

# Cultural industries, nation and state in the work of Renato Ortiz: A view from inside the Anglosphere

Indústrias culturais, nação e Estado na obra de Renato Ortiz:  
uma visão a partir da esfera anglofônica

Philip Schlesinger<sup>1</sup>  
philip.schlesinger@glasgow.ac.uk

## Abstract

*This short essay reflects on Renato Ortiz's work and its reception in the Anglosphere. It then discusses the author's meeting with Ortiz in Scotland during a European-Latin American 'encounter' set up to discuss cultural identity and communication. Contextual changes in the past two decades are noted and the essay moves on to consider how Ortiz addressed 'cultural industries' in A moderna tradição brasileira. The essay concludes by relating this perspective to the contemporary debate on the 'creative economy'.*

**Keywords:** *Anglosphere, cultural industries, creative economy, nation, state.*

## Resumo

*Este pequeno ensaio reflete sobre a obra de Renato Ortiz e sua recepção na esfera anglofônica. O trabalho discute o encontro do autor com Ortiz na Escócia, durante um evento Europeu e Latino-americano dedicado ao debate sobre identidade cultural e comunicação. Nas últimas duas décadas, foram observadas mudanças contextuais. Nesse sentido, o ensaio se desenvolve considerando como Ortiz abordou as "indústrias culturais" em A moderna tradição brasileira. O trabalho conclui relacionando essa perspectiva com o debate contemporâneo sobre "economia criativa".*

**Palavras-chave:** *esfera anglofônica, indústrias culturais, economia criativa, nação, Estado.*

## Introduction

In this contribution to honour Renato Ortiz's work I have avoided the standard format of the academic article. Instead, as far as possible, I have opted for the form of an essay. The occasion demands a more free-wheeling, somewhat personal style than is common in journals. This better suits what the editors requested: to interconnect my own thinking with that of Ortiz.

In 1996, a decade or so after Renato Ortiz published *A moderna tradição brasileira*, he attended an international conference on 'Cultural Identity and Communication in Latin America' that I organised at the University of Stirling in Scotland. I was asked to organise the Scottish encounter because I had translated and introduced a number of key pieces by Latin American scholars for the international journal *Media, Culture & Society*, of whose editorial board I was a member, and which I continue to be (Schlesinger, 1988). Sponsored by the World

<sup>1</sup> Professor in Cultural Policy in the Centre for Cultural Policy Research, Deputy Director of CREATE, the Centre for Copyright and New Business Models in the Creative Economy at the University of Glasgow. Visiting Professor in Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (Scotland's national academy), a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Centre for Cultural Policy Research, 13 Professor Square, University of Glasgow, Glasgow G12 8QQ, Scotland, UK.

Association for Christian Communication, WACC, the meeting was expressly conceived as an encounter between scholars working in Latin America and in Europe. The point was to take account of one another's work and to consider how the approaches taken diversely reflected the conditions in which we theorised, analysed, investigated and produced interpretations of our respective realities. We were also interested in finding commonalities.

It was a distinguished and intimate gathering in Stirling.<sup>2</sup> Several key figures represented the international 'cultural turn' in the analysis of media, culture and communications. They included Jesús Martín-Barbero and Néstor García Canclini, as well as the iconic spokesman for British cultural studies, Stuart Hall. Together with my co-organiser, the US media scholar and specialist on Latin America, Nancy Morris, I sought to establish a dialogue and to learn from comparison. Even now, over twenty years later, it strikes me that cultural analysis from Brazil is still relatively unknown in the Anglosphere: it is too little published outside the circles of area specialists. As we know, the dominance of the English language and the effect of this on the circulation and interpretation of academic work internationally, has been one of Renato Ortiz's more recent concerns (Ortiz, 2011[2004]).

While Ortiz's work is certainly cited, this has overwhelmingly been in Portuguese. Its presence in the Anglosphere is relatively slight, although certainly appreciated where it has been taken up. One of the ways in which attention seems to be achieved, at least in the fields of media and culture, is through the translation of a major book. In that respect, Jesús Martín-Barbero (1987) and Néstor García Canclini (1989) have been more fortunate in the scale of attention that their work has achieved in the English-speaking world. This is an obvious point to make regarding Ortiz, an author who has critiqued the dominance of English for its hierarchising effect and obscuring of the specificity of cultures. Too much, Ortiz rightly contends, is lost in translation and progressively fewer translations reach the centres of linguistic dominance.

All of that said, it is undoubtedly a pity that Ortiz's wide-ranging oeuvre has not achieved more focal attention through the translation of a major book that is taken to represent a position. This does give an author a certain lift off. Agreed, such partial representation also introduces its own distortions but in the end no-one complains about being read – only about being misread. Nevertheless, there are other routes to the dissemination of work than book publication, not least the kind of encounter that I have described, which produces quite different effects because of the depth of its personal dimension. Dialogue take us to a different place than reading or listening. Besides, Ortiz has found a place in the Anglosphere through the translation of articles and book chapters.

Quite how one's work is received at any given time is highly unpredictable. Pieces that become highly cited or influential are often quite surprising. What you think is your best

work may be utterly ignored, to your chagrin. The rediscovery of one's formerly neglected work is entirely possible – ever more so now, given global accessibility through electronic repositories. How Renato Ortiz's academic production will circulate and be used in future is not a closed matter. The assembling of the dossier in which this essay appears certainly bears out its continuing relevance and resonances for a new generation.

## Waves of change

More than twenty years ago, the Stirling meeting took place at a strikingly different moment in the process of European Union integration. At the time, that was one of the topics at the forefront of my thinking and analysis. As the present European crisis deepens, it has returned unbidden to my agenda. Twenty years ago, and even more recently, there was considerable academic interest in identifying and capturing evidence of the 'Europeanisation' of the public sphere – its intended or accidental capillary action in engaging the national publics of the member states of the EU. This line of inquiry was propelled by what now is the debatable assumption that historic differences embodied in national systems were weakening and that a common European identity and common politico-communicative space *might* be in the making, however gradually (Fossum and Schlesinger, 2007). It has become ever more apparent that we should never discount the weight of history, a temptation that my work consciously avoided at the time (Schlesinger, 2008).

It is increasingly difficult to assert a complex and open approach to thinking about the place of culture within the transforming European space. We cannot but be struck by this at a moment when forces advocating re-nationalising enclosures are so much in evidence across the continent. In my own work, twenty years ago and more, I reflected quite diversely on the ambiguous potentiality of that moment. Would post-war Europe become a 'new cultural battleground' with states showing resistance to supranational integration? Would there be new assertions of identity at the sub-state level by nations without states (Schlesinger, 1992)? As it happens, both have occurred. Separately, I wondered whether in negotiations over global cultural trade, the European Union could address the growing domination of US audiovisual content in all national markets as TV systems liberalised and commercialised (Schlesinger, 1997).

The second of these questions, and EU public policy measures taken to support audiovisual production, distribution and consumption, caught the attention of some Latin American cultural analysts. Here was a privileged part of the world – the European Union – in which the question of relative global cultural disadvantage was being addressed. Ortiz (1988, p. 186–191), in quite different circumstances, was also thinking about this question. At that time, it was from the point of view of a

<sup>2</sup> For a full account of the proceedings and participants see Schlesinger and Morris (1997).

globalising Brazil that had entered modernity and found a place in the international audiovisual marketplace. That EU measures taken were weak and inadequate (and still are) was less important than the fact of taking remedial action. Across the south Atlantic, European policy coherence and the scale of the EU's involvement in the management of culture were over-rated. But that did not stop them being read as exemplary.

Standing back, then, and thinking about the bigger picture in two distinct but interconnected cultural zones – the Latin American and the European – was one impetus to our setting up the encounter of 1996. Of course, we recognised that differences within each of these areas still mattered hugely and certainly, in the case of Brazil, that its historical formation and trajectory, its sheer territorial scale, and its linguistic distinctiveness in South America were of signal importance.

Before our workshop began in Stirling, in a private conversation with Renato Ortiz and Néstor García Canclini, Nancy Morris and I discussed the careful analytical balance that was needed in taking the discussion forward. In their responses to a paper we had circulated for our colloquium, we were told in no uncertain terms that any analysis of 'Latin Americanness' had to be tempered by recognising how national experiences and distinctive processes of state formation remained highly relevant, even when talk of 'deterritorialisation' and 'globalisation' was at its peak. Of course, this was a point that Ortiz had already made forcefully towards the end of his book (Ortiz, 1988, p. 185).

Considering the European project today, we hear no mention of the Europeanisation of culture and identity. Now, there is neither such a project nor the realistic prospect of creating a common public sphere. We are still in the grip of a complex crisis. The economic crash of 2008 continues to unbalance the European Union, reinforcing the advantage of some countries and interests within them to the disadvantage of others. It is no longer fanciful to wonder in what form it will survive over the longer term.

We all experience the working through of the economic shock and political-institutional crisis in specific ways. I write today as a citizen of the United Kingdom, which is seeking 'Brexit' – exit from the European Union – to what I regard as a highly questionable destination. Within the British state, profound political, social and economic divisions over current political strategy are obvious and deep. They have taken a decidedly cultural form by crystallising social differences (not least those of class and region) in the present focus on controlling immigration. This has dramatised present challenges to an overarching British identity. Moreover, the multinational fault-lines of the United Kingdom have been exposed by the continuing demand in Scotland – the country and nation in which I live – for sovereign independence and dissolution of the three-century-old Great British union-state. We cannot know the eventual outcome of this quest, although it is clear that chronic constitutional renegotiation will remain a constant of contemporary British political life.

Across the European Union as whole, various forms of regressive and populist nationalism are once again part of the

scene, finding ready support amongst those large sections of society increasingly disenchanted with the present weakness of the democratic order and those taking their distance from established political institutions. Widespread hostility to the 'other' – varieties of ethnocentrism, racism and islamophobia, and in some cases, markedly increased anti-semitism – has become deeply embedded in mainstream politics, to varying degrees in different EU states. Questions of migration and questions of social integration are central but how these are addressed cannot be divorced from the impact of economic crisis and the decline of the welfare state. In short, running counter to the prevalent mood when Renato Ortiz came to Scotland with other Latin Americans to discuss his work, in Europe both social closure and cultural defensiveness are presenting a worrying challenge to openness and the possibility of cosmopolitanism.

## The new politics of the cultural industries

Renato Ortiz's sub-title is *cultura brasileira e indústria cultural*. Bearing this in mind, I will briefly compare 'cultural industries' as conceived by Ortiz thirty years ago and the present scene. I will therefore turn to how the 'creative industries' are now thought about. I shall pursue this theme, which is closely related to my current research and, actually, fundamental to Ortiz's analysis. *A moderna tradição brasileira* is at base a growth story, an account of a move from one developmental stage to another and of the changes that ensue. The book relates the steps taken by Brazil from underdevelopment to becoming a world-player in cultural terms (although, Ortiz then remarked, not of the first rank).

In *A moderna tradição brasileira*, Ortiz is overwhelmingly concerned with the modernisation of Brazil, how this is connected to the national project, and how capitalist development in turn plays out in changing relationships between state, culture and nation-people. Ortiz's chapters overlap with one another and may usefully be read as a number of 'takes' on his object of study. The idea of the 'cultural industries' is continually referenced. In his book, the concept principally derives from the highly influential work of Horkheimer and Adorno (1997 [1944]). Ortiz argues that along with processes of state-formation in Brazil, culture itself becomes a nationalising project and part of a capitalistic logic that repositions individual subjectivities. In what follows, I will not discuss the specific empirical detail that Ortiz provides concerning the film, radio, TV, press and advertising industries, the foundation of museums and galleries and theatres in Brazil and the concrete stages of national development under successive political regimes. Instead, I will concentrate on the underlying framework.

Ortiz's historicisation of the cultural development process has a direct bearing on the applicability of the concept of the cultural industries: his account of the initially slow pace of technological advance in the media industries, the gradual in-

vention of new public institutions, and related development by incremental stages of a culture of consumption usefully underlines just how much the conceptual applicability of the Frankfurt School model depends on the specific developmental conditions in force. According to Ortiz (1988, p. 48-49), the process of national political and cultural construction from the 1930s to the 1950s faced:

*[...] os obstáculos que se interpunham ao desenvolvimento do capitalismo brasileiro colocavam limites concretos para o crescimento de uma cultura popular de massa. Faltavam a elas um traço característico das indústrias de cultura, o caráter integrador. [...] Porque a indústria cultural integra as pessoas a partir do alto ela é autoritária, impondo uma forma de dominação que as "sintoniza" a um centro ao qual elas estariam "ligadas".*

Ortiz demonstrates, in minute detail, how the conditions for a consumer society arose in Brazil. When he turns to analysing the memories of those who worked in the cultural industries, he addresses matters that have become increasingly pressing in contemporary debates on the creative industries (of which, more later). These include the role of creative innovation in cultural work, and indeed, the precariousness of such work and its uncertain remuneration for many (Ortiz, 1988, p. 97). He further notes how intensified cultural creativity in Brazil depended on the constitution of a multi-fold, widely-based public whose consumption expanded across a wide range of cultural forms. He is keen to stress – rightly – that mass cultural consumption is not reducible to its purely economic dimension, and that its uses in the course of consumption are far more complex.

I have found Ortiz's account of the political conditions for cultural production under the dictatorship's censorship to be especially interesting. He identifies nuances in the effects of repression that are often overlooked in blanket critiques of censorship. The relations identified in his account are not simple or uniform and indeed, might in some respects be seen as paradoxical:

*O ato censor atinge a especificidade da obra, mas não a generalidade da sua produção. O movimento cultural pós-64 se caracteriza por duas vertentes que não são excludentes: por um lado se define pela repressão ideológica e política; por outro, é um momento da história brasileira onde mais são produzidos e difundidos os bens culturais. Isto se deve ao fato de ser o próprio Estado autoritário o promotor do desenvolvimento capitalista na sua forma mais avançada (Ortiz, 1988, p. 114-115).*

The detailed analysis of the 1960s and 1970s is particularly relevant for the contemporary analysis of cultural policy development in authoritarian states. Ortiz focused on the articulation between military interests and the businesses of scale growing in the cultural, media and communications fields. He was very attentive to what could and could not be done by those in the cultural industries under the sometimes

inconsistent conditions that pertained. If 'integração nacional' was the overarching goal of the dictatorship, this left open areas of discretion at a time when cultural production, distribution and consumption were undergoing 'uma formidável expansão' (Ortiz, 1988, 121). Due to the dictatorship's desire to control the flow of information, communications infrastructure achieved full territorial penetration – a key material condition for development that resonates strongly in the digital age with its premium on continual, rapid technological innovation. Ortiz's analysis of the development of media and cultural institutions, then, led to this view:

*A indústria cultural adquire, portanto, a possibilidade de equacionar uma identidade nacional, mas reinterpretando-a em termos mercadológicos; a ideia de "nação integrada" passa a representar a interligação dos consumidores potenciais espalhados pelo território nacional. Nesse sentido se pode afirmar que o nacional se identifica ao mercado; à correspondência que se fazia anteriormente, cultura nacional-popular, substituiu-se uma outra, cultura mercado-consumo. (Ortiz, 1988, p. 165).*

However, that is not the end-point of the argument. As noted, this turns to Brazil's entry into the global market-place as a major producer of tele-novelas, which shifted the terms of reference "[...] da defesa do nacional-popular para a exportação do "internacional-popular". For Ortiz (1988, p. 205-206), this bespoke a shift of focus from interior to exterior in the shape of 'uma ideologia que justifica a ação dos grupos empresariais no mercado mundial'. Welcome to the world of what is now called the 'creative economy'.

## The creative economy

It is no accident that the transnational diffusion of the telenovela is a key end-point in Ortiz's account. The 'modern tradition' to which the title of his book alludes is his way of framing the re-composition of a socio-cultural order now capable of new achievements under conditions of modernity. How the cultural industries work is an economic question, as Ortiz amply demonstrates throughout his study. It is also always a political one – and this too is a clear line of argument. The cultural industries are inescapably a matter of cultural policy that involves state action. Such intervention is commonly decanted through a range of bodies, differentiated by function and territorial scope and competence. Ortiz notes the extensive cultural institution-building that took place under the Estado Novo and also under the dictatorship. The invention of cultural institutions is precisely what states do to manage national identities and economies in the hope that this will work.

The conditions under which this process of regular institution-building occurs will vary, of course. Ortiz's work in this regard connects to my own research interests, in particular my recent analyses of bodies set up to intervene in the fields of film

policy and creative industries policy more generally (Doyle *et al.*, 2015; Schlesinger *et al.*, 2015). The impetus in the United Kingdom for this kind of institutional invention has not been the 'integração nacional' pursued by the dictatorship. Yet it has still been powered by a national project – that of competing more effectively and profitably in the tough global game of cultural trade (Hesmondhalgh *et al.*, 2015).

We must be highly attentive to the particular conditions that pertain at any time and in any place and how these may define the scope of autonomy and heteronomy in the cultural field. That accepted, we may note that cultural policy in the present period involves highly familiar elements to those that Ortiz was writing about thirty years ago – the state, national cultural institutions, policy-making expertise, together with an ambivalent official view of culture that straddles both its economic and symbolic dimensions.

Thirty years on, the goal of building a competitive 'creative economy' in which creative industries may flourish has become a globally-diffused lodestar objective for states. The terminology has changed in the intervening period. 'Cultural industries' have been at least partially dethroned to enter a new coupledness. The terms of today's debate are overwhelmingly economic: 'creative and cultural industries' are widely seen by states as a crucial sector capable of rapid innovation and growth, where intellectual property is the main mechanism for ensuring that revenue flows to 'creators'. Enhancing the returns from global competition in cultural trade and the enhancement of capacity has become a national project pursued around the world, which of course involves making transnational alliances when these suit the interests in play. The creative game has also become a European Union project, where the supranational discourse has scaled up from the national level to encompass the group of 28 states that constitute the union (Schlesinger, 2018).

This phase of the present cultural turn has been the subject of an extensive literature (e.g., Oakley and O'Connor, 2015; Jones *et al.*, 2015) and having recently summed up the global orthodoxy and its key dimensions, I will not repeat myself here (Schlesinger, 2017). It is worth noting, however, that the United Nations (2013) has contributed to the globalisation of what is now a protean agenda – it fits both authoritarian and democratic regimes like a glove, because they are all united in their nationalism. At the same time, as the focus and rhetoric of the creative economy have globalised, the underlying worldview has also been indigenised: it is a new development ideology that plays out in each national context according to its own specific conditions.

National culture, as I have repeatedly demonstrated in my recent work, is more and more valued for its economic dimension than its contribution to the building of solidary communities or to engendering a diversity of expressions within a framework of continually renegotiated, but broadly shared values about what constitutes a good society. In the digital era, when the intermediated disaggregation of public spheres and

common cultures is increasingly evident, national projects face some fundamental new challenges. We are only just beginning to address these.

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