Propaedeutic to the Critique of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion: A Polemic against Intellectual Assimilation

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Marx suggérait que, de loin en loin, quelques individus parvenaient à se libérer si complètement des positions qui leur sont assignées dans l’espace social qu’ils pouvaient appréhender cet espace comme un tout et transmettre leur vision à ceux qui sont encore prisonniers de la structure.

Pierre Bourdieu

In his Seminar on *L'éthique de la psychanalyse*, Jacques Lacan draws a distinction between the “knave” and the “fool” as two intellectual types: the right-wing intellectual,” Slavoj Žižek elucidates, “is a knave, a conformist who considers the mere existence of the given order as an argument for it, and mocks the Left for its ‘utopian’ plans, which necessarily lead to catastrophe; while the left-wing intellectual is a fool, a court jester who publicly displays the lie of the existing order, but in a way which suspends the performative efficiency of his speech.” While preparing a response to Miguel Ángel de la Torre’s “Confesiones de un macho cubano,” I was inspired by the “foolishness” of our colleague’s task, namely, to expose how he, as both a Hispanic and an academic, has been complicit with those forms of life that perpetuate intra-Hispanic violence, specifically in the modes of classism, racism, and sexism. In other words, the purpose of our colleague’s “confession” in

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this essay—to use the language of psychoanalysis—is to make manifest what has been repressed, and by so doing, to overcome the real (violence) that lurked behind the symptom (machismo). And this is why you miss the point if you remain fixated on the way our colleagues has constructed and applied his class-gender-race matrix. The virtue of “Confesiones de un macho cubano” is found elsewhere, at a second level of abstraction if you will: De la Torre challenges us to reflect on the ways we, as Hispanics and academics, perpetuate forms of intra-Hispanic violence, both in our communities and our scholarship. U.S. Hispanic theology needs more “fools” like you, de la Torre! We need more scholars that are willing to turn their tools of analysis on themselves, and, through this reflexive gesture, unmask and destabilize the violence that lurks behind our own life-worlds and scholarship.

Given a society dominated by the liberal belief in the possibility of a harmonious “multiculturalism,” a Hispanic community which is too often oblivious to the pernicious forces of assimilation and forms of “intra-Hispanic” violence, and an academy dominated by the pragmatist myth of an integrated community of scholars, it takes the prophetic “foolishness” of a scholar that is willing to step outside the symbolic order, to expose and subvert the logic of hegemony that penetrates U.S. society, our communities, and the academy. What if this quixotic gesture of the dialectic of self-critique was the only authentic act for U.S. Hispanic theologians? What if a radical intellectual de-centering via reflexivity was the only way to ensure that we do not become part of the problem—that we do not become arielistas and/or malinchistas? “Creo que se puede intentar la santa cruzada de ir a rescatar el sepulcro del Caballero de la Locura del poder de los hidalgos de la Razón . . . Lo guardan para que el Caballero no resucite . . .”

The time has come for U.S. Hispanic theologians and scholars of religion to take stock. The time has come for us to systematically reflect on our intellectual genealogies, our projects, publications, our terminology, our interlocutors. The time has come for us to reflect upon the emergence and institutionalization of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion, as well as upon our position in the academy and the academy’s position in U.S. society. As the demographic transition inspires and Hispanics become the largest minority group in the United States, and correlatively, as we Latina/o theologians and scholars of religion increase in number and move toward the center of the academy, it is imperative that we systematically reflect upon where we’ve come from, where we are, and where we are going, lest we lose sight of our liberationist task; lest we become part of the problem. “Nosotros, los de entonces, ya no somos los mismos . . .”

In that spirit, this essay calls for what since the time of Immanuel Kant has been termed critique—that is, a critique of U.S. Hispanic theology and the study of U.S. Hispanic religion. In other words, this essay calls for a reflection on the conditions of possibility for the emergence and transformation of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion. Let me be clear and get to the heart of the matter: critique here is not to be understood as the Kantian, Neo-Kantian, or phenomenological project of reflecting on the conditions of possibility of transcendental categories of thought, morality, or judgment, universal values, cultural forms, linguistic structures, and religious a priori. For we would then be falling captive to the idealism that both Latin American liberation theology and liberation philosophy have warned us about, an idealism that legitimated the interlocked endeavors of the Enlightenment and Conquest-Colonization. Nor is critique here to be understood as the pragmatist project of reflecting on the conditions of possibility of a community of scholars that always reach understanding through certain procedures. For we would then be falling captive to the liberal “integrationist” ideology that so suffuses our lives, the same liberal ideology that legitimated U.S. hegemony in Latin America. This liberal worldview generates what in Hegelese can be called the spurious teologia de conjunto: that is, the vacuous idea of a communitarian theology that is given, already there, in contradistinction to something that emerges only after the life-and-death struggle for recognition has taken place. Rather, critique here, as I am using the term, is to be understood as the critical philosophical and theoretical project of reflecting on the conditions of possibility of a scholarly knowledge and a set of academic practices that are produced in a society suffused with power asymmetries, a society that is always contested and never harmonious, and this holds a fortiori if you are a minority. Understood in this sense, critique is always dialectical, and, for us, it becomes the task of reflecting on the possibilities of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion in light of what historically has been known as the problem of knowledge. Only this understanding of the relationship between knowledge and the real-life

¹ Pablo Neruda, Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada en Obras completas (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1956) 77–78.

² Space permits only a few comments: The insight that all knowledge is socially constituted was first given systematic philosophical form at the end of 19th century through the critique of positivism. Thus emerged the problem of knowledge. Charles Sanders Peirce repudiated the notion that scientific progress was linked to the internal dialectic of methodological principles deduced from the a priori laws of a Kantian transcendental consciousness. He understood scientific growth, rather, as a logic of
critical theoretical, archaeological, and world-systems perspective to the problem of knowledge; from below, an ethnographic sociological perspective on intellectual production and the academic field. In a second task, which would correspond to the approach from above to the problem of knowledge, we must attempt to elucidate the two paradigms involved in the emergence and development of the study of Latino religion: the liberationist paradigm which emerged in Latin America during the 1960s; and the liberal paradigm which crystallized as the central discourse in the U.S. academy with the emergence of pragmatism at the end of the nineteenth century. For our third task, which would correspond to the approach to the problem of knowledge from below, we must reconstruct the genesis and transformation of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion. However, if we are to be consistent with the challenges posed to us by the problem of knowledge, we must understand this third task specifically as the analysis of the development of a particular section of the U.S. academic field constituted by certain stocks of knowledge, a specific community of scholars and institutions which materialized around the “invention” of a particular object of analysis—U.S. Hispanic religion. Finally, for our fourth task we must seek to construct a new ground for the study of U.S. Hispanic religion which, taking as its point of departure the conscious and unconscious struggle of Hispanics in the U.S. academy against intellectual assimilation elucidated via the critical reconstruction developed through the first two tasks—that is, elucidated via the “foolish” gesture of reflexivity—sets out to destabilize the dominant philosophical presuppositions, theories, and interpretations of religion in the U.S. academy. And, then, in the space opened up by critique, as a second moment of this fourth task, we should aim to elucidate, first, the phenomenology of struggle as the point of departure for the analysis of U.S. Hispanic reality, and, second, the ideological and emancipatory aspects of Hispanic religion, both of which have been suppressed by the liberal tendencies of the U.S. academy. Following is an outline of the four tasks I argue should constitute the critique of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion:

Four Tasks Constituting the Critique of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion

The First Task:

Exposition of the Problem of Knowledge as the Proper Philosophical and Theoretical Point of Departure

i. From Above: Critical Theoretical, Archaeological, and World-systems approach to the Problem of Knowledge
ii. From Below: Scholarly Knowledge, Intellectual Production, and the Academic Field

The Second Task:
Elucidation of the Liberationist and Liberal Paradigms

The Third Task:
Reconstruction of the Genesis and Transformation of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion
i. Genesis: Between Liberation and Liberalism
ii. Transformation: The Liberalization of the Liberationist Paradigm

The Fourth Task:
Construction of a New Ground for the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion
i. Critique of the U.S. Academic Field via the Destabilization of Dominant Interpretations
ii. The Phenomenology of Struggle, and U.S. Hispanic Religion as Ideology and as Emancipation

The First Task:
Exposition of the Problem of Knowledge as the Proper Philosophical and Theoretical Point of Departure

In the first task we should aim to bring forth the philosophical and theoretical point of departure, or, in other words, the frame of reference for the project of critique. Specifically we must demonstrate how the relationship between knowledge and the real-life process can be adequately grasped only by interlocking two approaches: A social theoretical, structural, archeological, and world-systems approach from above that aims to analyze the social foundations of knowledge and the correlation between general modes of knowledge and socio-historical and structural conditions; and an ethnographically motivated sociology of knowledge from below that aims to critique the intellectualizing intent of scholastic knowledge and analyze the relationship between intellectual production and an academic field on the one hand, and the academic field and its socio-historical location on the other.

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This endeavor will entail a retrieval of the critical philosophical and theoretical traditions around the problem of knowledge, such as Karl Marx’s critique of the ideological function of philosophy and science, Friedrich Nietzsche’s repudiation of the autonomy of pure and practical reason via his notion of the “will to power,” “Georg Lukács’ unmasking of the correlation between the scientific method and the capitalist

"Consider the following well-known passages so often repressed in an academy dominated by the liberal paradigm: “Division of labor becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labor appears. From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatten itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to anticipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of ‘pure’ theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. But even if this theory, theology, philosophy, etc., comes into contradiction with the existing relations, this can only occur because existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing forces of production.” A few pages later: “Even this ‘pure’ natural science is provided with an aim, as with its material, only through trade and industry, through the sensuous activity of men.” And several paragraphs later: “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relations, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance” (The German Ideology, in The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, ed. Robert C. Tucker [New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978] 159–73).

“Nietzsche marshalled a critique of the autonomy of morality and cognition arguing that human faculties were driven by affects and suffused with interests. Intellectual activity was a manifestation of the will to power. This was a repudiation of the Kantian tradition that grounded its entire project on the transcendental status, first of “pure” and “practical reason,” and later values, cultural forms, language, and the like: “Henceforth, my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a ‘pure, will-less, painless, time-less knowing subject’; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as ‘pure reason,’ ‘absolute spirituality,’ ‘knowledge in itself’: these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinking, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing something, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective ‘knowing,’ and the more and more effects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity,’ be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this—what would that mean but to castrate the intellect?” (On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo [New York: Vintage Books, 1967] 119).
mode of production,\textsuperscript{10} Theodor Adorno's critique of positivism,\textsuperscript{11} Max Horkheimer's critique of "traditional theory,"\textsuperscript{12} Jürgen Habermas's notion of a "critical social science,"\textsuperscript{13} Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyer-

\textsuperscript{10} He develops this from the historical and dialectical vantage points: "Thus we perceive that there is something highly problematic in the fact that capitalist society is predisposed to harmonize with scientific method, to constitute indeed the social premises of its exactness. If the internal structure of the 'facts' of their interconnections is essentially historical, if, that is to say, they are caught up in a process of continuous transformation, then we may indeed question when the greater scientific inaccuracy occurs. . . The historical character of the 'facts' which science seems to have grasped with such 'purity' makes itself felt in an even more devastating manner. As the products of historical evolution they are involved in continuous change. But in addition they are also precisely in their objective structure the products of a definite historical epoch, namely capitalism" (Georg Lukács, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990] 7).

\textsuperscript{11} Out of the critique of the Enlightenment, in particular the dialectical tradition, emerges the critical theoretical approach to the problem of knowledge. Adorno exemplifies this approach. He develops his critique of positivism not as a formal philosophical problem (Wilhelm Dilthey, Ernst Cassirer, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger) but as a socio-historical one. The modern scientific enterprise, in particular the natural sciences, are now understood as a function of a specific social structure, viz., capitalism. The philosophy of science and the social and human sciences are also criticized to the extent that these claim objectivity or neutrality, either in the hermeneutical or nomological sense, and fail to grasp the contradiction that defines their social function. Introduction to Sociology (Cambridge, Great Britain: Polity Press, 2000) and Theoriser W. Adorno, Hans Albert, Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, Harald Pilot, and Karl R. Popper, The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976).

\textsuperscript{12} For instance, Horkheimer writes: "The scholarly specialist 'as' scientist regards social reality and its products as extrinsic to him, and 'as' citizen exercises his interest in them through political articles, membership in political parties or social service organization, and participation in elections. But he does not unify these two activities, and his other activities as well, except, at best, by psychological interpretation. Critical thinking, on the contrary, is motivated today by the effort to transcend and abolish the opposition between the individual's purposefulness, spontaneity, and rationality, and those work-process relationships of which society is built. Critical thought has a concept of man as in conflict with himself until this opposition is removed." "Traditional and Critical Theory," Critical Theory, 209–10.

\textsuperscript{13} Habermas delineates a "critical philosophy of science" which has as its task the uncovering of the correlation between "logical-methodological rules" and "knowledge-constitutive interests": "There are three categories of processes of inquiry for which a specific connection between logical-methodological rules and knowledge-constitutive interests can be demonstrated. This demonstration is the task of a critical philosophy of science that escapes the snares of positivism. The approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a practical one; and the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporates an emancipatory cognitive interest. . . ." Knowledge and Human Interests (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971) 208.

\textsuperscript{14} The works of Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend are significant to the extent that they advance the critique of knowledge specifically through a social theoretically motivated critique of the philosophy of science. Both took issue with Popperian neo-positivism, repudiating the idea that the natural sciences are structured and transformed solely through the force of logical-methodological procedures deployed in an autonomous scientific sphere. Karl Popper, Logic of Scientific Discovery (New York: Basic Books, 1959), Conjectures and Refutations (London: Routledge, 1989), and The Open Society and Its Enemies. Vol. 2: The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971). See also Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds. Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Both addressed this refutation by uncovering the structural or institutional conditions for the possibility of scientific methods and theories. Their most poignant attack on traditional philosophies of science was the insight that "normal science" was antithetical to critical inquiry. Kuhn's theory of "scientific revolutions" rejected the view that scientific growth occurred through "accretion," that is through coherent advances gained through formal methodological procedures. Rather Kuhn understood scientific growth to be the result of "paradigm" shifts caused by structural changes like, for instance, changes in education, habits, and problem-solving practices. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Third Edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds. Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). Feyerabend radicalized Kuhn by making power asymmetries and domination a central aspect of his analysis. He suggested, for example, that "interests, forces, propaganda, and brainwashing techniques" play a substantial role in the development of science, and concluded that the only way to achieve advancements in science was through methodological and theoretical "anarchism." Paul Feyerabend, Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge (London: Verso, 1975). Albeit from within the strictures of the philosophy of science, Kuhn and Feyerabend pointed to the importance of a structural approach to the problem of scientific knowledge.

\textsuperscript{15} Michel Foucault's "archaeology of knowledge," his methodological and epistemological reflections on the human sciences, marshals what is perhaps the most radical critique of the centrality and unity of the knowing subject or community both at the ontological and epistemological, theoretical and methodological levels, and thus represents what is perhaps the most devastating critique of the philosophy of science, the history of ideas, traditional approaches to the sociology of knowledge (Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Karl Mannheim), and even of the most critical of the social theoretical approaches to the problem of knowledge. Unlike the critical theoretical tradition which grounds its critique on the Marxist analysis of the relationship between systems of knowledge and socio-economic conditions, and unlike the structuralist tradition which grounds its critique on the relationship between systems of knowledge and linguistic formations, values, cultural forms, the unconscious, etc., Foucault's archaeological critique aims to understand the emergence and development of systems of knowledge through the interrelationship of systems of "discourses," "statements," and "archives." His analysis is aimed at that ontological
Through this retrieval the following theses are made manifest:

i) All knowledge is socio-historically mediated and has a social function, and thus, all scholarship that fails to reflect on its socio-historical conditions of possibility functions as ideology.

ii) Discourses on the social world are particularly susceptible to socio-historical distortions as in the human and social sciences, the practice of constructing an object of analysis is always conditioned by the specific socio-historical relationship that exists between the intellectual, the scientific discourse, and the social reality being interpreted. This is the case because, willy nilly, scholarly discourses on the social world have specific—but not necessarily conscious—social investments and interests in that very world they aim to analyze.

space located between language and socio-economic conditions—the discursive space; and its situated in that epistemological space located between philology and history, psychology and sociology—the archaeological space. L’Archeologie du savoir (Paris: Gallimard, 1969).

41Immanuel Wallerstein’s claim that academic and political debates about contemporary social reality are not just over the empirical analysis but also over the tools of analysis themselves points to the particularly empirical nature of the epistemological problem of the human sciences. This is why debates in the human sciences over nomothetic and idiographic approaches, synchronic and diachronic analysis, objective and subjective modes of knowledge and structure and agency must be understood not only in terms of formal social theoretical categories like Habermas’s notion of “knowledge-constitutive interests,” but also in terms of concrete empirical conditions—that is, in terms of the socio-historical location of this debate. Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Foucault demonstrated how scholarly knowledge is always shaped by, and thus must always be understood in terms of larger institutions, paradigms or discourses. Wallerstein demonstrates how these discourses can only be fully understood against the socio-historical context in which they developed. Thus, from a “world-systems perspective,” he historically reconstructs the social sciences teasing out the homologies that exist between sciences and the socio-historical conditions in which they developed. Diachronically, Wallerstein traces the changes in the structure of the social sciences sparked by the transformation of the world system in 1945 and 1989. Synchronically he shows how the north-south dichotomy which transpired after the Second World War has also affected the structure of the social sciences. Unlike John Meyer and his colleagues who focus on integrating effects which global cultural forms have had on intellectual discourses, Wallerstein argues rather that systemic power asymmetries linked to socio-economic disparities have been a central socio-historical determinant for the recent development of the human sciences. The End of the World as We Know It (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

iii) The conflicts and contradictions of a particular society manifest themselves in that society’s academic field in the mode of an intellectual struggle, and this holds a fortiori for the sub-field of all those disciplines that have as their proper task discourses on the social world.

iv) Through the process of critical reflection, that is, through the process of unmasking the social determinants of intellectual practices and production, the academic field is revealed as one of the loci of the struggle of socially marginalized people: viz., the struggle over the interpretations of the world which is one dimension—the theoretical dimension—of the general struggle.

The second approach to the problem of knowledge will entail an engagement of Bourdieu’s ethnographically inspired sociology of knowledge as it complements the “from above” social philosophical and theoretical, structural, archaeological perspectives, through a critique of the intellectualizing gaze of scholastic reason, the uncovering of the logic and interests of academic practices, and the social function of the academic field.17 Bourdieu’s insights provide methodological and theoretical substance to the more formal reflections of the retrieval just outlined, allowing us to build a model that can guide us in our the analysis of the study of Latino religion, its genesis and transformation. Paradigms do not float around but are linked via carriers and institutions to a specific set of practices, and thus they are always being negotiated and renegotiated, produced and reproduced on the ground. From below, then, the following emerges: Agents negotiate paradigms through their continuous interactions with others and institutions, that is, agents negotiate paradigms through a field. With the Bourdieuan lens, paradigms or discourses are understood as overdetermined stocks of knowledge internalized as a habitus actualized in a field. From above, paradigms—which transcend academic fields, both diachronically and synchronically—enable and shape these. From below, however, paradigms appear as epistemological and ontological presuppositions, methodological practices, intellectual genealogies, text milieus, categories of thought, meta-theoretical claims, language, games, which, through the socializing function of education, the disciplining function of authoritarian academic structures, and the normalization of intellectual institutions, are always ready to hand, that is,

forms of life. This is especially the case with discourses on the social world as they aim to analyze the world in which they are produced and thus are caught not only in an epistemological “double hermeneutic” as Anthony Giddens has suggested, but also in an empirical, socio-historical tension. In this sense it is essential that intellectual paradigms about the social world be understood socio-historically lest one fall captive to reification. And here we find the central epistemological and methodological problems of those approaches to the human sciences that can be traced back to the repudiation of the philosophy of negation—viz., positivism and pragmatism. It is not enough simply to analytically elucidate the “macro” conditions of a “micro” problem, to mention as background information those social spheres or elements that are in practice (i.e., methodologically and theoretically) being held constant, or to give lip service to the material substratum of a cultural phenomenon as, for instance, ethnographers, anthropologists, and sociologists in the U.S. tend to do. Rather, social reality must be grasped dialectically which means historically, structurally, and materially. This is

9 This is a crucial distinction. As intimated above, though all forms of knowledge are epistemologically mediated by, and dependent on the social world, the social sciences and other scholarly discourses on the social world such as theology, because they have the social world as both ground and object of analysis, face at least two additional epistemological difficulties—one linked to the social world formally understood, and the other linked to the social world empirically understood. When Anthony Giddens argues that the social sciences face a “double hermeneutic” he is essentially referring to the first difficulty: The social sciences deploy socially mediated tools to interpret a world that is already socially meaningful in itself. Anthony Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Methods (New York: Basic Books, 1976) 162. The second difficulty that all discourses on the social world must face is, however, potentially more pernicious to the degree to which it is overlooked by the dominant discourse on epistemology and methodology in the human sciences. This eclipsed perspective is the one that interests us here. It is the one Bourdieu develops. Once again: In the human sciences, the practice of constructing an object of analysis is always conditioned by the specific socio-historical relationship that exists between the intellectual and the social reality being interpreted.


11 For example, the infamous criteris paribus condition of non-dialectical economic theory or the so-called “background,” “macro” or “structural” section that is intended to frame those non-dialectical ethnographic studies.


why it is crucial that we understand the philosophical foundations of the liberationist and liberal paradigms dialectically, in light of their socio-historical conditions of possibility. In what follows I will briefly sketch the central socio-historical factors, and then, the philosophical foundations of the liberationist and liberal paradigms respectively.

THE LIBERATIONIST PARADIGM:

The following six socio-historical factors enabled and shaped the emergence and development of the Latin American liberationist paradigm:

i. The rise and fall of the Latin American left.

ii. The rise and fall of dependency theory as a viable economic strategy for overcoming the conditions of underdevelopment in Latin America.

iii. The religious changes that transpired in Latin America after the Second Vatican Council, in particular the emergence of the CELAM conferences within the Roman Catholic Church, the crystallization of liberation theology, and the growth of radical Protestantism.

iv. The crystallization of an autochthonous and politicized cultural sphere, in particular the development of realismo mágico in literature and the emergence of a socially conscious film industry.

v. The polemic between Augusto Salazar Bondy and Leopoldo Zea about the possibility of an authentic Latin American philosophy.

vi. The emergence of neo-liberalism and neo-capitalism under the rubric of globalization as the new hope for Latin American economic development.

Now here are the central philosophical foundations of the liberationist paradigm which should be understood as dialectically related to the socio-historical conditions just expounded, and should hermeneutically be grasped as an attempt to overcome the conditions of domination and underdevelopment that suffused the socio-historical elements just elucidated:

i. Intellectual Genealogy: The philosophical foundations of the liberationist paradigm can be traced back to the critique of the Enlightenment notion of the positive relationship between, on the one hand, the autonomy of reason and moral-cognitive development, and, on the other, social integration and progress, political liberalism, democratic capitalism, and modernization.

ii. Philosophy of History: The liberationist paradigm is ontologically grounded in a dialectical, structural, organic, materialist, dynamic, and historical understanding of reality. In Latin America, this ontology has been given systematic form through the philosophy of history.


32 Enrique Dussel, Mètode para una filosofía de la liberación: Supersión analéctica de la dialéctica hegeliana (Salamanca: Ediciones Sigüeme, 1974).

33 Ignacio Ellacuria, Filosofía de la realidad histórica. The construction of a Latin American philosophy of history can be understood as a repudiation of the positivistic and pragmatic frames of reference that are so central to the project of modernity and the process of modernization, frames of reference that repudiate the very idea of a philosophy of history, frames of reference which, for Latin American liberationists are socio-historically linked to U.S. hegemony. Pragmatism repudiates the very notion of a philosophy of history as metaphysical nonsense. This is clear from Peirce’s repudiation of Kant and Hegel. Fearing the specter of dialectics (Marx), Peiper vehemently and dogmatically rejected the idea that socio-historical conditions played a role in the development of science. See his response to Kuhn in Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge. Mannheim criticized U.S. social thought for its ahistoricism (Ideology and Utopia [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936] 254).
iii. Social Theoretical Assumptions: The liberationist paradigm takes as its central social theoretical assumption what Habermas has called the "theory of social conflict," which "seeks to understand [the social] system as an association of domination [Herrschaftsverband] kept open and in flux by internal opposition."32

iv. Conception of Justice: The Latin American critique of "justice as fairness," discourse ethics, and all talk of public spheres takes as its point of departure the historical underdevelopment, instability, and colonized status of the Latin American public sphere.33 From here the contributions of John Rawls, Habermas, Charles Taylor and Karl-Otto Apel are historicized and critiqued for reifying forms of thought that are linked to specific socio-historical conditions. Specifically, Latin American philosophers of liberation have taken issue with the dominant social ethics of the center for dichotomizing the praxeological and poetic dimensions of the everyday (cotidiano), and for failing to address the question of the material and metabolic substratum of the lifeworld.34

v. Epistemology: The liberationist epistemology is grounded in what Habermas has called the "emancipatory cognitive interest" of the "critically oriented sciences."35

In Latin America in the 1970s, the liberationist paradigm enabled the emergence of a Marxian inspired sociology of religion that aimed on the one hand to unmask the ideological functions of religion, and on the other, highlight its empowering dimensions. For example: François Houtart’s and the Louvain School’s Godelierian and Gramscian approaches to religion and society;36 Otto Maduro’s investigations into an authentic Latin American sociology of religion;37 and Cristián Parker’s reflections on popular religion as socio-cultural resistance vis-à-vis modernization and globalization.38

Analogously, there emerged around the same time a theology that set out to critique its own eurocentric foundations, ground itself in the reality of structural oppression, and develop a method that gives pride of place to practice over theory. For example: Leonardo Boff’s ecclesiology;39 Clodovis Boff’s epistemological and methodological reflections,40 and Ignacio Ellacuria’s writings on the prophetic and utopian functions of Latin American theology.41

THE LIBERAL PARADIGM:

The following six socio-historical factors enabled and shaped the development of the liberal paradigm, the dominant discourse in the U.S. academy:

i. The crystallization of the bipolar system, the emergence of the regime of international organizations, and the polemic between realpolitik and human rights, or between hegemonic stability and neo-liberal institutionalism, especially as this polemic manifested itself in U.S. policy vis-à-vis Latin America.42

ii. McCarthyism and the specter of Marxism, especially vis-à-vis the U.S. academic field.43

iii. The civil rights movement, 1960s radicalism, and the counter-culture.44

33 Jorge Castañeda, La casa por la ventana: México y América Latina después de la Guerra Fría (México: Cal y arena, 1993).
35 Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interest, 308–10.
36 François Houtart, Sociole de la religión (Managua: Centro de Estudios Sobre America, 1992) and Religion, sociedad y mercado en el neoliberalismo (México: Centro de Investigaciones Interdisciplinarias en Ciencias y Humanidades, Coordinación Humanidades, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1997).
38 Cristián Parker, Religión y clases subalternas urbanas en una sociedad dependiente: Religiosidad popular urbana en América Latina: un estudio de caso en Chile (Louvain-la-Noue: Centre de Recherches socio-religieuses, 1986), and Otra Lógica en América Latina: Religión Popular y Modernización Capitalista.
39 Leonardo Boff, Iglesia: carisma y poder (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1982).
41 Ignacio Ellacuría, “Utopía y profetismo,” in Mysterium Liberationis, 393–442.
iv. The Chicago School of neoclassical economics, the rise of U.S. "individualistic" capitalism, and the move toward regional economic integration.46

v. The second wave of immigration, the rise of multiculturalism or identity politics, and the transformation of the field of U.S. religion from the logic of "denominationalism" to the logic of "congregationalism."47

vi. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the "triumph" of democratic-capitalism.47

Against the backdrop of these socio-historical conditions, the philosophical foundations of the liberal paradigm are more fully understood. These are:

i. Intellectual genealogy: The liberal paradigm can be traced back to the Enlightenment view that once freed from the yoke of tradition, an autonomous reason would shepherd individuals and societies toward progress and prosperity.48

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ii. Pragmatism: The liberal paradigm is ontologically grounded in either a positivistic, empiricist, analytical, or a cultural-symbolic, praxeological-communicative, and interpretative understanding of reality. Both worldviews were given systematic form through the school of thought known as pragmatism, the first and probably only autochthonous school of U.S. thought, which developed as a critique of the ontologizing philosophies of Continental Europe.49

iii. Social theoretical assumptions: The liberal paradigm takes as its social theoretical point of departure what Habermas has called the "theory of social integration" which "seeks to understand the social system as a structure of harmoniously equalized and enduring order."50

iv. Conception of Justice: Liberal notions of justice, rooted in the Enlightenment ideas of progress and stability and the pragmatic critique of metaphysics and the philosophy of history,50 are procedural, discursive, praxeological-communicative, and/or formal.51

v. Epistemology: There exist two liberal epistemologies: one is grounded in what Habermas has termed the "technical cognitive interest" of the "empirical-analytic sciences" and the other is grounded in what he has termed the "practical interest" of the "historical-hermeneutic sciences."52
In the United States the liberal paradigm provided the horizon for an understanding of religion, as a carrier of certain political liberal values which functions as a vehicle for social integration and maintenance, and as a bulwark against the destructive forces of pernicious individualism. These are some of the more central contributions to this tradition: The social historical and theoretical reflections of Alexis de Tocqueville about the foundations of U.S. culture; Talcott Parsons' notion of "denominational pluralism"; H. R. Niebuhr's sociology of religion; Robert Bellah's notion of "civil religion" and his understanding of the relationship between individualism and religious values; Peter Berger's sociological phenomenology of religion; discursive theories of religion, i.e., religion, communication, and public sphere; ethnographic approaches to religion; and religion as a promoter of "good" globalization.14

The liberal paradigm also provided the horizon for a liberal theology of culture and dialogue that, for Protestant circles, emerged in the nineteenth century with work of Ernst Troeltsch and was reinterpreted by the Niebuhr brothers, Paul Tillich, and Gordon Kaufman, and for

16 H. Richard Niebuhr, Social Sources of Denominationalism (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1987).
23 Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture (New York: Roman Catholic circles emerged with Karl Rahner's phenomenological critique of Transcendental Thomism and Bernard Lonergan's theological method, and was developed by David Tracy, Robert Schreiter, and others.15

The Third Task:
Reconstruction of the Genesis and Transformation of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion

In the third task I am proposing for the critique of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion, we would deploy Bourdieu's ethnomethodologically motivated sociology of knowledge from below in an attempt to reconstruct the genesis and transformation of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion. What appeared as paradigms, viewed from above, become, from below, stocks of knowledge that are ready to hand. In the same way that the liberal and liberationist paradigms were enabled and limited by the socio-historical conditions in which they emerged, the study of Latino religion was enabled and limited, on the one hand, by the group of scholars, set of intellectual practices, disciplines, stocks of knowledge, and institutions that constituted that region of the U.S. academic field dedicated to the production of discourses on U.S. religion, and on the other, by the socio-historical location of these elements. When applied to the study of Latino religion, this critical sociology of the academic field reveals that an intellectual tension between the liberationist and liberal stocks of knowledge has defined the history of the study of Hispanic religion. More significantly, this tension is a manifestation in the academic field of the marginalized status that characterizes Latinos in the U.S. The study of Hispanic religion will be plagued with distortions so long as scholars of U.S. Latino religion fail to reflect on the socio-historical conditions of possibility for the invention and institutionalization of Hispanic religion as an object of analysis in the U.S. academic field.

As suggested, this reconstruction of the study of Latino religion will require a dialectical approach analogous to the one developed in the second task. First, we must elucidate the socio-historical determinants—both exogenous and endogenous to the U.S. academic field—that led to the emergence and development of the subfield of Hispanic religion, and to the restructuring of the intellectual habitus of both Hispanic and non-Hispanic scholars that produced Hispanic religion. And second, we must analyze the development of the different arguments, concepts, theories, and the like that undergirded the production of scholarship on Latino religion. This is to say that we must deconstruct the way that Hispanic religion was constituted as an object of analysis over time, but always understanding that these constructions were enabled and shaped by the socio-historical factors elucidated. Given the scale of this proposal such an approach cannot be developed here in its full complexity and nuance. An outline of the central contours will have to suffice.

PRE-HISTORY

For decades, before the study of Hispanic religion became institutionalized as an object of analysis in the U.S. academy, there existed a history of social scientific and theological reflections on, for instance, the religion of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in California and Texas, Puerto Ricans in New York, Cubans and Cuban-Americans in Miami. The crystallization of the category “Hispanic religion” in the academy was correlated with the demographic shift that transpired in the country which led to the subsumption of particular and concrete nationalities under an abstract and universal identity—viz., “Hispanic/Latino.” This correlation is significant because it reveals the dialectical relationship that exists between the academic field and the social totality, and more specifically, between intellectual and existential violence. The existential violence suffered by the Venezuelan, the Salvadoran, the Dominican, who, identified and classified as Hispanic, is negated his or her cultural and historical particularities, is dialectically related to the epistemological and ontological violence that takes place in the academic sphere when a lecture or a study methodologically and/or theoretically suppresses the particularities of a Hispanic person or group. This slippage between particular and universal, concrete and abstract gets to the existential uncertainty that must be the point of departure for any study of U.S. Hispanic reality, of which religion is a central aspect. However, both ethnic particularities and existential angst are suppressed by scholars in the name of methodological and theoretical expediency. This is the problem with the ahistoricism, pragmatism, and positivism of the liberal paradigm that dominates the U.S. academy. In the same way that political liberalism negates ethnic particularities in order to create and integrate the abstract individual citizen, the categories and strategies used by the liberal academy negates, at the theoretical level, the particularity of life forms in the name of heuristic efficacy and effectiveness, and, at the methodological level, negates the hermeneutical self-understanding of specific ethnic/racial individual groups in the name of the scientific method, and the “reflexive” (Bourdieu) or “self-reflective” (Habermas) empirical question of what social group controls the processes by which this or that method is “normalized,” that is, becomes part of the regime of “normal science.”

GENESIS

Several decades ago, when the religious beliefs and practices of Latinos were first “discovered” by intellectuals in the United States, two factors endogenous to this newly emerging field of study over-determined its structure. First, a disproportionate amount of those scholars investigating Hispanic religiosity were themselves of Hispanic origin; and second, the liberationist paradigm, which had always existed at the periphery of the U.S. academy, held the most sway as the frame of reference for the analysis of Hispanic religion. In addition, two exogenous factors—a demographic and a geopolitical—that had significant influence on the development of this emerging field: Latinos constituted a relatively small percentage of the U.S. population, and the Latin American left still posed a viable alternative to what years later would become known as neo-liberalism.

U.S. HISPANIC INTELLECTUALS AS THE “INVENTORS” OF THE OBJECT OF ANALYSIS

Hispanic religion as object of analysis emerged as the intellectual aspect of the Hispanic struggle for recognition. With Bourdieu we need to ask about the social location of the inventors as this empirical fact

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One example of this violence can be found in the work being done in the sociology of religion under the rubric “new immigrants,” where the political liberal integrationist interest which lurks behind all talk of “multiculturalism” and “identity politics” is internalized in ethnographic studies through the methodological and theoretical assimilation of newly arrived immigrants. See, for example, Stephen Warner, “Work in Progress Towards a New Paradigm in the Sociological Study of
always plays a role in the construction of the object of analysis. On the one hand, as intellectuals U.S. Hispanics are situated in a dominant position among a dominated people; but, on the other hand, as Hispanics they are situated in a marginalized position in an academic sphere dominated demographically by Euro-Americans and intellectually by the liberal paradigm. U.S. Hispanics invented Latino religion as an object of analysis, first in theological circles in response to pastoral needs, and later in social scientific circles as a critique of the ethnocentrism of the categories and theories used. The self-reflectively critical and "interested" nature of the first constructions of Hispanic religion were very different to the more interpretative and "neutral" constructions that would emerge years later when a greater number of non-Latino scholars became "interested" in the study of Latino religion.

THE HISPANIC INTELLECTUAL HABITUS

From the outset, Latino intellectuals, like all intellectuals that exist at the limits of what is understood as "normal science," struggled with the construction of the object of analysis. A tension existed between the dominant liberal language that stressed the symbolic, praxeological, cultural and integrationist aspects of religion and the liberationist language that stressed the material, poietic, economic, and emancipatory aspects. This tension was internalized in the Hispanic intellectual habitus which was never able to synthesize with an academic field dominated by a liberal approach. Initially, Hispanic intellectuals had ready to hand stocks of knowledge unknown to the non-Hispanic intellectual. This produced a hermeneutical tension that realized itself through the marginalization of the first studies of Hispanic religion, and also through a destabilized habitus. The language of liberation existed at the margins. Not surprisingly, as elites Hispanic intellectuals were more susceptible to assimilation via academic careers. This tension between liberation and liberalism is clearly present in the early works of the first studies of Latino religion. These studies will need to be de-constructed in order to tease out the tension between liberalism and liberation that defined the structure of the subfield of U.S. Hispanic religion.

TRANSFORMATION

Gradually, as Latino religion became institutionalized as an object of analysis in the U.S. academy, an increasing number of non-Hispanic scholars began to gain interest in this new phenomenon, and the liberal approach, which had historically been the dominant intellectual worldview among U.S. academics, began to exert more influence as the rubric of analysis in this particular field. Thus was intensified what Bourdieu has called the symbolic struggle over the monopoly of legitimate nomination. As to the two exogenous factors, this transformation of the field of U.S. Hispanic religion was paralleled by a precipitous increase in the population of U.S. Latinos, and the demise of the Latin American left. Eventually, there came a point when both the liberationist and liberal paradigms came to marshal substantial epistemological, methodological, and theoretical leverage in the study of U.S. Hispanic religion. As these endogenous and exogenous factors unfolded and interacted, however, a moment arose when the liberal discourse began to exert greater influence, gradually eclipsing the liberationist perspective. I refer to this development—a development that continues today—as the liberalization of the liberationist paradigm. In U.S. Hispanic theology, the liberalization of the liberalization paradigm manifests itself as the "aesthetic turn." And in the social sciences this phenomenon manifests itself as the eclipse of the question of power in the sociological analysis of U.S. Latino popular religion.

THE AESTHETIC TURN

I argue that the aesthetic turn in U.S. Hispanic theology is an example of intellectual assimilation. This development needs to be analyzed from the perspective of a critical sociology of knowledge and revealed for what it is: the theological aspect of the liberalization of the liberationist paradigm. In a previous essay, I asked why it is way that gives it a emancipatory-liberationist one. See, for example, his Galileo journey: The Mexican-American Promise (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983). Second, the tension that has existed between the terms mujerista and feminista which is no doubt a function of the dialectical relationship between, on the one hand, the way Latin American and Anglo American intellectual discourses on women are negotiated, and on the other hand, how the negotiators, viz., Hispanic women theologians, grapple with the existential crisis of living in the U.S.

Pierre Bourdieu, Homo academicus, 41.
that U.S. Hispanic theology does not tarry with the negative, the monstrousity of marginalization and struggle? While it acknowledges the socio-economic struggle of U.S. Latinas/os, it sublimes this struggle into an aesthetic praxis which gives pride of place to the procession over the necessity of production, which accentuates the liturgy while eclipsing the reality of labor, which underscores the fiesta while ignoring the daily eight-to-five of the factory. But by doing this, theology remains an abstraction, an intellectual idea. Stated in another way, rather than formulating an aesthetics that is grounded and shaped by the totality of reality—which for the majority of Latinas/os includes the real, everyday struggle of “making” a living—U.S. Hispanic theology, either deduces an idea of struggle from an a priori aesthetics, or worse, it brackets the dimension of struggle all together. But if U.S. Hispanic theology aims to become more than an abstraction, and accepts to tarry with the totality of U.S. Hispanic reality—both positive and negative—then it must attempt to overcome the praxis-poiesis diremption which it itself posits; it needs to do this, for example—if we are talking “aesthetics”—through an aesthetics of struggle which only later can be sublated into an aesthetics of celebration. If, however, U.S. Hispanic theology opts not to accept this task of overcoming, then it must heed the lesson of Kant’s critical philosophy and stay within the epistemological limits of its narrowly defined program, i.e., put more concretely, U.S. Hispanic theology must refrain from aestheticizing the monstrousity of marginalization and struggle, it must refrain from reducing the totality of U.S. Hispanic reality to an a priori aesthetics of celebration. Will the coming-of-age of U.S. Hispanic theology necessarily result in the distancing of theological discourse from the everyday struggle of the Latina/o community? In other words, my thesis is that U.S. Hispanic theology is currently undergoing an “aesthetic turn” which is having the onerous effect of distancing theological discourse away from the everyday struggles of an economically, culturally, and politically dominated U.S. Latina/o community—an effect which could in the long-term alienate U.S. Hispanic theologians from their community. Two moments of this “aesthetic turn” need to be highlighted at the outset: The first moment is epistemological. The fact that an overwhelming amount of attention is being dedicated to aesthetic theory suggests that little attention is being given to other ways of knowing, such as, for instance, social scientific and critical theoretical approaches. The second moment is ontological. By biasing the aesthetic, Latina/o theologians are implying that the defining characteristic or element of U.S. Hispanic reality is the experience of the beautiful. For to deny this presupposition would be to admit that U.S. Latina/o theological discourse is an intellectualized abstraction which does not correspond with the everydayness of U.S. Hispanic reality. But how about the reality of domination? When these two moments are combined and the ‘aesthetic turn’ in U.S. Latina/o theology is considered comprehensively, the following concern arises: The coming-of-age of a theological discourse dominated by a theoretical and empirical concern for the aesthetic that consequently has a tendency of reducing the complexity of U.S. Hispanic reality to the beautiful.8

The Eclipse of the Question of Power

The eclipse of the question of the relationship between power and popular religion is an example of the liberalization of the liberationist paradigm in the sociology of U.S. Hispanic religion. Any use of the concept “popular religion,” if it is to be consistent with the genealogy of the nomenclature, necessarily needs to address the issue of religious power, and specifically engage the relationship between popular religion and domination. But, as I have suggested elsewhere...

in a way that is free from the biases of U.S. sociology of religion, then critical-historical and structural approaches need to be marshaled. Only this way will the power dynamic that is played out in the religious field, and, which, through structural homologies, extends to other social fields, can be uncovered.\(^7\)

Only on extremely rare occasions have scholars of U.S. Hispanic religion recognized this transformation I am calling here the liberalization of the liberationist paradigm in its full complexity, either as a positive or negative phenomenon. More often, only its surface manifestations have been acknowledged either through a critique of the liberal paradigm for occluding the structural asymmetries which adversely affect U.S. Hispanics, or through a repudiation of the liberationist paradigm for being displaced and anachronistic, that is, for being ill-suited to address the socio-religious dynamics that exist in modern industrialized societies, the U.S. in particular. For the most part, however, what I am calling the liberalization of the liberationist paradigm has transpired silently, without much recognition, and can be detected only by tracing the genealogy of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion, and more specifically, the deconstruction of assumptions, text milieus, methods, theories, and concepts that together constitute the history of this area of study. The critical reflection on the socio-historical determinants that mediated and shaped the study of Latino religion, however, suggests that the tension that has existed between the liberal and liberationist approaches to Hispanic religion is the academic or intellectual manifestation of the general social process of Latino assimilation into the U.S. mainstream.

The Fourth Task: Reconstruction of the Genesis and Transformation of the Study of U.S. Hispanic Religion

In the fourth and final task involved in the critique of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion as I envision it, we should aim to construct a new ground for the study of Latina/o religion; this ground should draw on the critical philosophical and theoretical tradition which have been historically absent from our intellectual genealogies. Thus, the reconstruction of the emergence and development of U.S. Hispanic religion, carried out in the third task, now becomes a prolegomenon for the ground laying, as it un masks the socio-historical struggles that suffuse the intellectual discourses on Hispanic religion, revealing the intellectual aspect of the general struggle against assimilation. Hence, our new approach to Latino religion will consist of two tasks: first, the task of critiquing the U.S. academic field via the destabilization of dominant interpretations; second, the task of constructing a new ground for the study of U.S. Hispanic religion that aims to push beyond the liberation-liberalism dichotomy that holds sway in the U.S. academy. This new ground should consist of two moments: the phenomenology of struggle as the point of departure for the elucidation of U.S. Hispanic reality; and the dialectic of ideology and emancipation as the proper movement of U.S. Hispanic religion.

Destabilization of the U.S. Academy Via the Conscious Repudiation of Intellectual Assimilation

U.S. Hispanic theologians and scholars of religion should not be afraid to turn our weapons of analysis on ourselves, to perform the quixotic gesture of reflexivity. In the business of interpreting the world, intellectuals tend to fall captive to what Pierre Bourdieu calls “scholastic epistemocentrism.”\(^7\) That is, failing to understand themselves as “empirical subjects,” intellectuals often do not reflect on the fact that their scholarly activities are practices that are socio-historically situated, structured, on the one hand, by the position they occupy in an academic field, and, on the other, by the positions they occupy in other social fields—e.g., the economic and political fields, the field of power, and the like.\(^7\) Intellectuals in democratic-capitalist societies like the United States have a proclivity for performing this \textit{epoche}? on the socio-historical determinants of academic discourses because of the dominance—both in terms of forms of thought and forms of life—of a praxeological-interpretative and symbolic-cultural bias that views the academic field as the epitome of undistorted reasonable and rational communication. The project critical theorists from Georg Lukács to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have called the critique of political liberalism and capitalism—which is always an intellectual project, i.e., it is always an intellectual’s project—must, therefore, begin with the critique of the internalization by the academic field of those modes of thought that emerged together with democratic-capitalism, which, in praxeological terms, becomes the practice of destabilizing an academic field via the repudiation of its dominant worldviews. The critique of the tyranny of capital must begin with the critique of the tyranny of


"normal science" which is always the science practiced by those a society regards as "normal," that is, it is the science practiced by those that speak the customary language. Posses the average physiology and physiognomy, are immersed in the typical text milieus, and deploy the dominant problem solving tactics and strategies.

Moreover, scholastic epistemocentrism does particular violence to these discourses on the social reality of minority groups as it suppresses the distortions produced by the internalization of the contradictions and tensions that suffice a society, thus re-enforcing the oppression of that group, now in the academic realm. The critique of the idea that order and progress can be achieved via praxis alone (an idea that reaches its zenith with "multiculturalism" and "identity politics") must begin with the critique of the "consensus theory of truth" and the idea of the possibility of an integrated "community of scientists." The critique of the tyranny of the majority must begin with the critique of the tyranny of dominant interpretations, which are always the interpretations of the dominant. From this perspective, the task of U.S. Hispanic intellectuals that claim to expound a liberationist approach must begin with the unmasking of intellectual assimilation.74

The political liberal belief in the possibility of a harmonious multiculturalism equilibrated and adjusted via discourse, participation, and correct procedures, exemplified in the idea of the public sphere,75 appears in the academic realm as the belief in the possibility of an inte-
Why are we afraid to be polemical? One thing should be said to all those academic elites in the United States that, because of a lack of a critical consciousness, discriminate against the intellectual traditions of nuestra América: beware of the demographic transition, it comes "like a thief in the night."

A NEW GROUND

In the space opened up by the destabilization of dominant interpretations, we need to construct a new ground for the study of U.S. Hispanic religion that is, on the one hand, free from the distortions of intellectual assimilation, and, on the other, critical vis-à-vis the function of the religion of minorities in liberal-democratic societies. As suggested above, this ground laying should consist of two moments: First, the delineation of the phenomenology of struggle as the primordial element of U.S. Hispanic reality. In a past essay, through a retrieval of Xavier Zubiri’s critique of the pernicious idealism of Western philosophy and the materialist and liberationist re-interpretation of the Zubirian system by Ignacio Ellacuría, I attempted to establish the philosophical horizon for this phenomenology.

The next step should be the empirico-existential elucidation of this nomenclature. Second, in light of this phenomenology of struggle empirico-existentially understood, the dialectical relationship between the ideological and emancipatory elements of U.S. Hispanic religion needs to be developed as our primary heuristic device. Let us make manifest, for instance, both the ideological and emancipatory aspects of mestizaje, popular religion, teología de conjunto, praxis, and the like. Once we are able to reflectively engage our own contradictions, and once we immerse ourselves in these contradiction and work in and through them, then we will be getting somewhere.

Conclusion

How can we engage in the struggle for the liberation of our people if we ourselves are in chains—the chains of intellectual assimilation—and yet believe to be free? Reflexivity in the form of the critique of the study of U.S. Hispanic religion is the power to break free of these chains. Consider Tomás Gutiérrez Alea’s Hasta Ciento Punto (1983) as an illustration of the emancipatory function of the reflexive gesture. This film about making a film undergirds the dialectical process by which an intellectual comes to terms with his own repressed sexism. Oscar, a

well-respected dramaturge, accepts to write a screenplay for a film about the problems of machismo among the waterfront workers in La Habana. In the process of conducting the research, he falls in love with Lina, a dock worker he decides to use as the model for the protagonist of the film because of her critical feminist consciousness. As their love affair deepens and intensifies, Oscar’s machista tendencies slowly become manifest; and, through this therapeutic gaining of consciousness, he finds himself compelled to change the entire premise of his screenplay. Is Oscar not the quintessential intellectual who, deluded by the chimera of a superior consciousness, is forced to come to terms with the fact that he is dialectically related to his subject matter, to his object of analysis?

I pose to my colleagues a challenge analogous to the one Oscar had to face, and it is the critique of the study of Hispanic religion. Is the dialectic of reflexivity not a way of recasting one of the central insights of liberation theology, namely, that all theology and intellectual production that fails to reflect on its own socio-historical conditions of possibility is potentially oppressive, part of the problem?