re-produce internationally recognized brands create clothing craved by Guatemalans. The "pirates" also tend to be fairly small-scale producers, hardly international gang members of intellectual property rights scofflaws. In fact, in neoliberal Tecpan, they are among the least mobile producers in terms of securing their profit margins in the space of modernity, Guatemala City; only those more capitalized producers can deliver their goods to wholesalers who provide the services that make for financial security, and avoid the physical and fiscal risks of other Guatemala City or highland "Indian" markets.

The last essay focuses on the charity work of Guatemala City's neo-Pentecostal megachurch *El Shaddai*, and the decision to orient its gift-giving to the rural Maya and not to the urban (and much closer at hand) poor. O'Neill analyzes the church's printed materials and some interviews to demonstrate how its members Biblically and spatially rationalize gift-giving and differentiation to create a deserving poor and an unredeemable urban delinquency.

The volume speaks to the specificities of Guatemala's situation, but more importantly, to all places around the globe where a universally perceived decrease in personal and community security has resulted, not in a sustained public discussion and response, but rather privatization and/or vigilante responses to securing security.

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FLORENCIA GARRAMUÑO: *Primitive Modernities: Tango, Samba, and Nation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.

How is it that tango and samba succeeded in overcoming their modest beginnings to finally achieve national recognition and become symbols of their countries? The answer that Florencia Garramuño offers in her book *Primitive Modernities* is twofold: on the one hand, the taste of the elites moved towards these popular genres, becoming (relatively) more plebeian; on the other hand, these genres became progressively "more sophisticated and polished" (p. 22) until they eventually garnered the aura of prestige associated with the "civilized" world.

But this is just the starting point for a study that ultimately aims to investigate and clarify the fascinating convergences between the ideas of the primitive and the

modern in Argentina and Brazil during the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, it is against such a backdrop that the author interprets the rise of tango and samba—musical genres that long carried the stigma of the primitive, but gradually adopted the sign of the modern upon rising to the national stage. Garramuño argues that this process, far from removing the traces of the primitive, involved a substantial change in the perception and estimation of the primitive itself. Sharing the same fate as these genres, the primitive left behind the negative connotations of backwardness and provincialism, replacing them with ones of progress and cosmopolitanism that would eventually impact the ways in which the national cultures of Argentina and Brazil were conceived. Hence the “paradox”—as the author calls it—of a “primitive modernity” that is marked by the sign of exoticism. For in these two countries the exotic (in the sense of the foreign and exuberant) became somehow integrated into the very idea of the nation, leading to a relationship with the autochthonous dominated by two attitudes: one that “gazes with puzzled eyes on its own country and tends to position the subject as an eternal exile” and “another, more constructive attitude that would prefer to erect pantheons and found cultural nationalities upon the supposed desert or jungle of one’s national culture” (p. 36).

In order to explain this complex relation of distance and closeness, Garramuño turns to an impressive repertoire of sources that includes, among others, the two Andrades, Jorge Luis Borges and Leopoldo Lugones, the films of Carmen Miranda and Carlos Gardel, the paintings of Tarsila do Amaral and Emilio Pettoruti, and the novels of Marques Rebelo and Manuel Gálvez. It is here, in this recognition of the fluidity of exchanges between elite and popular culture, that lies one of the book’s main strengths, since, as the author notes, “in the passages and thresholds between different cultural forms—literature, music, popular expressions, film, visual arts—problems are revealed that cut across each form and allow scrutiny of the processes of nationalization and modernization in relation to a Latin American culture in the very materiality of its discourses, its dialogues, and its polemics” (p. 8). But a useful complement to this broad cultural perspective would have been a theoretical framework that could orient the reader in this particularly difficult conceptual territory, replete as it is with equivocal terms, elusive meanings, and contentious interpretations.

It is therefore unfortunate that Garramuño fails to lay out clear definitions, choosing instead to accumulate a series of circumstantial usages. Thus, depending on the circumstances, “modernity” in her book means European, civilized, urban, new, avant-garde, future-oriented, and even fashionable. Moreover, and despite being fully aware of the differences between the concepts of modernity, modernization, and modernism, she chooses not to discuss them systematically. (Occasionally, she resorts to the convention, so popular of late, to replace those

terms with the adjectival noun “the modern,” which only serves to facilitate leaps from one realm of meaning to another.)

It could be argued that this decision is anything but arbitrary since, in the end, all the meanings listed above were typically mingled in the imaginations of artists and intellectuals, and were certainly confused in those of the general public. Nevertheless, a theoretical framework acknowledging the differences between ordinary and technical uses would have permitted us to better grasp the implications of those primitive modernities that the book sets out to explore. Without such a guide, the investigation opens in multiple directions without arriving at any port other than to reiterate the original thesis, namely, that in all the works examined a condensation of the primitive and the modern takes place. To say, for example, that the originality of Pettoruti’s paintings resides in its combination of primitive national symbols (the accordion, the tango dancer) with modern painting techniques (i.e. avant-garde techniques) (pp. 69-70) is almost anodyne, much as it is to say that tango’s modernity is confirmed by its inclusion in a soap advertisement, “a product typically associated with modernity” (p. 22).

Where the book escapes these circular paths is in its assertion that the Latin American uses of the primitive pointed to the project of an alternative modernity: “The transformation of the meanings of the primitive and its progressive association with modern traits, the contingent character of primitivism, and its functionality for a Latin American culture in the midst of constructing a particular modernity is what is read upon reconstructing the network of cultural meanings that were ascribed to tango and to samba” (p. 13). But what were the most prominent features of that “particular modernity” other than its not being European? A new concept of the agency and autonomy of the subject? A new vision of the relationship of man and nature in which the latter is no longer subordinated to the former? We cannot say for sure without a substantial definition of modernity, either from the perspective of the period the book investigates or from the author’s own perspective. What becomes clear, however, is that theorizations of so-called “alternative modernities” are oftentimes less interested in examining the global history of a problematic concept than in seizing the much coveted label of modernity, even at the price of emptying it of any content.

It is perhaps true that modernity has become nowadays an empty signifier. But the challenge is, then, one of reconstructing the history of that process, not repeating it.

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