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*Errant Modernism: The Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil* (review)

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Shell-Weiss also provides important insights about race relations and civil rights issues. In most ways, Miami was a deep South city until the 1950s, when a heavy migration of Jews and others from northern cities began to alter the city's political culture. Thus, race relations remained difficult through the first half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, black professionals founded civil rights organizations that challenged segregation, organized voter registration drives, filed law suits, fought for housing reform, and eventually engaged in nonviolent direct action protests, such as lunchcounter sit-ins. Fair employment was always an issue, especially after the early Cuban migrants provided new competition in the low-wage job market. Miami blacks also protested the disparity in American immigration policy that offered favored treatment to Cuban exiles but refused admission to Haitian "boat people" who began arriving on south Florida beaches in the 1970s. Once again, the author demonstrates how African Americans and black immigrants built community and neighborhood, demanded civil rights, and shaped their own experience.

This book breaks important new ground in its treatment of labor and unionism. Except for some skilled worker AFL unions, such as in the building trades, Miami in its early decades was a tourist town with a large, unorganized workforce concentrated in service industries. By mid-century, however, Miami had developed a more diverse economy, ranging from shipbuilding to food processing and garment manufacture. Shell-Weiss's treatment of union activity in the garment industry demonstrates the difficulties of forging alliances in an ethnically diverse work force composed mostly of women. This problem persisted into late twentieth-century organizing drives among service workers in hotels and health care, where multiethnic cooperation was not always successful.

Shell-Weiss has written a deeply researched book of great substance. It is not a traditional history of twentieth-century Miami, but a focused study of new peoples adjusting to life and creating new lives in a strange and different place. Its strength lies in its concentration on migration, race, ethnicity, gender, and work, subjects that will appeal to readers and scholars in many different fields.

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## CULTURAL & LITERARY STUDIES

*Errant Modernism: The Ethos of Photography in Mexico and Brazil.* By Esther Gabara. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. Pp. xii, 260. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$26.95 paper.

In this work, Esther Gabara provides an innovative interpretation of modernist literary and artistic movements of the 1920s and 1930s in Brazil and Mexico, successfully arguing that their radical aesthetic experimentation and ethical commitment retain their relevance in the vastly changed circumstances of today. The work establishes an elaborate interdisciplinary dialogue between word, image, and context that will be of interest to those working in literary studies, art history, and visual culture for many years to come.

Gabara argues that the specific historical trajectories of Brazil and Mexico require us to redefine concepts such as modernism, postmodernism, and nationalism in order to account for the contributions of writers and artists like Mario de Andrade, Salvador Novo, and Manuel Álvarez Bravo. This makes the work useful for those interested in Latin American studies, while contributing to ongoing theoretical debates about the general applicability of these terms across cultures and contexts. Gabara also breaks new ground by demonstrating how sexuality and gender influenced the experience and representation of modernity in these places. The end result provides a fresh analysis of the creative expressions of canonical figures in Mexico and Brazil, as well as the links between elite and popular culture. According to Gabara, the “resulting modernism has no inside nor outside and does not stay where it ought: it exceeds the purity of the art object, the limitations of elite culture, and the European center that for so long tried to hold an exclusive claim to it” (pp. 259-260).

This is a complex and ambitious work, comparing diverse regions and artistic practices and engaging theoretical vocabularies most familiar to those working in literary studies and art history. Photography is the medium and practice that ties the study together, providing a unique entry to Latin American modernity. According to Gabara, “photographs and the idea of the photographic led artists and writers to produce works that fuse meditations on ethics with experimental aesthetics in what I call the ethos of modernism” (p. 2). This distinctive ethos reveals traces of Latin America’s colonial centuries, including the reinscription of baroque forms of representation and the lingering influence of racial constructs, and emphasizes “ethical self-questioning” (pp. 5-6). These historical legacies and new interpretive strategies inform the experimental practices of avant-garde intellectuals whose creative work redefined “the same genres that have been crucial to modernism internationally: landscape, portraiture, the (photo-) essay, and prose fiction” (p. 9). These interventions result in artifacts that reveal a distinctive history and thus experience of modernity, one that blurs easy divisions between modern and postmodern. The definition of modernity is stretched and redefined to accommodate the heterogeneity of lived experience in Brazil and Mexico, opening up new interpretive possibilities more cognizant of varied regional histories and identities.

Gabara argues that a key component of Latin American modernism is the joining of abstract experimentation with recognition of the world outside the frame. Thus, “Manuel Álvarez Bravo’s photographs, like the prose fiction of his contemporaries, simultaneously compose an internal drama within the photograph out of light and form, and gesture to the tensions of modernity outside the photograph” (p. 11). Mario de Andrade’s landscapes err—an example of the “errant modernisms” of the book’s title—by departing from realism to construct abstract expressions that reveal Brazil’s colonial history and multiple subjectivities. Andrade’s foray into photographic portraiture coincides with the publication of his landmark novel, *Macunaíma* (1928). These artistic expressions reveal a tension between subject and object in Brazilian modernism. The results are “unstable and mobile portraits, not fixed ones,” an indeterminacy that “makes possible a critical nationalism with space for a variety of citizens who occupy circumstances of race (and racial diversity) and sexuality generally not considered part of homogenizing nationalistic discourse” (pp. 110-111). The homosexuality of many leading intellectuals such as Mario de Andrade and Sal-

vador Novo further complicated the construction of national identity in Brazil and Mexico, alongside the emergence of mass culture and the partial erosion of patriarchal norms in the shifting economic circumstances of the 1920s and 1930s.

A short review provides an inadequate forum to assess the contributions of this theoretically complex interdisciplinary work. Gabara successfully demonstrates the inadequacy of prevailing definitions of modernism, postmodernism, and nationalism in light of the actual experiences and artistic interventions found in Brazil and Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. How, then, are these concepts to be reconstructed?

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*On Location in Cuba: Street Filmmaking during Times of Transition.* By Anne M. Stock. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009. Pp. xxiv, 320. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$59.95 cloth; \$21.95 paper.

Whatever happened to Cuban cinema beginning in the 1990s, when the Cuban nation entered into crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union, experiencing what has been termed a Special Period of acute shortages and uncertainties? If we look at the production of the state film institute, ICAIC, then the picture looks gloomy indeed. In 1996, for example, not a single feature film was completed. Add to this the deaths, between 1996 and 2008, of filmmakers whose names are synonymous with the expansive period of Cuban revolutionary cinema: Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Santiago Alvarez, Pastor Vega, Octavio Cortázar, and Humberto Solás. Yet, to chart the demise of Cuban cinema in this way would be, for Anne M. Stock, blind to the new audiovisual cultures and practitioners that have emerged in the past 20 years. In this absorbing, closely documented, refreshingly original, and well-written book, Stock maps a field that will be unknown to most readers and cinema goers, for whom the visibility of a “new” Latin American cinema in recent years has been synonymous with a handful of internationally acclaimed directors from Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil, like Alfonso Cuarón, Guillermo del Toro, Lucrecia Martel, Pablo Trapero, Walter Salles, and Fernando Meirelles.

The study is crafted with the nuance of an insider (the result of some 50 research trips to Cuba over a 20-year period), the perspective of an outsider, attuned to contemporary debates about globalization and transnational cinemas, and the commitment of a cultural bridge builder, looking to increase dialogue and exchange between the United States and Cuba. Certain shared characteristics are seen to define these street filmmakers. They are professionally trained, having completed their studies at the university or in art and film schools. They have found ways of coping with, indeed creatively transforming, the limitations imposed by economic crisis. As Stock explains, they use new lightweight digital cameras and can edit on home computers; they work with minimal budgets, usually in partnership with government and nongovernment institutions on the island and in other countries; and they are committed to experimentation and innovation. The key underlying practice is “resolviendo,” making do, getting by.