HYBRID CULTURES

STRATEGIES FOR ENTERING AND LEAVING MODERNITY

NÉSTOR GARCÍA CANCLINI

FOREWORD BY RENATO ROSALDO

TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER L. CHIAPPARI AND SILVIA L. LÓPEZ

With a New Introduction
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The University of Minnesota is an equal-opportunity educator and employer.
For Teresa and Julián
Personal life, expression, knowledge, and history advance obliquely, and not directly, toward ends or toward concepts. That which is sought too deliberately is not obtained.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty
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INTRODUCTION

Hybrid Cultures
in Globalized Times

How does one know when a discipline or field of knowledge changes? One way of responding: when some concepts irrupt with force, displacing others or requiring their reformulation. This is what has happened with the “dictionary” of cultural studies. I propose to discuss here in what sense one can assert that hybridization is one of these detonating terms.

I will focus my attention on how studies of hybridization have altered the manner of speaking about identity, culture, difference, inequality, multiculturalism, and about conceptual pairings used to organize conflict in the social sciences: tradition/modernity, north/south, local/global. Why does the issue of hybridity take on such importance of late if it is a long-standing characteristic of historical development? One could say that precursors have existed since the first exchanges between societies, and in fact Pliny the Elder mentioned the word with reference to migrants to Rome in his time. A number of historians and anthropologists have shown the key role of mestizaje in the Mediterranean since the classical period of Greece (Laplantine and Nouss 1997), and others use the term “hybridization” specifically to identify what occurred following Europe’s expansion toward America (Bernand 1993; Gruzinski 2002). Mikhail Bakhtin used it to characterize the coexistence, since early modernity, of elite and popular languages.

Nevertheless, it is in the final decade of the twentieth century that the analysis of hybridization becomes most extensive in the treatment of a broad range of cultural processes. But the value of the concept is also under
discourse. It is used to describe processes of interethnic contact and decolonization (Bhabha 1994), globalizing processes (Nederveen Pieterse 1996; Hannerz 1996), travel and border crossing (Clifford 1997), and artistic, literary, and mass communicational fusions (de la Campa 1994; Hall 1992; Martín Barbero 1987; Papastergiadis 1997; Webner 1997). There are also studies of how diverse gastronomies are hybridized in a national cuisine (Archetti 1999), and of the strategies of association between public institutions and private corporations, Western museography and the traditions of emerging cultures, in universal exhibitions (Harvey 1996). This new introduction intends to assess these varied usages and the principal positions they represent. To the extent that, as Jean Franco has written, “Hybrid Cultures is a book in search of a method” to avoid being “corseted into false oppositions such as high or popular, urban or rural, modern or traditional” (Franco 1992), such an expansion of scholarship requires that we enter new avenues of debate.

In like manner, I will treat some of the epistemological and political objections directed at the concept of hybridization. With respect to the scientific status of this notion, I will differentiate it from its usage in biology in order to consider specifically the contributions and difficulties it presents in the social sciences. With regard to its contribution to political thought, I will expand on the analysis already presented in the book, explaining why hybridization is not a synonym for fusion without contradiction but rather can be helpful in accounting for particular forms of conflict generated in recent cross-cultural contact and in the context of the decline of national modernization projects in Latin America. We must answer the question of whether the access to a greater variety of goods facilitated by globalizing forces democratizes the ability to combine these goods and to develop a creative multicultural reality.

Rethinking Identities through Hybridization

One must begin by accepting the dispute over whether hybrid is a good or bad word. That the word is widely used is not sufficient for us to consider it respectable. On the contrary, its profuse employment favors the assignment to it of divergent meanings. By moving from biology to sociocultural analysis it gained new fields of application but lost univocal sense. Hence some would prefer to continue talking about syncretism in religious matters, of mestizaje in history and anthropology, of fusion in music. What is the advantage for scientific research of turning to a term laden with equivocal sense?
Let’s confront, then, the epistemological discussion. I want to acknowledge that this aspect was not adequately addressed in *Hybrid Cultures*. The debates that took place over those pages, and regarding the works of other authors, cited in this new text, allow me now to better elaborate on the position and status of the concept of hybridization in the social sciences.

I will start with a first definition: *I understand for hybridization sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate form, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices.* In turn, it bears noting that the so-called discrete structures were a result of prior hybridizations and therefore cannot be considered pure points of origin. An example: currently there is a debate over whether Spanglish, born in the Latino communities of the United States and extended via the Internet throughout the world, can be accepted, taught in university courses (as happens at Amherst College in Massachusetts), and become the object of specialized dictionaries (Stavans 2003). As if Spanish and English were languages unindebted to Latin, Arabic, and pre-Columbian languages. If we refused to recognize the long, impure history of Spanish and extirpated all the terms of Arabic origin, we would be left without *alcachofas* (artichokes), *alcaldes* (mayors), *almohadas* (pillows), and *algarabía* (rejoicing). One way of describing this movement from the discrete to the hybrid, and to new discrete forms, is the “cycles of hybridization” formula proposed by Brian Stross, according to which we move historically from more heterogeneous forms to other more homogeneous ones, and then to other relatively more heterogeneous forms, without any being “purely” or simply homogeneous.

The spectacular multiplication of hybridizations during the twentieth century does not make precision an easy matter. Can practices as varied as interracial marriages, the combination of African ancestors, indigenous figures and Catholic saints in Brazilian Umbanda, and advertising collages of historical monuments with beverages and sports cars be organized under just one term? Something as common as the fusion of ethnic melodies with classical and contemporary music or with jazz and salsa can take the form of phenomena as diverse as *chicha*, a mixture of Andean and Caribbean rhythms; the jazzy reinterpretation of Mozart by the Afro-Cuban group Irakere; or the reelaborations of English and Hindu melodies performed by the Beatles, Peter Gabriel, and other musicians. The artists who stress these crossovers and turn them into the conceptual crux of their work do not do so under the same conditions or with the same objectives. Antoni Muntadas, for example, gave the title *Hybrids* to a set of projects on exhibit in 1988 at
the Reina Sofia Center for Art in Madrid. On that occasion he suggested, through photography, the displacements that had taken place between the old use of that building as a hospital and its current artistic function. On another occasion, he created a Web site, hybridspaces, in which he explored the cross-contamination of images from architecture and the mass media. A great deal of his work is produced through mixing multimedia and multicultural elements: the print culture and publicity of street life inserted into television, or the final ten minutes of daily television programming from Argentina, Brazil, and the United States shown simultaneously and followed by a shot sequence contrasting the street-level diversity of the countries with their televisual homogenization.

What is the utility of grouping under just one term such heterogeneous devices and experiences? Is it useful to designate these with the word *hybrid*, whose biological origin has led some authors to warn against the risk of transferring to culture and society the sterility typically associated with that term? Those who make this criticism recall the infecundity of the mule (Cornejo Polar 1997). Even when this objection is found in recent texts, it represents the persistence of a belief dating to the nineteenth century, when hybridization was treated with suspicion because it was assumed to be detrimental to social development. Since 1870, when Mendel demonstrated the enrichment produced by genetic cross-breeding in botany, fertile hybridizations have been plentiful, taking advantage of cell characteristics of different plants in order to improve their growth, resistance, quality, and the economic and nutritional value of foods derived from them (Olby 1985; Callender 1988). The hybridization of coffee, flowers, cereals, and other products expands the genetic variety of the species and boosts their survival in the face of climatic and habitat changes.

At any rate, there is no reason for one to remain trapped in the biological dynamics from which the concept is derived. The social sciences have imported many ideas from other disciplines without being invalidated by the conditions of use in the science of origin. Biological concepts such as reproduction were redeveloped in order to speak about social, economic, and cultural reproduction: the debate carried out from Marx to the present day is based on the theoretical consistency and explanatory power of that term, not on a fatal dependence on the usage assigned to it by another science. In the same way, the polemics about the metaphorical use of economic concepts to examine symbolic processes, such as Pierre Bourdieu's when he refers to cultural *capital* and linguistic *markets*, need not focus on the migration of those terms from one or another discipline but on the epis-
temological operations that situate their explanatory fecundity and their limits inside cultural discourses: do they or do they not allow an improved understanding of something that previously had been unexplained?

The social (Hall; Papastergiadis) and linguistic (Bakhtin; Bhabha) constructions of the concept of hybridization have made possible a departure from the biological and essentialist discourses of cultural identity, authenticity, and purity. This contributes to identifying and accounting for multiple fertile alliances: for example, of the pre-Columbian imaginary with that of the colonizers of New Spain, and later with that of the culture industries (Bernand; Gruzinski), between popular and tourist aesthetics (De Grandis), of national ethnic cultures with metropolitan cultures (Bhabha), and with global institutions (Harvey). The few written fragments of a history of hybridizations have made evident the productivity and innovative power of many cross-cultural mixtures.

How does hybridization fuse discrete social structures or practices in order to generate new structures and new practices? At times this occurs in an unplanned manner or is the unforeseen result of processes of migration, tourism, and economic or communicational exchange. But often hybridization emerges from individual and collective creativity—not only in the arts but in everyday life and in technological development. One seeks to reconvert a heritage or resource (a factory, a professional skill, a set of techniques and knowledges) in order to reintegrate it to new conditions of production and distribution. Let's be clear about the cultural significance of reconversion: this term is used to explain the strategies by which a painter becomes a designer, or the national bourgeoisie acquire the languages and other competencies necessary to reinvest their economic and symbolic capital in transnational circuits (Bourdieu 1984). One also encounters economic and symbolic reconversion strategies in the popular sectors: rural migrants who adapt their knowledges in order to work and consume in the city, or who connect their traditional craftwork with modern uses in order to interest urban buyers; workers who reformulate their culture on the job in the face of new technologies of production; indigenous movements that renovate their demands in transnational politics or in an ecological discourse and learn to communicate these demands via radio, television, and the Internet. For reasons such as these, I maintain that the object of study is not hybridity but the processes of hybridization. Empirical analysis of these processes, articulated with reconversion strategies, shows that hybridization is of interest both to hegemonic groups and to popular sectors that wish to take possession of the benefits of modernity.
These diverse, ongoing processes of hybridization lead to a relativizing of the notion of identity. They even call into question the tendency on the part of anthropology and of a certain sector of cultural studies to take up identities as a research object. The emphasis on hybridization not only puts an end to the pretense of establishing “pure” or “authentic” identities; in addition, it demonstrates the risk of delimiting local, self-contained identities or those that attempt to assert themselves as radically opposed to national society or globalization. When an identity is defined through a process of abstraction of traits (language, traditions, certain stereotyped behaviors), there is often a tendency to remove those practices from the history of mixing in which they were formed. Consequently, one mode of understanding the identity becomes absolute, and heterodox ways of speaking the language, making music, or interpreting the traditions are rejected. One winds up, in short, sealing off the possibility of modifying culture and politics.

Studies of identitarian narratives conducted from theoretical perspectives that take into account processes of hybridization (Hannerz; Hall) show that it is not possible to speak of identities as if they were simply a matter of a set of fixed characteristics, or to posit them as the essence of an ethnicity or a nation. The history of identitarian movements reveals a series of operations for the selection of elements from different historical periods, and their articulation by hegemonic groups in a story that gives them coherence, drama, and eloquence.

For this reason, some of us propose to shift the object of study from identity to cross-cultural heterogeneity and hybridization (Goldberg 1994). It is no longer adequate to say that there are no identities describable as self-contained and ahistorical essences, and to understand them as ways in which communities imagine themselves and construct stories about their origin and development. In a world so fluidly interconnected, identitarian sedimentations organized in more or less stable historical groups (ethnicities, nations, classes) restructure themselves in the midst of interethnic, transclass, and transnational groupings. The diverse ways in which the members of each group appropriate the heterogeneous repertoire of goods and messages available in the transnational circuits generate new forms of segmentation: within a national society—Mexico, say—there are millions of indigenous people mestizo-ized with white colonizers, but some have been “chicano-ized” by traveling to the United States; others reshape their habits in relation to the offerings of the mass media; others have acquired a high level of education and enriched their traditional patrimony with
aesthetic resources and knowledge from various countries; others incorporate themselves into Korean and Japanese enterprises and fuse their ethnic capital with the disciplines and knowledge of those productive systems. Studying cultural processes, therefore, rather than leading us to affirm self-sufficient identities, is useful for recognizing forms of positioning oneself in the midst of heterogeneity and for understanding how hybridizations are produced.

**From Description to Explanation**

By reducing the conceptual hierarchy of identity and heterogeneity in favor of hybridization, we remove support from policies of fundamentalist homogenization or the limited (segregated) recognition of "the plurality of cultures." It is worth asking, therefore, where hybridization leads, if it serves to reformulate cross-cultural research and the design of transnational and transethnic, perhaps global, cultural policies.

One difficulty in fulfilling these aims is that studies about hybridization are usually limited to **describing** cross-cultural mixing. We have barely begun to advance, as part of its sociocultural reconstruction, toward giving **explanatory** power to the concept: studying processes of hybridization by locating these in structural relations of causality—and giving the concept **hermeneutical** capacity: making it useful for interpreting relations of meaning that are reconstructed through mixing.

If we want to go beyond liberating cultural analysis from its fundamentalist identitarian tropes, we must position hybridization in another network of concepts: for example, contradiction, mestizaje, syncretism, transculturation, and creolization. It is also necessary to understand it in the context of the ambivalences of the globalized mass diffusion and industrialization of symbolic processes, and of the power conflicts these provoke.

Another objection to the concept of hybridization is that it can suggest easy integration and fusion of cultures, without giving sufficient weight to contradictions and to that which resists being hybridized. Pina Werbner’s happy observation that cosmopolitanism, by hybridizing us, shapes us as "multicultural gourmets," runs that risk. Antonio Cornejo Polar (1997) has pointed out in a number of authors who concern ourselves with this theme the "impressive list of fertile hybrid products" and "the celebratory tone" with which we speak of hybridization as the harmonization of "torn and belligerent" worlds. John Kraniauskas (1998) also found that, because the concept of reconversion designates the utilization of old resources in new
contexts, the list of examples provided in this book constitutes an “optimistic” vision of hybridizations.

It is possible that the polemic against folk purism and traditionalism has led me to give priority to the prosperous and innovative cases of hybridization. Nevertheless, the contradictory significance of cross-cultural mixes has become more evident today. Precisely as we move from the descriptive character of the notion of hybridization—as a fusion of discrete structures—toward developing the concept as an explanatory resource, we are able to indicate in which cases the mixes can be productive, and when they generate conflicts owing to something that remains incompatible or irreconcilable in the practices brought together. Cornejo Polar has contributed to this move forward when he says that, just as one “enters and exits modernity,” one could also understand historically the variations and conflicts of the metaphor that concerns us if we speak of “entering and exiting hybridity” (Cornejo Polar 1997).

I am grateful to this author for suggesting that we apply to hybridization the same provisional and transitory movement that I posited in Hybrid Cultures, beginning with the subtitle of the book, as necessary for understanding strategies for entering and exiting modernity. If we speak of hybridization as a process to which one can gain access and which one can abandon, from which one can be excluded, or to which we can be subordinated, it is possible to understand the various subject positions implicated in cross-cultural relations. Thus, one can work on processes of hybridization in relation to cultural inequality, to the possibilities for appropriating several cultures at once in different groups or classes, and therefore in relation to asymmetries of power and prestige. Cornejo Polar only hints at this direction for analysis in the posthumous essay I cited, but I find a supplement for expanding on that insight in a text he wrote shortly before: “Una heterogeneidad no dialéctica: sujeto y discursos migrantes en el Perú moderno” (Cornejo Polar 1996).

In this article, responding to the tendency to celebrate migrations, he recalled that the migrant is not always “especially disposed to synthesize different stages of his itinerary, even though—as is clear—it might be impossible for him to keep these encapsulated and disconnected from each other.” With examples from José María Arguedas, Juan Biondi, and Eduardo Zapata, he demonstrated that the oscillation between identities of origin and of destination can lead the migrant to speak “spontaneously from various locations,” without mixing them, as someone from the provinces or someone from Lima, as a speaker of Quechua or of Spanish. On some oc-
casions, he observed, one transfers elements from one discourse to another metonymically or metaphorically. In other cases, the subject accepts being decentered from his or her own history and takes on different "incompatible and contradictory" roles "in a nondialectical way": "the there and the here, which are also the yesterday and the today, reinforce the subject's enunciative competence and can concoct opposing narratives and—even if you like, exaggerating somewhat—schizophrenically" (Cornejo Polar 1996, 841).

Under the current conditions of globalization, I find ever-greater reason for employing the concepts of mestizaje and hybridization. But as cross-cultural contact intensifies through migration, economics, and mass communications, one sees, as François Laplantine and Alexis Nouss observe, that there is not only "fusion, cohesion, osmosis, but confrontation and dialogue." In these times, in which "disillusionment with the promises of abstract universalism have led to particularist tensions" (Laplantine and Nouss 1997, 14), cross-cultural thinking and practices are resources for acknowledging difference and elaborating on the tensions that arise there. Hybridization, as a process of intersection and transaction, is what makes it possible for multicultural reality to avoid tendencies toward segregation and to become cross-cultural reality. Policies of hybridization can serve to work democratically with differences, so that history is not reduced to wars between cultures, as Samuel Huntington imagines it. We can choose to live in a state of war or in a state of hybridization.

It is useful to warn against the overly pleasant versions of mestizaje. That is why it is best to insist that the object of study is not hybridity, but the processes of hybridization. In this way one can acknowledge the extent to which these processes are destructive, and recognize what is left out of the fusion. A theory of hybridization that is not naive requires a critical awareness of its limits, of what refuses or resists hybridization.

Homi Bhabha has studied hybridizations as involving the politics of domination and of resistance. Alberto Moreiras goes further, using Bhabha's expression "savage hybridity" to point out that the condition of unspeakability among a range of identitarian positions, typical of contemporary societies, "ungrounds" both hegemonic and subaltern social groups. The hegemonic groups cannot assert themselves absolutely in the name of any orthodox system of thought, and the subaltern groups are unable to establish an ethnic or national identity as an exclusive base for their antagonistic position. No single particularism can build itself up on coherent ontological support from the social, or from its own postulation as subject. "No differential thinking can establish closure in its self-determination without
a systematic or foundational ground that gives it a principle of construction. In the absence of such a foundation, the impossibility of closure of the system of difference is its aporetic relation. It cannot be solved logically, and it is thus a limit for thought.” Moreiras argues that this “destabilization of all ontologies” creates the “possibility of an other history” (Moreiras 2001, 293, 294).

I agree with the author of The Exhaustion of Difference that this inability of the cultural notion of hybridization to reach logical closure, the impossibility of presenting the hybrid as a stable order of subjectivization, makes it possible to think the concept of hybridization critically. But it remains to be seen how—“if the hybrid is an abyss” in which the imagination is afraid of losing itself (Moreiras 2001, 296)—real existing historical movements, both hegemonic and subaltern, tend to exorcise that vertigo by instituting time and again essentializations of a particular state of hybridization. It is worth examining these risks, with attention to the distinct modalities in which exchanges and confrontations between cultures present themselves.

Hybridization and Its Family of Concepts

At this point it must be said that the concept of hybridization is useful in some research to cover conjointly forms of cross-cultural contact that usually carry different names: radical or ethnic fusions called mestizaje, syncretism of beliefs, and also other modern mixes between the artisanal and the industrial, the refined and the popular, written and visual forms in mass media messages. Let’s explore why some of these interrelations cannot be designated with classic names such as mestizo or syncretic.

The mix of Spanish and Portuguese colonizers, then English and French, with indigenous Americans, to which were added slaves transported from Africa, made mestizaje a foundational process in the societies of the so-called New World. At present, less than 10 percent of the population of Latin America is indigenous. Also minorities are those communities of European origin that have not mixed with the native population. But the important history of fusions between the different groups requires the notion of mestizaje, in both the biological sense (production of phenotypes as a result of genetic crossovers) and the cultural sense—mixing of European habits, beliefs, and forms of thought with those originating from American societies. Nonetheless, that concept is insufficient for naming and explaining the more modern forms of cross-cultural contact.

For a long time the physiognomical and chromatic aspects of mestizaje
were the primary focus of study. Skin color and physical traits continue to
matter in the ordinary construction of subordination, in discrimination
against indigenous people, blacks, or women. Nevertheless, in the social
sciences and in democratic political thought, mestizaje is currently located
in the cultural dimension of identitarian combinations. In anthropology,
in cultural studies, and in policy, the problem is how to design forms of
modern multicultural association, even though these are conditioned by
biological mestizaje.

Something similar occurs in the passage from religious mixes to more
complex fusions of beliefs. Undoubtedly, it is relevant to speak of syncre-
tism in reference to the combination of traditional religious practices.
Intensified migration and the transcontinental diffusion of beliefs and
rituals in the past century accentuated these hybridizations and increased,
at times, tolerance for them—to such an extent that in countries like Brazil,
Cuba, Haiti, and the United States, double or triple religious identification
became common (for example, being Catholic and participating in an Afro-
American form of worship or a New Age ceremony). If we consider syncre-
tism in a broader sense, as the simultaneous adherence to different systems
of belief, not only of a religious kind, the phenomenon expands dramati-
cally, above all in the great numbers of people who turn to indigenous or
Eastern medicine to treat certain ailments, or to allopathic medicine, or
to Catholic or Pentecostal rituals. The syncretic use of these resources for
health care tends to go together with musical fusions and multicultural
forms of social organization, as happens with Cuban Santería, Haitian
voodoo, and Brazilian candomblé (Rowe and Schelling 1991).

The word creolization has also been used to refer to cross-cultural mixes.
In a strict sense, it designates the language and culture created by vari-
tions from the base language and other languages in the context of slave
trafficking. It is applied to the mixing that French has undergone in the
Americas and the Caribbean (Louisiana, Haiti, Guadeloupe, Martinique)
and in the Indian Ocean (Réunion, the island of Mauritius); or Portuguese
in Africa (Guinea, Cape Verde), in the Caribbean (Curaçao), and Asia
(India, Sri Lanka).

Given that it presents paradigmatic tensions between orality and writ-
ing, between educated and popular sectors, on a continuum of diversity,
Ulf Hannerz suggests extending usage of the term to the transnational
sphere in order to name “processes of cultural confluence” characterized
“by inequality in power, prestige, and material resources” (Hannerz 1996).
His insistence that the increasing flow between center and periphery must
be examined together with asymmetries between markets, states, and educational levels helps avoid the danger of seeing *mestizaje* as simple cross-cultural reconciliation and homogenization.

These terms—*mestizaje*, syncretism, creolization—continue to be used in a good part of the anthropological and ethnohistorical literature to specify particular, more or less classic, forms of hybridization. But how does one designate fusions between mass media and urban working-class cultures, between the consumer styles of different generations, between local and transnational musics, that take place on the borders and in large cities (but not only there)? The word *hybridization* seems more ductile for the purpose of naming not only the mixing of ethnic or religious elements but the products of advanced technologies and modern or postmodern social processes.

I emphasize borders between countries and large cities as contexts that condition the specific formats, styles, and contradictions of hybridization. The rigid borders established by modern states have become porous. Few cultures can now be described as stable units, with precise limits based on the occupation of a fenced-in territory. But this multiplying of opportunities for hybridization does not imply indeterminacy or unrestricted freedom. Hybridization occurs under specific social and historical conditions, amid systems of production and consumption that at times operate coercively, as can be appreciated in the lives of many migrants. Another of the social entities that both foster and condition hybridization is the city. The multicultural and multilingual megacities (for example, London, Berlin, New York, Los Angeles, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Mexico City, and Hong Kong) are studied as centers where hybridization foments the greatest number of conflicts and the greatest cultural creativity (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996).

**Are Modern Concepts Useful for Talking about Globalization?**

The terms employed as antecedents or equivalents to hybridization—*mestizaje*, syncretism, and creolization—are generally used to refer to traditional processes or to the survival of premodern customs and forms of thought in the early modern period.

One of the tasks of this book is to construct the notion of hybridization in order to designate specifically modern cross-cultural mixtures, among others generated by the forms of integration conducted by nation-states, political populisms, and the culture industries. It was necessary, therefore, to discuss
the linkage and discord between modernity, modernization, and modernism, as well as doubts about whether Latin America is a modern continent.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, modernity was judged by postmodern thought. Written in the context of the hegemony then enjoyed by postmodernism, the book valued its antievolutionism, its valorizing of multiculturality and transhistorical heterogeneity, and exploited the critique of metanarratives in order to delegitimize the fundamentalist pretensions of traditionalist modes of thought. But, at the same time, I resisted considering postmodernity to be a stage that would replace the modern era. I preferred to conceive of it as a mode of problematizing the articulations that modernity established with traditions it attempted to exclude or overcome. The decollection of ethnic and national patrimonies, as well as the deterritorialization and reconversion of knowledges and customs, were examined as resources for hybridizing.

The 1990s reduced the attractiveness of postmodern thought and placed globalization at the center of the social sciences. Just as today we perceive with greater clarity that the postmodern did not close the curtains on modernity, the global problematic does not allow us to leave modernity behind either. Some of the more notable theorists of globalization, such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, study it as the culmination of modern conflicts and tendencies. In Beck’s view, globalization places us before the challenge of configuring a more reflexive “second modernity” that would not impose its secularizing rationality but would rather plurally accept diverse traditions.

Globalizing processes accentuate modern cross-cultural contact by creating world markets for money and material goods, messages, and migrants. The flows and interactions that occur in these processes have diminished the power of border and customs agents, as well as the autonomy of local traditions, and have fostered a greater variety of hybridizations in production, communication, and styles of consumption than in the past. To the classic modalities of fusion derived from migrations, commercial exchanges, and the policies of educational integration promoted by nation-states are now added the mixtures generated by the culture industries. Although this book does not speak exclusively about globalization, it does examine processes of internationalization and transnationalization in that it deals with the culture industries and migration from Latin America to the United States. Even traditional crafts and music are analyzed in relation to transnational mass cultural circuits, where the products of popular culture tend to be “expropriated” by tourist and communications enterprises.
Through the study of recent trends in globalization we observe that these activities not only integrate, producing *mestizaje*; they also segregate, producing new inequalities and stimulating differentialist reactions (Appadurai 1996; Beck 1999; Hannerz 1996). At times, corporate and consumer globalization is exploited in order to assert and expand ethnic particularities or cultural regions, as is happening with Latin music (Ochoa 1998; Yúdice 1999). Some social actors discover in these processes resources for resisting or modifying globalization and for reformulating the conditions of exchange between cultures. But the example of musical hybridizations, to mention just one, demonstrates the inequalities and differences that exist when hybridizations take place in countries of the center or of the periphery: one has only to recall the distance between the homogenized fusions of Latino culture and the distinct modes of making Latin music in Miami's recording industry, and the greater diversity recognized by local production companies in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, or Mexico.

It is therefore worth adding to the typology of traditional hybridizations (*mestizaje*, syncretism, creolization) the operations of hybrid construction among modern actors and under advanced conditions of globalization. We encounter two such examples in the multicultural formation of Latino culture: (1) the neo-Hispanoamericanization of Latin America, and (2) inter-American fusion. By neo-Hispanoamericanization, I mean the expanding ownership of publishing houses, airlines, banks, and telecommunications by Spanish companies in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. In Brazil, Spanish capital occupied the second-highest level of foreign investment in 1999, at 28 percent; in Argentina, Spanish investment moved into first place that same year, overtaking the United States. On the one hand, one might think it beneficial to broaden economic exchange with Spain and Europe in order to correct the earlier tendency for Latin America to be subordinated to U.S. capital. But asymmetrical conditions of exchange limit the participation of Latin American artists and media in these cases as well.

Under the heading of inter-American fusion I include the totality of processes of “North Americanization” of Latin American countries and of the “Latinization” of the United States. I am inclined to call these hybridizations fusions, because that word, the preferred term in music, is emblematic of the prominent role of agreements among transnational recording industries, Miami’s position as “capital of Latin American culture” (Yúdice 1999), and regional interaction through cross-cultural consumption. (I analyzed
these inter-American and Euro-American relationships more extensively in my book La globalización imaginada.)

Talking about fusions should not cause us to neglect elements of resistance or cultural scissions. The theory of hybridization should take into account the movements that reject it. Such movements do not only arise from fundamentalisms that oppose religious syncretism and cross-cultural mestizaje. There is resistance to the acceptance of these and other forms of hybridization because such phenomena generate insecurity among different cultural groups and conspire against their ethnocentric self-esteem. Hybridization also represents a challenge for modern analytic thought, accustomed as it is to the binary separation of the civilized from the savage, of the national from the foreign, of Anglo from Latino.

In the same way, processes involving what we might call restricted hybridization compel us to be careful with generalizations. The fluidity of communications facilitates the appropriation of elements from many cultures, but this does not mean that we accept them indiscriminately; as Gustavo Lins Ribeiro comments, with reference to white fascination with Afro-American culture, some people think: “I’ll listen to their music, but they’re not marrying my daughter.” At any rate, the intensification of cross-cultural contact favors greater and more diversified mixing and exchange than in other periods, such as people who are Brazilian by nationality, Portuguese by language, Russian or Japanese by origin, and Catholic or Afro-American by religious tradition. This variability of regimes of belonging once again defies binary thinking, or any other effort to organize the world into pure entities and simple oppositions. It is necessary to register that which, in the intersection of cultures, remains different. As N. J. C. Vasantkumar explains regarding syncretism, “it is a process of mixing what is compatible and securing what is incompatible” (quoted in Canevacci 1995, 22).

What Changed in the Past Decade

Latin America is losing its national projects. The loss of control over the economies in different countries is evident in the disappearance of the national currency (Ecuador, El Salvador) or in the frequency of devaluations (Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela). Currencies carry national emblems, but they no longer represent the capacity of nations to sovereignly administer their present. They do not correspond to reality, even though Brazil, in its efforts to increase the value of the national currency and return it from hyperinflationary frenzy to a plausible relationship with the country,
has renamed its currency exactly that: the real. This gamble, entrusting a
strong signifier with the revitalization of the signified, is as inconsistent
with theories of representation and linguistics as the attempt to make the
reorganization and endogenous control of the economy hinge on currency
stability is with an economic point of view.

Why resort to such recklessly naive doctrines in order to achieve struc-
tural effects? asks Renato Janine Ribeiro. As this Brazilian philosopher
demonstrates with respect to his own country, the name change for the
currency had temporary effects: it made it possible for a president of the
republic to be elected twice, it cemented the alliance between left and right,
it helped privatize state agencies and calmed social tensions for a few years.
Six years later, the fallen value of the real and the greater external depen-
dency of national economic variables show that initiating a new history by
reconstituting the signified by way of the signifier, the economy through
finances, was just a temporary way of hiding the conflicts of history, a his-
tory of lost opportunities, ill-fated elections—in sum, a loss of control of
the economic and social processes that the national currency aspires to
represent (Janine Ribeiro 2000).

From the 1940s to the 1970s, the creation of publishing houses in Argent-
tina, Brazil, Mexico, and a few in Colombia, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, and
Venezuela, produced an “import substitution” in the field of lettered cul-
ture, quite significant for the configuration of modern democratic nations;
starting in the mid-1970s, most of the presses began to go bankrupt or sold
off their catalogs to Spanish publishers, which were then purchased by
French, Italian, and German enterprises.

The social history of Latin American cultures traced in this book reveals
that a key resource for modernization was the increase in the number of
university students (from 250,000 in 1950 to 5,389,000 by the end of the
1970s). Since the 1980s, the universities, aging and economically asphyxi-
ated, have become, for young people, according to Juan Villoro, “gigantic
waiting rooms where they are entertained so that they don’t become a fac-
tor in social conflict.”

Even though many young people were often professionally frustrated
thirty, forty, or fifty years ago after leaving the universities, and at times the
best researchers would migrate to Europe or the United States, higher edu-
cation sought to produce intellectuals for national development; today it
continues to frustrate most, but it only offers the option of leaving to work
in secondary positions in the First World service economy or becoming
a technician with the transnational corporations that control production
and trade in their own country. Nothing in the national society leads to
the temptation of political service; very few public posts require high-level
professional training, and a background in critical intellectual work, if
anything, disqualifies from public service those who are asked only to be
experts. The youth of thirty years ago were preoccupied with how to close
the gap between high and popular culture; young professionals and uni-
versity students in Latin America now are afflicted with the problem of
how to stay afloat in what remains of the world of high culture and the
middle class; if they are Colombians or Ecuadoreans, the question is how
to leave the country, and for where.

All of the tendencies we observed a decade ago, toward abdicating the
public in favor of the private, the national in favor of the transnational,
have been accentuated. Two new processes, at that time only just emerging,
contribute to this historical direction. One is the digitalization and media-
tion of rural processes of production, circulation, and consumption, which
transfers the initiative and economic and cultural control to transnational
corporations. The other is the growth of informal markets, the increasing
scarcity of employment, and, in its most spectacular form, the narcotics-
driven reordering of a great part of politics and the economy, with the re-
sulting slow destruction of social ties.

There continue to be a few foundations and programs dedicated to cul-
tural patronage on the part of businesspeople in some Latin American
countries, but institutions sponsored by both public and private actors
have closed down everywhere. The role of these national actors is usu-
ally taken over by foreign investors in telecommunications, distributors
and exhibitors of film and video, and vendors of computer products and
services. Aesthetic innovation is of declining interest in the museums, in
the publishing houses, and in film; it has been shifted instead into elec-
tronic technologies, into musical entertainment and fashion. Where there
were painters or musicians, there are now designers and disc jockeys.
Hybridization in a certain way has become easier and more prolific at a
time when it does not rely on long periods of artisanal or erudite patience,
but rather turns on the ability to generate hypertexts and quickly produced
audiovisual or electronic publications. Ten years ago, being aware of new
developments in different countries and the possibilities for mixing them
required frequent travel, subscription to foreign magazines, and payment
of enormous telephone bills; now it’s a matter of periodically upgrading
computer equipment and having good Internet access.

Despite the fact that we live in a historical moment excited with itself,
histories of art, literature, and culture continue to appear here and there as narrative resources, metaphors, and prestigious quotations. Fragments of baroque, romantic, or jazz classics are summoned forth in rock and techno music. Renaissance iconography and avant-garde experimentation nourish the advertising for technological advances. Colonels who had no one to write to them come with their novels into film; the memory of the oppressed and the disappeared maintains their testimony in ragged rock songs and video clips. The dramas of history are hybridized with today’s discourses more often in cultural movements than in social or political ones.

Meanwhile, national profiles maintain their validity in some areas of consumption—above all, in fields where each society has its own offerings at its disposal. This is not the case with film, because U.S. films occupy between 80 and 90 percent of the screen time in nearly the entire world; to the dominance in production and distribution one can now add transnational control of exhibition circuits, with which the U.S. film industry’s ability to marginalize what remains of European, Asian, and Latin American cinematography is confirmed for the foreseeable future. What is happening with music is a different story: the major labels (Sony, Warner, EMI, and Universal) control 90 percent of the world’s recording market, but consumer surveys indicate that in all of the Latin American countries more than half of what is listened to is in Spanish.

Popular cultures have not been extinguished, but one must seek them out in other places or nonplaces. The staging of the popular continues to take place in museums and folkloric exhibits, on the political stage, and in mass communication, with strategies similar to those I analyzed in chapters 5 and 6, even though the recomposition, revaluing, and devaluing of local cultures through globalization emphasize, and at times change, some processes of hybridization.

It is more clear now than when I wrote this book that the interaction between popular and hegemonic groups, between the local and the transnational, cannot be read only as antagonism. The major labels of the music industry, for example, are companies that move with ease between the global and the national. Experts at glocalizing, they create the conditions for us to circulate among diverse scales and locations of production and consumption.

In sum, globalizing processes promote the expansion of consumers’ combinatorial faculties, but almost never in endogenous hybridization, that is, in local production circuits, which are increasingly conditioned by a coercive heteronomous hybridization that concentrates combinatorial initiatives in a
small number of transnational headquarters for the generation of goods and messages, for the publication and administration of social meaning.

Policies of Hybridization

Is it possible to democratize not only the access to goods but the capacity for hybridizing them, to combine the multicultural repertoires expanded by these global times? The answer depends, above all, on political and economic action. Along these lines, I want to foreground the urgency of attaching to free-trade agreements regulations that order and strengthen transnational public space. Among other requirements for such a state of affairs is that we globalize citizens rights, that multinational hybridizations derived from mass migrations find recognition in a more open conception of citizenship, capable of embracing multiple forms of belonging.

The growing concentration of capital and transnational political power in recent years has underscored the relevance of an observation made by John Kraniauskas (1992) in an article published a few years after the first Spanish edition of Hybrid Cultures. The British critic noted the risk of optimism he foresaw in placing too much emphasis on the element of deterritorialization in hybridization and in dwelling more on the creativity and dynamism of migrant cultural expression than on the loss and suffering of being uprooted, and the resulting tendency to limit the destructive effects of hybridization through procedures of reterritorialization. As Kraniauskas wrote, although at times resistance to being hybridized and quests for territorial reaffirmation include fundamentalist temptations, they can also serve as political resources for sustaining alternative local paths of development.

The point here is that defending heterogeneity and the possibility of multiple hybridizations is a first political move in an effort to keep the world from falling prisoner to the homogenizing logic with which finance capital tends to level markets in order to facilitate profits. Demanding that finance be seen as part of the economy, or rather as part of the production of goods and messages, and that the economy be redefined as the setting for political disputes and cultural differences, is the next step toward a globalization—understood as the process of opening up national symbolic markets and repertoires, as the intensification of exchanges and hybridizations—that is not impoverished and reduced to mere globalism, the homogenizing dictatorship of the world market.

In the same way that this book concerns itself in several chapters with
criticizing states and political and cultural populisms for the unsatisfactory ways they manage modernizing hybridizations, today it is necessary to rethink the political meaning of cross-cultural homogenizations and fusions in poorly regulated and highly globalized market relations. I will not repeat here what I attempted to do in two later books, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (2001) and *La globalización imaginada* (1999). The introduction to the English version of *Consumers and Citizens*, written by George Yúdice, carefully and polemically situates my work in dialogue with the literature on hybridization and multiculturalism in the United States and Europe.

What the protest movements against the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development are doing (environmentalists, human rights activists, etc.) must be augmented with a specifically cross-cultural task, recognizing diversity and affirming relationships of solidarity. Earlier, I mentioned borders and megacities as strategic settings. For this task it is useful to consider also exiles and migrations, circumstances that lend themselves to cross-cultural mixing and fertilization.

Edward W. Said explains: “Seeing ‘the entire world as a foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal. . . . For an exile, habits of life, expression or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.”

James Clifford, commenting on this paragraph by Said, argues that discourses of diaspora and hybridization allow us to think contemporary life as “a contrapuntal modernity” (Clifford 1997, 256). But elsewhere in the same book, *Routes*, he asks himself if the notion of travel is not more adequate than others common to postmodern thought: displacement, nomadism, pilgrimage. In addition to indicating the limits of these latter terms, he proposes travel as a “translation term” among others, or “a word of apparently general application used for comparison in a strategic and contingent way.” All translation terms, he clarifies, “get us some distance and fall apart. *Tradittore, traduttore.* In the kind of translation that interests me most, you learn a lot about peoples, cultures, and histories different from your own, enough to begin to know what you’re missing” (ibid., 39).
I consider it attractive to treat hybridization as a translation term along with syncretism, fusion, and other words employed to designate particular kinds of mixing. Perhaps the decisive issue is not how to come to an agreement about which of those concepts is most inclusive and fertile but how to continue constructing theoretical principles and methodological procedures that can help us make the world more translatable, which is to say more cohabitable in the midst of differences, and to accept at the same time what each of us gains and loses through hybridizing. I find in a poem by Ferreira Gullar, set to music by Raymundo Fagner on a CD where he sings some songs in Portuguese and others in Spanish, alternating his voice and language of origin with those of Mercedes Sosa and Joan Manuel Serrat, an excellent manner of stating these dilemmas. The CD, like Gullar’s poem, is titled Translating (Traduzirse):

A part of me is every person
Another part, depthless depth, is no one
A part of me is the multitude
Another part strangeness and solitude
A part of me ponders, weighs
Another part raves
A part of me eats lunch and dines
Another part is easily frightened
A part of me is always constant
Another part knows itself in an instant
A part of me is dizzying change
Another part language
Translating one part into the other part
Which is a matter of life and death
Could it be art?

We link in this way the question concerning what art and culture can be today to the tasks of translating that which within us and between us remains torn, belligerent, or incomprehensible, or could perhaps be hybridized. This path can liberate musical, literary, and media practices from the “folk” mission of representing a single identity. Aesthetics can rid itself of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century efforts to turn it into patriotic pedagogy.

I should say, in light of what I have developed here, that these days another threat replaces that earlier folkloric or nationalist goal. It is the threat
posed by the globalist market: the reduction of art to a discourse of planetary reconciliation. The standardized versions of world film and music, of the “international style” in the visual arts and literature, sometimes suspend the tension between what gets communicated and what gets torn apart, between what gets globalized and what insists on difference or is banished to the margins of the world system. A simplified view of hybridization, like that brought on by the commercial taming of art, is facilitating the increased sale of compact discs and films and television programs from other regions. But the equalizing of differences, the simulated disappearance of asymmetrical relations between centers and peripheries, makes it difficult for art—and culture—to become sites where what cannot be or refuses to be hybridized might be named.

The first condition for perceiving the opportunities and limits of hybridization is not turning art and culture into resources for the magical realism of universal understanding. Rather, it is a matter of positioning these in the unstable, conflictive field of tradition and “treason.” Artistic exploration is crucial in this task if it manages to be at one and the same time language and vertigo.

2005
Translated by Bruce Campbell

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The two preceding chapters seem unbalanced. In arguing against the excessive weight of the traditional in the study of popular cultures, most of the pages went toward demonstrating what there is not of the traditional, authentic, and self-generated in the popular groups. I gave little space to urban popular cultures, to the changes unleashed by migration, to the atypical symbolic processes of dissident youths, and to the masses of unemployed and underemployed that make up what are called informal markets.

Now I am going to defend the hypothesis that it makes little sense to study these "slighted" processes under the aspect of popular cultures. It is on those stages that almost all the conventional categories and pairs of oppositions (subaltern/hegemonic, traditional/modern) employed for talking about the popular explode most visibly. Their new modalities of organization of culture and of hybridization of the traditions of classes, ethnic groups, and nations require different conceptual instruments.

How do we analyze the manifestations that do not fit into the cultured or the popular, that spring from their crossings or on their margins? If this part insists on presenting itself as a chapter, with citations and notes, is it not for the author's lack of professional preparation for producing a series of video clips in which a gaucho and a resident of a favela converse about the modernization of traditions with Mexican migrants who enter the United States illegally, or while they visit the Museum of Anthropology, or wait in line at
an automatic teller and comment on how the Rio or Veracruz carnivals have changed?

Style concerns me not only as a way of staging the argumentation of this chapter. It has to do with the possibility of investigating materials not encompassed by the programs with which the social sciences classify the real. I wonder if the discontinuous, accelerated, and parodic language of the video clip is fitting for examining hybrid cultures, if its fruitfulness for breaking down habitual orders and letting emerge the ruptures and juxtapositions ought not culminate—in a discourse interested in knowledge—in a different type of organization of data.

With the goal of progressing in the analysis of intercultural hybridization, I will broaden the debate over the ways of naming it and the styles with which it is represented. First I will discuss a notion that appears in the social sciences as a substitute for what can no longer be understood under the signs of cultured or popular: the formula “urban culture” is used in order to attempt to contain the diverse forces of modernity. Next I will be concerned with three key processes for explaining hybridization: the breakup and mixing of the collections that used to organize cultural systems, the deterritorialization of symbolic processes, and the expansion of impure genres. Through these analyses we will seek to determine precisely the articulations between modernity and postmodernity, between culture and power.

From the Public Space to Teleparticipation

Perceiving that the cultural transformations generated by the latest technologies and by changes in symbolic production and circulation were not the exclusive responsibility of the communications media induced a search for more comprehensive notions. As the new processes were associated with urban growth, it was thought that the city could become the unity that would give coherence and analytical consistency to the studies.

Undoubtedly, urban expansion is one of the causes that intensified cultural hybridization. What does it mean for Latin American cultures that countries that had about 10 percent of their population in the cities at the beginning of the century now concentrate 60 to 70 percent in urban agglomerations? We have gone from societies dispersed in thousands of peasant communities with traditional, local, and homogeneous cultures—in some regions, with strong indigenous roots, with little communication with the rest of each nation—to a largely urban scheme with a heterogeneous
symbolic offering renewed by a constant interaction of the local with na-
tional and transnational networks of communication.

Manuel Castells already observed in his book *La cuestión urbana* that the
dizzying development of cities, in making visible under this name multiple
dimensions of social change, made it comfortable to attribute to them the
responsibility of vaster processes (93). Something similar occurred to what
happened with the mass media. The megalopolis was accused of engender-
ing anonymity; it was imagined that neighborhoods produce solidarity, the
suburbs crime, and that green spaces relax . . .

Urban ideologies attributed to one aspect of the transformation, pro-
duced by the intercrossing of many forces of modernity, the “explanation” of
all its knots and crises. Since that book by Castells, much evidence has accu-
mulated showing that “urban society” is not sharply opposed to the “rural
world” and that the predominance of secondary relations over primary ones
and of heterogeneity over homogeneity (or the opposite, according to the
school) is not due only to the population concentration in the cities.

The urbanization predominant in contemporary societies is intertwined
with serialization and anonymity in production, with restructurings of im-
material communication (from mass media to the telematic) that modify
the connections between the private and public. How can we explain the fact
that many changes in thinking and taste in urban life coincide with those in
the peasantry, if not because the commercial interactions of the latter with
the cities and the reception of electronic media in rural houses connects
them daily with modern innovations?

Inversely, living in a big city does not imply becoming dissolved in the
massive and the anonymous. The violence and public insecurity, the incom-
prehensibility of the city (who knows all the neighborhoods of a capital
city?), lead us to search for selective forms of sociability in domestic inti-
macy and in trusting encounters. Popular groups seldom leave their spaces,
whether peripheral or centrally located; middle- and upper-class sectors in-
crease the bars on their windows and close and privatize the streets of their
neighborhoods. For everyone radio and television, and for some the com-
puter connected to basic services, bring them information and entertain-
ment at home.

Living in cities, writes Norbert Lechner in his study on daily life in San-
tiago, has become “isolating a space of one’s own.” In contrast to what
Habermas observed in early periods of modernity, the public sphere is no
longer the place of rational participation from which the social order is de-
termined. It was like that, in part, in Latin America during the second half of
the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. It is enough to record the role of the “press, theater, and the patrician salons in conformity with a Creole elite”; first for restricted sectors, then broader ones, liberalism assumed that the public will should be constituted as “the result of the discussion and publicity of individual opinions” (Lechner, Part 2, 73-74).

Studies of the formation of popular neighborhoods in Buenos Aires in the first half of the century recorded that the microsocial structures of urbanism—the club, the café, the neighborhood society, the library, the political committee—organized the identity of the migrants and Creoles by linking immediate life with the global transformations that were being sought by society and the state. Reading and sports, militancy and neighborhood sociability were united in a utopian continuity with national political movements (Gutiérrez and Romero).

This is coming to an end, partly due to changes in the staging of politics; I am referring to the mix of bureaucratization and “mass mediatization.” The masses, called upon since the 1960s to express themselves in the streets and to form unions, were being subordinated in many cases to bureaucratic formations. The last decade presents frequent caricatures of that movement: populist leaderships without economic growth and without surplus to distribute, end up overwhelmed by a perverse mixture of reconversion and recession and sign tragic pacts with the speculators of the economy (Alan García in Peru, Carlos Andrés Pérez in Venezuela, Carlos Menem in Argentina). The massive use of the city for political theatricalization is reduced; economic measures and requests for the collaboration of the people are announced on television. Marches and rallies in streets and squares are occasional or have minor effect. In the three countries cited, as in others, public demonstrations generated by the impoverishment of the majority sometimes adopt the form of disarticulated explosions, attacks on shops and supermarkets, on the margin of the organic paths to political representation.

The city’s loss of meaning is in direct relation to the difficulties of political parties and unions in calling people to collective tasks that do not produce income or are of doubtful economic gain. The lesser visibility of macrosocial structures, their subordination to nonmaterial and different circuits of communication that mediatize personal and group interactions, is one of the causes for the decline in the credibility of all-encompassing social movements, such as the parties that concentrated the entirety of labor demands and civic representation. The emergence of multiple demands, enlarged in part by the growth of cultural protests and those relating to the quality of life, raises a diversified spectrum of organizations to speak for
them: urban, ethnic, youth, feminist, consumer, ecological movements, and so on. Social mobilization, in the same way as the structure of the city, is fragmented in processes that are more and more difficult to totalize.

The efficacy of these movements depends, in turn, on the reorganization of the public space. Their actions have a low impact when they are limited to using traditional forms of communication (oral, of artisanal production, or in written texts that circulate from person to person). Their power grows if they act in mass networks: not only the urban presence of a demonstration of one or two hundred thousand persons, but—even more—their capacity to interfere with the normal functioning of a city and find support, for that very reason, in the electronic information media. Then, sometimes, the sense of the urban is restored and the massive ceases to be a vertical system of diffusion to become a larger expression of local powers, a complementing of the fragments.

At a time when the city or the public sphere is occupied by actors that technically calculate their decisions and technobureaucratically organize the attention to the demands, according to criteria of revenue and efficiency, polemical subjectivity—or simply subjectivity—retreats to the private sphere. The market reorders the public world as a stage for consumption and dramatization of the signs of status. The streets are saturated with cars, people rushing to fulfill work obligations or to a programmed recreation activity, almost always according to its economic yield.

A separate organization of “free time,” which turns it into a prolongation of work and money, contributes to this reformulation of the public. From working breakfasts to work, to business lunches, to work, to seeing what is on television at home, and some days to socially productive dinners. The free time of the popular sectors, compelled by underemployment and wage deterioration, is even less free in having to be busy with a second or third job, or in looking for them.

Collective identities find their constitutive stage less and less in the city and in its history, whether distant or recent. Information about unforeseen social vicissitudes is received in the home and commented upon among family or with close friends. Almost all sociability, and reflection about it, is concentrated in intimate exchanges. Since information on price increases, what the governor did, and even the accidents that happened the previous day in our own city reach us through the media, these become the dominant constituents of the “public” meaning of the city, those that simulate integrating a disintegrated imaginary urban sphere.

Although this is the trend, it would be unjust not to point out that some-
times the mass media also contribute to overcoming fragmentation. To the
degree they inform us about the common experiences of urban life—social
conflicts, pollution, which streets have traffic jams at what hours—they es-
establish networks of communication and make it possible to apprehend the
social, collective meaning of what happens in the city. On a broader scale, it
may be affirmed that radio and television, in placing in relation to each
other diverse historical, ethnic, and regional patrimonies and diffusing them
massively, coordinate the multiple temporalities of different spectators.

The investigations of these processes should articulate the integrating and
disintegrating effects of television with other processes of unification and
atomization generated by the recent changes in urban development and the
economic crisis. The groups that get together now and then to analyze col-
lective questions—parents at school, workers at their workplace, neighbor-
hood organizations—tend to act and think as self-referential and often sec-
tored groups because economic pressure forces them down the economic
ladder. This has been studied chiefly by sociologists in the southern cone,
where military dictatorships suspended political parties, unions, and other
mechanisms of grouping, mobilization, and collective cooperation. The re-
pression attempted to reshape the public space by reducing social participa-
tion to the insertion of each individual in the benefits of consumption and
financial speculation.¹ Up to a point, the media became the great mediators
and mediatizers, and therefore substitutes for other collective interactions.

The dictatorships made this transformation more radical. But in the last
decade, when other Latin American governments have shared this neocon-
servative policy, its effects have been generalized. “To appear in public” is
today to be seen by many people scattered in front of the family television
set or reading the newspaper in their home. Political leaders and intellectu-
als accentuate their conditions as theatrical actors, their messages are dis-
tributed if they are “news,” and “public opinion” is something measurable by
opinion polls. The citizen becomes a client, a “public consumer.”

“Urban culture” is restructured by giving up its leading role in the public
space to electronic technologies. Given that almost everything in the city
“happens” thanks to the fact that the media say so, and in seeming to occur
the way the media want it to, there is an accentuation of social mediatization
and of the weight of the stagings, and political actions are constituted as so
many images of the political. Thus Eliseo Verón (1985), pushing things to the
extreme, asserts that participating today means having relations with an
“audiovisual democracy” in which the real is produced by the images cre-
ated in the media.
I would put it in somewhat different terms. More than an absolute substitution of urban life by the audiovisual media, I perceive a game of echoes. The commercial advertising and political slogans that we see on television are those that we reencounter in the streets, and vice versa: the ones are echoed in the others. To this circularity of the communicational and the urban are subordinated the testimonies of history and the public meaning constructed in longtime experiences.

**Historical Memory and Urban Conflicts**

From mass culture to technoculture, from urban space to teleparticipation. In observing this trend, we run the risk of relapsing into the linear historical perspective and suggesting that communicational technologies substitute for the inheritance of the past and public interactions.

It is necessary to reintroduce the question of the modern and postmodern uses of history. I am going to do so with the most challenging and apparently most solemn reference: monuments. What meaning do they conserve or renew in the midst of the transformations of the city and in competition with transitory phenomena like advertising, graffiti, and political demonstrations?

There was a time when monuments, along with schools and museums, were a legitimizing stage of the traditional cultured. Their gigantic size or distinguished placement contributed to exalting them. “Why are there no statues in short sleeves?” the Argentine television program *La noticia rebelde* asked the architect Osvaldo Giesso, director of the Cultural Center of the city of Buenos Aires. To give a long, drawn-out response would require considering the statues together with the rhetoric of textbooks, the ritualism of civic ceremonies, and the other self-consecrating liturgies of power. One would also have to analyze how the monumentalist aesthetic that governs most historic spaces in Latin America was initiated as an expression of authoritarian social systems in the pre-Columbian world. Spanish and Portuguese colonial expansionism was superimposed on them because of the need to compete with the grandiloquence of indigenous architecture by means of neoclassical giganticism and baroque exuberance. Finally, it would be necessary to analyze how the processes of independence and construction of our nations engendered enormous buildings and murals, portraits of heroes, and calendars of historical events, all designed to establish an iconography representative of the size of the utopias.

What do monuments claim to say within contemporary urban symbolism? In revolutionary processes with broad popular participation, public
The evocation of the originary scene of the city is mixed with images of current urban life. The stone monument, barely elevated above the street and constructed with materials and textures similar to those used in the buildings that surround it, seems to indicate a relation of continuity between the pre-Columbian inhabitants and current ones. But at the same time the crossing of the historical iconography with contemporary signaling suggests combinations that can end up being contradictory or parodic: Are the Indians pedestrians? Are their hands pointing to the political propaganda of today?
Against what is Emiliano Zapata battling now, at the entrance to the city of Cuernavaca? Against the advertising of hotels, beverages, and other urban messages? Against the dense traffic of vehicles that suggest the conflicts in which his energetic figure would be located?
The same Zapata, but a different one also, made by the peasants of a town near Cuetzalán, in the state of Puebla. Without a horse and without the monumental rhetoric of battle, simply angry, a head the size of any man’s, on a crude pedestal, like the houses nearby.
The Monument to the Miner, in Guanajuato, demonstrates that horizontal identification with the surroundings does not always succeed in fulfilling the intended purpose. The monument, which is confused with its context, to consecrate what it shows, is not integral with the naturalism of the representation and the ground-level placement of the work do not permit the monument to the Miner to be separated from the real, that it mark the unreality of the image so that its meaning becomes realist.
The proud severity of the mother with her son, accentuated by the hieratic treatment of the stone, contrasts with the demonstration in favor of abortion, which offers two other variations of the theme: posters with a suffering face and the smiles and gestural fluidity of the protesters.
The Hemiciclo Juárez, in the Alameda of Mexico City, is the basis for multiple uses, which correspond to the diverse interpretations of the figure of the hero. First, a demonstration of parents protesting for their disappeared children. Later, feminists struggling in favor of abortion choose the father of anticlericalism to support their defense of voluntary maternity. The central banner partially obscures the images put up earlier, and between them all they propose various levels of resignification of the monument.
The enormous head of Juárez designed by Siqueiros and located on the Calzada Zaragoza at the exit of Mexico City toward Puebla, is a monument and a window, a wall that imposes itself upon and frames the current scene. We see it rewritten by supporters of the Solidarity union in Poland—the nineteenth-century Mexican reformer associated with a European social struggle of the twentieth century. The evocation of the leader of the Reform, designed by a postrevolutionary sculptor who mixes in his image the gigantic cutoff head, in the style of the Olmecs, with broken lines, is of futurist inspiration.
rites and monumental constructions express the historic impulse of mass movements. They are part of the struggle for a new visual culture in the midst of the stubborn persistence of signs of the old order, such as occurred with the first postrevolutionary Mexican muralism and with Russian graphic art in the twenties and Cuban graphic art in the sixties. But when the new movement becomes the system, the projects for change follow the route of bureaucratic planning more than that of participative mobilization. When social organization is stabilized, ritualism becomes sclerotic.

To show the type of tensions that are established between historical memory and the visual scheme of modern cities, I will analyze a group of monuments. It is a small selection from the abundant documentation on monuments of Mexico assembled by Paolo Gori and Helen Escobedo. I am going to begin with a group of sculptures that represent the founding of Tenochtitlán and are located a short distance from the Zócalo in Mexico City.

These examples suffice to show the changes the most solid commemorations of patrimony suffer. Monuments often contain several styles and references to diverse historical and artistic periods. Another hybridization is added later in interacting with urban growth, advertising, graffiti, and modern social movements. The iconography of national traditions (Juárez) is used as a resource for struggling against those who, in the name of other traditions (those of Catholicism that condemn abortion), oppose modernity.

These images suggest diverse ways in which traditions and the monuments that consecrate them are reutilized today. Certain heroes of the past survive in the middle of conflicts that unfold in any modern city between systems of political and commercial signs, traffic signals, and social movements.

Modern development attempted to distribute objects and signs in specific places: commodities in current use, in shops; objects of the past, in history museums; those that claim to be valuable for their aesthetic meaning, in art museums. At the same time, the messages emitted by commodities, historical works, and artistic works, and those that indicate how to use them, circulate through schools and the mass media. A rigorous classification of things and of the languages that speak about them sustains the systematic organization of the social spaces in which they should be consumed. This order structures the life of consumers and prescribes behaviors and modes of perceiving that are appropriate for each situation. To be cultured in a modern city consists in knowing how to distinguish between what is purchased for use,
what is commemorated, and what is enjoyed symbolically. The social system requires living in a compartmentalized way.

Nevertheless, urban life transgresses this order all the time. In the movement of the city, commercial interests are crossed with historical, aesthetic, and communicational ones. The semantic struggles to neutralize each other, to perturb the message of the others or change its meaning, and to subordinate the rest to its own logic are stagings of the conflicts between social forces: between the market, history, the state, advertising, and the popular struggle for survival.

While historical objects in museums are removed from history and their intrinsic meaning is frozen in an eternity where nothing will ever happen, monuments open to the urban dynamic facilitate the interaction of memory with change and the revitalization of heroes thanks to propaganda or transit: they continue struggling with the social movements that survive them. In Mexico’s museums, the heroes of independence are distinguished by their relation to those of the Reform and the revolution; in the street their meaning is renewed in dialoguing with present contradictions. Without display windows or guards to protect them, urban monuments are happily exposed to their being inserted into contemporary life by graffiti or a popular demonstration. Although sculptors resist abandoning the formulas of classical realism in representing the past or making heroes in short sleeves, monuments are kept up-to-date by the “irreverences” of the citizens.

Graffiti, commercial posters, social and political demonstrations, monuments—languages that represent the main forces operating in the city. Monuments are almost always works with which political power consecrates the founding persons and events of the state. Commercial posters seek to synchronize daily life with the interests of economic power. Graffiti (like the posters and political events of the oppositions) express popular criticism of the imposed order. That is why the publicity announcements that hide or contradict the monuments, and the graffiti written over other graffiti, are so significant. At times the proliferation of announcements drowns out historical identity and dissolves memory in the anxious perception of the novelties that are incessantly renewed by advertising. On the other hand, the authors of spontaneous legends are saying that monuments are inadequate for expressing how the city moves. Is not the need to politically reinscribe monuments evidence of the distance between a state and a people, or between history and the present?
Decollecting

This difficulty in including what we earlier totalized under the formula “urban culture,” or with the notions of cultured, popular, and massive, presents the problem of whether the organization of culture can be explained by reference to collections of symbolic goods. The disarticulation of the urban also puts into doubt the possibility of cultural systems’ finding their key in the relations of the population with a certain type of territory and history that would, in a peculiar sense, prefigure the behaviors of each group. The next step in this analysis must be to work with the (combined) processes of decollecting and deterritorialization.

The formation of specialized collections of high art and folklore was a device in modern Europe, and later in Latin America, for ordering symbolic goods in separate groups and hierarchizing them. A certain type of paintings, music, and books belonged to those who were cultured, even though they did not have them in their houses and even though it was through access to museums, concert halls, and libraries. To know their order was already a way of possessing them that distinguished them from those who did not know how to relate to that order.

The history of art and literature was formed on the basis of collections that were housed in museums and libraries when these were buildings for keeping, exhibiting, and consulting collections. Today art museums exhibit Rembrandt and Bacon in one room, popular objects and industrial design in the following ones, and beyond those are happenings, performances, installations, and body art by artists who no longer believe in the works and refuse to produce collectible objects. Public libraries continue to exist in a more traditional mode, but any intellectual or student works much more in his or her private library, where books are mixed with journals, newspaper clippings, fragmentary bits of information that will be moved often from one shelf to another and whose use requires them to be spread out on several tables and on the floor. The situation of the cultural worker today is what Benjamin glimpsed in that pioneering text in which he described the sensations of moving and unpacking his library among the disorder of the boxes, “the floor strewn with scattered papers,” the loss of the order that connected those objects with a history of knowledge, making him feel that the mania of collecting “is no longer of our time” (Benjamin 1969a, 59-66).

On the other hand, there was a repertory of folklore, of the objects of peoples or classes that had different customs and therefore other collections. Folklore was born from collecting, as we saw in an earlier chapter. It was
formed when collectors and folklorists moved to archaic societies, investigated and preserved the containers used for cooking, the clothing, and the masks used in ritual dancing, and then gathered them together in museums. The containers, masks, and textiles are now found equalized under the name of “handicrafts” in urban markets. If we want to buy the best designs, we no longer go the mountains or the forests where the Indians who produce them live, because the pieces of diverse ethnic groups are mixed together in shops in the cities.

The aggregate of works and messages that used to structure visual culture and provide the grammar of reading the city diminished their efficacy in the urban space as well. There is no homogeneous architectural system and the distinguishing profiles of neighborhoods are being lost. The lack of urban regulation, and the cultural hybridity of buildings and users intermix styles from various eras in a single street. The interaction of the monuments with advertising and political messages situates the organization of memory and visual order in heteroclite networks.

The agony of collections is the clearest symptom of how the classifications that used to distinguish the cultured from the popular, and both from the massive, are disappearing. Cultures no longer are grouped in fixed and stable wholes, and therefore the possibility disappears of being cultured by knowing the repertory of “the great works,” or of being popular because one manages the meaning of the objects and messages produced by a more or less closed community (an ethnic group, a neighborhood, a class). Now these collections renew their composition and their hierarchy with the fashions; they are crossed all the time and, to top it all off, each user can make his or her own collection. The technologies of reproduction permit each person to set up a repertory of records and cassettes in his or her home that combine the cultured with the popular, including those who already do this in the structure of their works: Piazzola, who mixes the tango with jazz and classical music, and Caetano Veloso and Chico Buarque, who appropriate at once the experimentation of the concrete poets, Afro-Brazilian traditions, and post-Webernian musical experimentation.

In addition, there is a proliferation of reproduction devices that we cannot define as either cultured or popular. In them collections are lost, and images and contexts—along with the semantic and historical references that used to bind together their meanings—are destructed.

Photocopiers. Books are unbound; anthologies approach authors incapable of being dealt with in symposia; new bindings group together chapters of diverse volumes following the logic not of intellectual production but of
their uses: to prepare for an exam, to follow the tastes of a professor, to pursue sinuous itineraries absent in the routine classifications of bookstores and libraries. This fragmentary relation with books leads us to lose the structure in which the chapters are inserted; we descend, Monsiváis once wrote, into the "Xerox grade of reading." It is also true that the freer handling of texts, their reduction to notes, as desacralized as the tape-recorded class—which sometimes never passes to the written page because it is transferred directly to the screen of a computer—induces more fluid links among the texts and among students and knowledge.

Videocassette recorders. One forms his or her personal collection by mixing football games and Fassbinder films, North American series, Brazilian soap operas, and a debate over the foreign debt—what the channels broadcast when we are watching them, when we are working, or when we are sleeping. The recording may be immediate or delayed and with the possibility of erasing, rerecording, and verifying how it turned out. The video recorder resembles television and the library, says Jean Franco: "it permits the juxtaposition of very different topics starting from an arbitrary system and directed to communities that transcend the limits between races, classes, and sexes" (1987, 56). In truth, the video recorder goes farther than the library. It reorders a series of traditional or modern oppositions: between the national and the foreign, leisure and work, news and entertainment, politics and fiction. It also intervenes in sociability by allowing us to not miss a social or family gathering because we are watching a program and by promoting networks for borrowing and exchanging cassettes.

Videos. This is the most intrinsically postmodern genre. Intergenre: it mixes music, image, and text. Transtemporal: it gathers together melodies and images of various epochs and freely cites deeds out of context; it takes up what was done by Magritte and Duchamp, but for mass audiences. Some works take advantage of the versatility of video to create works that are brief but dense and systematic: Fotoromanza by Antonioni, Thriller by John Landis, All Night Long by Bob Rafelson, for example. But in most cases all action is given in fragments; it does not ask us to concentrate or to look for a continuity. There is no history to speak of. Not even art history or the media matter: images are plundered from everywhere and in any order. In a two-minute video, the German singer Falco summarizes the story of The Black Vampire by Fritz Lang; Madonna dresses like Marilyn Monroe, copying the choreography of Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and the facial expressions of Betty Boop: "Those who remember love the homage and the nostalgia. Those who have no memory of it or who were not born yet also love it as
their eyes follow the treat that is being sold to them as something brand-new” (McAllister, 21-23). There is no interest in indicating what is new and what comes from before. To be a good spectator one has to abandon oneself to the rhythm and enjoy the ephemeral sights. Even the videos that present a story downplay or ironize it by means of parodying montages and abrupt accelerations. This training in a fleeting perception of the real has had so much success that it is not limited to discotheques or a few entertainment programs on television; in the United States and Europe there are channels that broadcast them twenty-four hours a day. There are business, political, music, advertising, and educational videos that are replacing the business manual, the pamphlet, the theatrical spectacle, and the more or less reasoned staging of politics in electoral meetings. They are cold, indirect dramatizations that do not require the personal presence of interlocutors. The world is seen as a discontinuous effervescence of images, art as fast food. This ready-to-think culture allows us to de-think historical events without worrying about understanding them. In one of his films Woody Allen made fun of what he had understood by speed-reading War and Peace: “It talks about Russia,” he concluded. Le Nouvel Observateur says seriously that it finds a new way of reinterpreting the student revolts of 1968 using this aesthetic: they were a “revolt clip: hot montage of shock images, rupture of rhythm, cutoff ending” (43).

Video games. These are like the participative version of videos. When they take the place of movies—not only in the public’s free time but in the space of the movie theaters that close for lack of viewers—the operation of cultural displacement is clear. From contemporary cinema they take the most violent aspects: war scenes, car and motorcycle races, karate and boxing matches. They familiarize directly with the sensuality and efficacy of technology; they provide a mirror-screen where power itself and the fascination of battling with the big forces of the world are staged by taking advantage of the latest techniques and without the risk of direct confrontations. They de-materialize and disembodied danger, giving us only the pleasure of winning out over others, or the possibility, in being defeated, that the only thing lost is coins in a machine.

As studies on the effects of television established long ago, these new technological resources are not neutral, nor are they omnipotent. Their simple formal innovation implies cultural changes, but the final sign depends on the uses different actors assign to them. We cite them here because they crack the orders that used to classify and distinguish cultural traditions; they weaken historical meaning and the macrostructural conceptions to the ben-
efit of intense and sporadic relations with isolated objects, with their signs and images. Some postmodern theorists argue that this predominance of immediate and dehistoricized relations is coherent with the collapse of the great metaphysical narratives.

Actually, there are no reasons to lament the decomposition of rigid collections that, by separating the cultured, the popular, and the massive, promoted inequalities. Nor do we think that there are prospects for restoring the classic order of modernity. We see in the irreverent crossings occasions for relativizing religious, political, national, ethnic, and artistic fundamentalisms that absolutize certain patrimonies and discriminate against the rest. But we wonder if extreme discontinuity as a perceptive habit, the diminution of opportunities for understanding the reelaboration of the subsistent meanings of some traditions and for intervening in their change, do not reinforce the unconsulted power of those who continue to be concerned with understanding and managing the great networks of objects and meanings: the transnationals and the states.

Among the decollecting and dehierarchizing strategies of the cultural technologies must be included the existing asymmetry in production and use between the central and the dependent countries and between consumers of different classes within the same society. The possibilities for taking advantage of technological innovations and adapting them to their own productive and communicational needs are unequal in the central countries—generators of inventions, with high investment in renovating their industries, goods, and services—and in Latin America, where investments are frozen because of the debt and austerity policies, where scientists and technicians work with ridiculous budgets or have to emigrate, and where control of the more modern cultural media is highly concentrated and depends a great deal on outside programming.

Of course it is not a question of returning to the paranoid denunciations and conspiratorial conceptions of history that accused the modernization of quotidian and mass culture of being an instrument of the powerful in order to better exploit. The question is to understand how the dynamic itself of technological development remolds society and coincides with or contradicts social movements. There are different kinds of technologies, each with various possibilities for development and articulation with the others. There are social sectors with diverse cultural capitals and dispositions for appropriating them with different meanings: decollecting and hybridization are not the same for the adolescents from the popular classes who go to public video-game parlors as they are for those from the middle and upper classes.
who have the games at home. The meanings of the technologies are constructed according to the ways they are institutionalized and socialized.

The technological remodeling of social practices does not always contradict traditional cultures and modern arts. It has extended, for example, the use of patrimonial goods and the field of creativity. Just as video games trivialize historical battles and some videos trivialize experimental art trends, computers and other uses of video make it easy to obtain data, visualize graphics and innovate them, simulate the use of pieces and information, and reduce the distance between conception and execution, knowledge and application, information and decision. This multiple appropriation of cultural patrimonies opens up original possibilities for experimentation and communication with democratizing uses, as is appreciated in the use some popular movements make of video.

But new technologies not only promote creativity and innovation; they also reproduce known structures. The three most frequent uses of video—consumption of commercial movies, porno films, and the recording of family events—repeat audiovisual practices initiated by photography and the Super 8. On the other hand, video art—explored mainly by painters, musicians, and poets—reaffirms the difference and the hermetism in a way similar to that of art galleries and movie clubs.

The coexistence of these contradictory uses reveals that the interactions of new technologies with previous culture makes them part of a much bigger project than the one they unleashed or the one they manage. One of these changes of long standing that technological intervention makes more evident is the reorganization of the links between groups and symbolic systems; the decollections and hybridizations no longer permit a rigid linking of social classes to cultural strata. Although many works remain within the minority or popular circuits for which they were made, the prevailing trend is for all sectors to mix into their tastes objects whose points of origin were previously separated. I do not want to say that this more fluid and complex circulation has evaporated class differences. I am only saying that the reorganization of the cultural stagings and the constant crossings of identities require that we ask ourselves in a different way about the orders that systematize the material and symbolic relations among groups.

**Deterritorializing**

The most radical inquiries into what it means to be entering and leaving modernity are by those who assume the tensions between deterritorializa-
tion and reterritorialization. With this I am referring to two processes: the loss of the “natural” relation of culture to geographical and social territories and, at the same time, certain relative, partial territorial relocalizations of old and new symbolic productions.

In order to document this transformation of contemporary cultures I will analyze first the transnationalization of symbolic markets and migrations. Then I propose to explore the aesthetic meaning of this change by following the strategies of some impure arts.

1. There was a method of associating the popular with the national that, as we noted in earlier chapters, nourished the modernization of Latin American cultures. Carried out first in the form of colonial domination, then as industrialization and urbanization under metropolitan models, modernity seemed to be organized in politicoeconomic and cultural antagonisms: colonizers versus colonized, cosmopolitanism versus nationalism. The last pair of opposites was the one handled by dependency theory, according to which everything was explained by the confrontation between imperialism and national popular cultures.

Studies of economic and cultural imperialism served to get to know some devices used by the international centers of scientific, artistic, and communicational production that conditioned, and still condition, our development. But this model is insufficient for understanding current power relations. It does not explain the planetary functioning of an industrial, technological, financial, and cultural system whose headquarters is not in a single nation but in a dense network of economic and ideological structures. Nor does it take into account the need of metropolitan nations to make their borders flexible and integrate their economies and their educational, technological, and cultural systems, as is occurring in Europe and North America.

The persistent inequality between what the dependency theorists called the First and the Third Worlds maintains with relative effect some of their postulates. But although the decisions and benefits of the exchanges may be concentrated in the bourgeoisie of the metropolises, new processes make the asymmetry more complex: the decentralization of corporations, the planetary simultaneity of information, and the adaptation of certain international forms of knowledge and images to the knowledge and habits of each community. The delocalization of symbolic products by electronics and telematics, and the use of satellites and computers in cultural diffusion, also impede our continuing to see the confrontations of peripheral countries as frontal combats with geographically defined nations.

The Manichaeism of those oppositions becomes even less realistic in the
eighties and nineties when several dependent countries are registering a notable increase in their cultural exports. In Brazil, the advance of massification and industrialization of culture did not imply—contrary to what tended to be said—a greater dependency on foreign production. Statistics reveal that in the last several years its cinematography and the proportion of national films on the screens grew: from 13.9 percent in 1971 to 35 percent in 1982. Books by Brazilian authors, which accounted for 54 percent of publishing production in 1973, rose to 70 percent in 1981. Also, more national records and cassettes are listened to, while imported music declines. In 1972, 60 percent of television programming was foreign; in 1983, it fell to 30 percent. At the same time that this trend toward nationalization and autonomy is occurring in cultural production, Brazil is becoming a very active agent in the Latin American market of symbolic goods by exporting soap operas. As it also succeeds in broadly penetrating the central countries, it became the seventh world producer of television and advertising, and the sixth in records. Renato Ortiz, from whom I take these data, concludes that they went “from defense of the national popular to exportation of the international popular” (1988, 182-206).

Although this trend does not occur in the same way in all Latin American countries, there are similar aspects in those of more modern cultural development that reestablish the articulations between the national and the foreign. Such changes do not eliminate the question of how distinct classes benefit from and are represented in the culture produced in each country, but the radical alteration of the stagings of production and consumption—as well as the character of the goods that are presented—questions the “natural” association of the popular with the national and the equally a priori opposition with the international.

2. Multidirectional migrations are the other factor that relativizes the binary and polar paradigm in the analysis of intercultural relations. Latin American internationalization is accentuated in the last few decades, when migrations not only include writers, artists, and exiled politicians as happened since last century, but settlers from all social layers. How do we include in the one-directional schema of imperialist domination the new flows of cultural circulation opened up by the transplants of Latin Americans to the United States and Europe, from the least-developed countries to the most prosperous ones of our continent, from poor regions to urban centers? Are there two million South Americans who, according to the most conservative statistics, left Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay in the seventies because of ideological persecution and economic suffering? It is not
accidental that the most innovative reflection on deterritorialization is unfolding in the principal area of migrations on the continent—the border between Mexico and the United States.

From both sides of that border, intercultural movements show their painful face: the underemployment and uprooting of peasants and indigenous people who had to leave their lands in order to survive. But a very dynamic cultural production is also growing there. If there are more than 250 Spanish-language radio and television stations in the United States, more than fifteen hundred publications in Spanish, and a high interest in Latin American literature and music, it is not only because there is a market of twenty million “Hispanics,” or 8 percent of the U.S. population (38 percent in New Mexico, 25 percent in Texas, and 23 percent in California). It is also due to the fact that so-called Latin culture produces films like *Zoot Suit* and *La Bamba*, the songs of Rubén Blades and Los Lobos, aesthetically and culturally advanced theaters like that of Luis Valdez, and visual artists whose quality and aptitude for making popular culture interact with modern and postmodern symbolism incorporates them into the North American mainstream.3

Whoever is familiar with these artistic movements knows that many are rooted in the everyday experiences of the popular sectors. So that no doubts remain about the transclass extent of the phenomenon of deterritorialization, it is useful to refer to the anthropological investigations on migrants. Roger Rouse studied the inhabitants of Aguililla, a rural town in southwestern Michoacán, apparently only accessible by a dirt road. Its two main activities continue to be agriculture and raising livestock for subsistence, but the emigration that began in the forties was such an incentive that almost all families there now have members who live or have lived abroad. The declining local economy is sustained by the flow of dollars sent from California, especially from Redwood City, that nucleus of microelectronics and post-industrial North American culture in Silicon Valley, where the Michoacanos work as laborers and in services. Most stay for brief periods in the United States, and those who remain longer maintain constant relations with their place of origin. There are so many outside of Aguililla, and so frequent are their connections with those who remain there, that one can no longer conceive of the two wholes as separate communities:

Through the constant migration back and forth and the growing use of telephones, the residents of Aguililla tend to be reproducing their links with people that are two thousand miles away as actively as they maintain their relations with their immediate neighbors. Still more, and more generally, through
the continuous circulation of people, money, commodities, and information, the diverse settlements have intermingled with such force that they are probably better understood as forming only one community dispersed in a variety of places. (Rouse, 1-2)

Two conventional notions of social theory collapse in the face of these “crossed economies, meaning systems that intersect, and fragmented personalities.” One of these is that of “community,” employed both for isolated peasant populations and for expressing the abstract cohesion of a compact national state, in both cases definable by relation to a specific territory. It was assumed that the links between the members of those communities would be more intense inside than outside of their space, and that the members treat the community as the principal medium to which they adjust their actions. The second image is the one that opposes center and periphery, also an “abstract expression of an idealized imperial system,” in which the gradations of power and wealth would be distributed concentrically: most in the center and a progressive decrease as we move toward surrounding zones. The world functions less and less in this way, says Rouse; we need “an alternative cartography of social space” based instead on the notions of “circuit” and “border.”

It also should not be assumed, he adds, that this reordering only includes those on the margins. He notes a similar disarticulation in the economy of the United States, previously dominated by autonomous blocks of capital. In the central area of Los Angeles, 75 percent of the buildings now belong to foreign capital; in all urban centers combined, 40 percent of the population consists of ethnic minorities from Asia and Latin America, and “it is calculated that this number will approach 60 percent in the year 2010” (Rouse, 2). There is an “implosion of the third world in the first,” according to Renato Rosaldo (n.d., 9); “the notion of an authentic culture as an autonomous internally coherent universe is no longer sustainable” in either of these two worlds, “except perhaps as a ‘useful fiction’ or a revealing distortion” (Rosaldo 1989, 217).

When, in the last few years of his life, Michel de Certeau taught in San Diego, he used to say that in California the mix of immigrants from Mexico, Colombia, Norway, Russia, Italy, and the eastern United States made him think that “life consists of constantly crossing borders.” Roles are taken and changed with the same versatility as cars and houses:

This mobility rests on the postulate that one is not identified either by birth, by family, by professional status, by friendships or love relationships, or by property. It seems as if all identity defined by status and place (of origin, of work, of residence, etc.) were reduced, if not swept away, by the velocity of all move-
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...ments. It is known that there is no identity document in the United States; it is replaced by the driver's license and the credit card, that is, by the capacity to cross space and by participation in a game of fiduciary contracts between North American citizens. (Certeau, 10-18)

During the two periods during which I studied the intercultural conflicts on the Mexican side of the border, in Tijuana, in 1985 and 1988, several times I thought that this city is, along with New York, one of the biggest laboratories of postmodernity. In 1950 it had no more than sixty thousand inhabitants; today there are more than a million, with migrants from almost all regions of Mexico (mainly Oaxaca, Puebla, Michoacán, and the Federal District) who have settled there over the years. Some go daily into the United States to work; others cross the border during the planting and harvesting seasons. Even those who stay in Tijuana are linked to commercial exchanges...
between the two countries, to North American *maquiladoras* located on the Mexican border, or to tourist services for the three or four million people from the United States who arrive in this city every year.

From the beginning of this century until fifteen years ago, Tijuana was known for a casino (abolished during the Cárdenas government), cabarets, dance halls, and liquor stores where North Americans came to elude their country’s prohibitions on sex, gambling, and alcohol. The recent installation of factories, modern hotels, cultural centers, and access to wide-ranging international information has made it into a modern, contradictory, cosmopolitan city with a strong definition of itself.

In interviews we did of primary, secondary, and university students, and of artists and cultural promoters from all social layers, there was no theme more central for their self-definition than border life and intercultural contacts. One of our research techniques was to ask them to name the most representative places of life and culture in Tijuana in order to photograph them later; we also took pictures of other scenes that seemed to condense the city’s meaning (publicity posters, casual encounters, graffiti) and selected fifty photos to show to fourteen groups from various economic and cultural levels. Two-thirds of the images they judged most representative of the city, and about which they spoke with the greatest emphasis, were those that linked Tijuana with what lies beyond it: Revolution Avenue, its shops and tourist centers, the minaret that bears witness to where the casino was, the parabolic antennas, the legal and illegal passages on the border, the neighborhoods
where those from different parts of the country are concentrated, the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, “lord of the émigrés,” to whom they go to ask that he arrange their “papers” or to thank him for their not having been caught by la migra (or Immigration).

The multicultural character of the city is expressed in the use of Spanish, English, and also indigenous languages in the neighborhoods and maquiladora, or among those who sell crafts downtown. This pluralism diminishes when we move from private interactions to public languages, that is, those of radio, television, and urban advertising, where English and Spanish predominate and coexist “naturally.”

Along with the poster that recommends the disco club and the radio station that plays “rock in your language,” another announces a Mexican liquor in English. Music and alcoholic beverages—two symbols of Tijuana—coexist under this linguistic duality. “The other choice” is explicitly the liquor, but the contiguity of the messages makes it possible that it also refers to rock in Spanish. The ambivalence of the image, which the interviewees considered analogous to life in the city, also allows us to conclude—following the order of reading—that the other choice is English.

The uncertainty generated by the bilingual, bicultural, and binational oscillations has its equivalence in the relations with its own history. Some of the photos were chosen precisely because they allude to the simulated character of a good portion of Tijuana culture. The Hot Water Tower, burned in
the 1960s with the intention of forgetting the casino it represented, was re-built a few years ago and now is exhibited with pride on magazine covers and in advertising; but in pointing out to the interviewees that the current tower is in a different location than the original one, they argue that the change is a way of displacing and relocating the past.

On several corners of Revolution Avenue there are zebras. In reality they are painted burros. They are there so that North American tourists can be photographed with a landscape behind them in which images from various regions of Mexico are crowded together: volcanoes, Aztec figures, cacti, the eagle with the serpent. “Faced with the lack of other types of things, as there are in the south where there are pyramids, there is none of that here … as if something had to be invented for the gringos,” they said in one of the groups. In another group, they pointed out that “it also refers to the myth that North Americans bring with them, that it has something to do with crossing the border into the past, into the wilderness, into the idea of being able to ride horseback.”

One interviewee told us: “The wire that separates Mexico from the United States could be the main monument of culture on the border.”

In arriving at the beach “the line” falls and leaves a transit zone, used at times by undocumented migrants. Every Sunday the fragmented families on both sides of the border gather for picnics.

Where the borders move, they can be rigid or fallen; where buildings are
evoked in another place than the one they represent, every day the spectacular invention of the city itself is renewed and expanded. The simulacrum comes to be a central category of culture. Not only is the "authentic" relativized. The obvious, ostentatious illusion—like the zebras that everyone knows are fake or the hiding games of illegal migrants that are "tolerated" by the United States police—becomes a resource for defining identity and communicating with others.
To these hybrid and simulated products, border artists and writers add their own intercultural laboratory. The following is from a radio interview with Guillermo Gómez-Peña, editor of the bilingual journal *La línea quebrada/The broken line*, with offices in Tijuana and San Diego:

**REPORTER:** If you love our country so much, as you say you do, why do you live in California?

**GÓMEZ-Peña:** I am de-Mexicanizing myself in order to Mexicomprehend myself. . . .

**REPORTER:** What do you consider yourself, then?

**GÓMEZ-Peña:** Post-Mexica, pre-Chicano, pan-Latino, land-crossed, Art American . . . it depends on the day of the week or the project in question.

Several Tijuana periodicals are dedicated to reworking the definitions of identity and culture taking the border experience as their starting point. *La línea quebrada*, which is the most radical, says that it expresses a generation that grew up “watching charro and science-fiction movies, listening to cumbias and Moody Blues songs, building altars and filming in Super 8, reading El Corno Emplumado and Art Forum.” Since they live in the interval, “in the crack between the two worlds,” and since they are “the ones who didn’t go because we didn’t fit, the ones who still don’t arrive or don’t know where to arrive,” they decide to assume all possible identities:

When they ask me my nationality or ethnic identity, I cannot respond with one word, since my “identity” has multiple repertories: I am Mexican but also
Chicano and Latin American. On the border they call me “chilango” or “mexiquillo”; in the capital “pocho” or “norteño,” and in Europe “sudaca.” Anglo-Saxons call me “Hispanic” or “Latino,” and Germans have more than once confused me with being Turkish or Italian.

With a phrase that would please a migrant as much as a young rocker, Gómez-Peña explains that “our deepest generational feeling is that of the loss that arises from the departure.” But there are also things that they have gained: “a view of culture that is more experimental, that is, multifocal and tolerant” (Gómez-Peña, 3-5).\(^6\)

Other artists and writers from Tijuana question the euphemized view of the contradictions and the uprooting they perceive in the La línea quebrada group. They reject the celebration of the migrations often caused by poverty in the place from which people migrate, and which is repeated in their new destination. There is no lack of those who, despite not having been born in Tijuana, contest this parodic and detached insolence in the name of their fifteen or twenty years in the city: “people who have arrived recently and want to discover us and tell us who we are.”

Both in this polemic and in other manifestations of strong emotions in referring to the photos of Tijuana, we saw a complex movement that we would call reterritorialization. The same people who praise the city for being open and cosmopolitan want to fix signs of identification and rituals that differentiate them from those who are just passing through, who are tourists, or . . . anthropologists curious to understand intercultural crossings.
The editors of the other Tijuana journal, *Esquina baja*, devoted a long time to explaining to us why they wanted, in addition to having an organ in which to express themselves,

to generate an audience of readers, a local journal of quality in all aspects, such as design and presentation . . . in order to counteract a bit that centrist trend that exists in the country, because what there is in the provinces does not succeed in transcending, and is minimized, if it does not first pass through the fine sieve of the Federal District.

We find something similar in the vehemence with which everyone rejected the “missionary” criteria for cultural activities favored by the central government. Against the national programs designed to “affirm Mexican identity” on the northern border, Baja Californians argue that they are as Mexican as the rest, though in a different way. About the “threat of North American cultural penetration” they say that, in spite of the geographic and communication proximity to the United States, the daily commercial and cultural exchanges make them live inequality intensely and therefore have a less idealized image of those who receive a similar influence in the capital via television messages and imported consumer goods.

Deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In the exchanges of traditional symbols with international communications circuits, culture industries, and migrations, questions about identity and the national, the defense of sovereignty, and the unequal appropriation of knowledge and art do not
Hybrid cultures, oblique powers

disappear. The conflicts are not erased, as neoconservative postmodernism claims. They are placed in a different register, one that is multifocal and more tolerant, and the autonomy of each culture is rethought—sometimes—with smaller fundamentalist risks. Nevertheless, the chauvinist critiques of "those from the center" sometimes engender violent conflicts: acts of aggression against recently arrived migrants and discrimination in school and at work.

The intense crossings and the instability of traditions, bases of the valorizing opening, may also be—in conditions of labor competition—a source of prejudice and confrontation. Therefore, the analysis of the advantages or inconveniences of deterritorialization should not be reduced to the movements of ideas or cultural codes, as is frequently the case in the bibliography on postmodernity. Their meaning is also constructed in connection with social and economic practices, in struggles for local power, and in the competition to benefit from alliances with external powers.

Intersections: From the Modern to the Postmodern

Hybridity has a long trajectory in Latin American cultures. We remember formerly the syncretic forms created by Spanish and Portuguese matrices mixing with indigenous representation. In the projects of independence and national development we saw the struggle to make cultural modernism com-
patible with economic semimodernization, and both compatible with the persistent traditions.

Decollecting and deterritorialization have antecedents in the utopian reflections and in the practices of artists and intellectuals. Two examples: the aesthetic proclamations of the Brazilian “cannibals” and of the Martín Fierro group in the twenties. The Anthropophagous Manifesto, published in 1928-29, says:

I am only interested in what is not mine. . . . It was because we never had grammar or collections of old vegetables. And we never knew what was urban, suburban, border, and continental . . . [that] we were never catechized. We live through a sleepwalking right.

The writers of the Martín Fierro group in 1924 affirmed their belief “in the importance of the intellectual contribution of America . . . the independence movement initiated by Rubén Darío.” They added that this “does not mean, however, that we will have to renounce, much less pretend to disregard, the fact that every morning we use a Swedish toothpaste, some towels from France, and an English soap.”

The constant references to border culture that we found in those interviewed in Tijuana remind us of the descriptions of the port, of the crosses between natives and migrants, “the exacerbation of the heterogeneous,” and the “obsessive” cosmopolitanism that Beatriz Sarlo detects in liberal and socialist writers between the twenties and forties in Buenos Aires: Borges the same as González Tuñón, Nicolás Olivari as well as Arlt and Oliverio Girondo. They cultivate “the wisdom of departure, of estrangement, of distance, and of culture shock that can enrich and complicate knowledge about the social margin and the transgressions.” Arlt wrote in his Agua fuertes porteñas: “Poetic farce, poor charm, the study of Bach or of Beethoven together with a tango of Filiberto or of Mattos Rodríguez.” That “culture of mixing” makes “Creole formation” coexist with “an extraordinary process of importation of symbolic goods, discourses, and practices” (Sarlo 1988b, 160, 167, 28).

It is known how many works of Latin American art and literature, valued as paradigmatic interpretations of our identity, were produced outside of the continent, or at least outside of their authors’ countries of birth—from Sarmiento, Alfonso Reyes, and Oswald de Andrade to Cortázar, Botero, and Glauber Rocha. The place from which several thousand Latin American artists write, paint, or compose music is no longer the city in which they spent their infancy, nor the one they have lived in for several years, but rather a hybrid place in which the places really lived are crossed. Onetti calls
it Santa María; García Márquez, Macondo; Soriano, Colonia Vela. But in truth, although those towns resemble other traditional ones of Uruguay, Colombia, and Argentina, they are redesigned by cognitive and aesthetic patterns acquirable in Madrid, Mexico, or Paris.

It is hardly a process of transnationalization of high art. Almost the same thing happens with the music of Roberto Carlos, so similar to that of José José, and both so similar to that of any singer of filled stadiums or on a Sunday television program in any country on the continent. There are those who believe they can explain this air of family by the power the culture industry exercises over the creators created by it. But something equivalent, though more complex, happens with the more experimental singer-songwriters of urban music. Although the personal profiles of Caetano Veloso, Raymundo Fagner, Mercedes Sosa, Fito Páez, Eugenia León, or Los Lobos are more differentiated than those of Roberto Carlos and José José, each of them opens his or her national repertory to the others, some even to the point of making records or performing together.

In what, then, lies the novelty of postmodern decollection, deterritorialization, and hybridity? In that artistic practices now lack consistent paradigms. Modern artists and writers innovated and altered the models or replaced them with others, but they always had referents of legitimacy. The transgressions of modern painters have been made by talking about the art of others. One line of thinking was that painting was in the metropolises: therefore the images of Jacobo Borges, José Gamarra, and Gironella remake, with irony or irreverence, those that from Velázquez to Rousseau had been conceived of as legitimate in European visuality. Other currents opened the cultured gaze to popular images, convinced that Latin American art would be justified by collecting the iconography of the oppressed: Viteri fills his works with rag dolls; Berni braids wires with egg cartons, bottle caps and automobile scrap metal, wigs, and curtain fragments in order to parodically talk about modernity and the Mundo ofrecido a Juanito Laguna. Art of European references or art of popular references: always art that is mestizo, impure, that exists by dint of being placed at the crossing of paths that have been composing us and breaking us down. But they thought there were paths and paradigms of modernity so respectable that they were worth discussing.

Postmodern visuality, in contrast, is the staging of a double loss: of the script and of the author. The disappearance of the script means that the great narratives no longer exist that used to order and hierarchize the periods of the patrimony and the flora of cultured and popular works in which societies
and classes recognized each other and consecrated their virtues. That is why in recent painting a single work can be at once hyperrealist, Impressionist, and pop, or an altar or a mask can combine traditional icons with what we see on television. Postmodernism is not a style but the tumultuous copresence of all styles, the place where the chapters in the history of art and folklore are crossed with each other and with the new cultural technologies.

The other modern attempt at refounding history was the subjectivity of the author. Today we think that the narcissistic exaltation of the painter or the filmmaker who want to make of their gesturing the founding act of the world is the pseudo-lay parody of God. We do not believe the artist who wants to build with illustrious grammar and is prepared to legislate the new syntax. With the help of art historians, he or she tried to convince us that the pink period follows the blue and that there would be a progression from Impressionism to futurism to Cubism to surrealism. In Latin America, we assumed that the postwar vanguards were the overcoming of socialist realism, of the Mexican muralist school, and the varied tellurisms of other countries; later it seemed to us that the experimental vanguards were replaced by the heroic, committed visuality of the sixties and seventies.

The frenetic vertigo of vanguard aesthetics and the market’s game of substitutions, in which everything is interchangeable, removed verisimilitude from the founding pretensions of gesturing. Modern art, which could no longer be a literal representation of an undone worldly order, also cannot be what Baudrillard maintains in one of his first texts: “literality of the gestural of creation” (stains, drips), constant repetition of the beginning, like Rauschenberg, abandoned to the obsession of reinitiating the same canvas many times, feature by feature (102-11). It also is not a metaphor of the political gesturing that dreamed of total and immediate changes. The artistic market and the reorganization of urban visuality generated by the culture industry and the fatigue of political voluntarism are combined to make unrealistic any attempt at making of high art or folklore the proclamation of the inaugural power of the artist or of prominent social actors.

Art and handicrafts markets, while they maintain differences, coincide in a certain treatment of works. Both the artist who, in hanging his or her works, proposes an order of reading and the artisan who arranges his or her pieces following a mythical framework discover that the market disperses and resemanticizes their works upon selling them in different countries and to heterogeneous consumers. The artist is sometimes left with the copies or the slides, and someday a museum may bring those works together, according to the revalorization that they experienced, in a show where a new order
will erase the painter’s “original” statement. The artisan is left with the possibility of repeating similar pieces, or going to see them—put in a series whose order and discourse are not his or her own—in the popular art museum or in books for tourists.

Something equivalent happens in the political market. Ideological goods that are exchanged, and the positions from which they are appropriated and defended, increasingly resemble each other in all countries. The old nationalist, or at least national, profiles of the political forces have been becoming diluted in alignments generated by common challenges (foreign debt, recession, industrial reconversion) and by the “exits” proposed by the big international currents: neoconservatism, social democracy, social communism.

Without script or author, postmodern visual and political cultures are testimonies to the discontinuity of the world and its subjects, and the copresence—melancholic or parodic, depending on the spirit—of variations that the market favors for renewing sales and that the political trends test . . . for what?

There is not only one response. Baudrillard said that

in a technical civilization of operatory abstraction, where neither machines nor domestic objects require much more than a controlling gesture (that gestural abstraction signifying a whole mode of relations and behavior), modern art in all its forms has for its primary function the salvation of the gestural moment, the intervention of the integral subject. It is the part of us, crushed by the technical habitus that art conjures up in the pure gestural complex of the act of painting and its apparent liberty. (108)

I meet many Latin American artists critical of modernity who, for aesthetic, sociocultural, or political motives, refuse this mannerism of the unending inauguration. Although they do not now link their work to the struggle for an impracticable new total order, they want to rethink fragments of the patrimony of their group in their works. I think of Toledo reworking the Maza- tecan erotic bestiary, with a style that joins his indigenous knowledge and his participation in contemporary art. Earlier I cited Paternosto and Puente, who reorganize their austere geometrism in order to experiment with pre-Columbian designs and other images that are neither repetitive nor folklorizing; or painters devoted to exploring the exasperated polychrome of our cultures—such as Antonio Henrique Amaral, Jacobo Borges, Luis Felipe Noé, and Nicolás Amoroso—who are concerned with reconstructing the relations among colors, subjective time, and historical memory.
For many artists, recognizing cultural hybridization, and working experimentally with it, serve to deconstruct the perceptions of the social and the language that represent it.

Two mannequins that could be women that could be mannequins. In their fake bodies, they reflect the street, cars, and a bus with an advertisement with four women models. Maybe a man is looking at them and another is about to enter the scene. Who is inside and who is outside the grating?

We see the world through duplications and appearances. It is not strange that this photo, taken by Paolo Gasparini in New York in 1981, is titled *Behind.*
The gaze (London, 1982). The images that are clearly visible are the photographs of the women, the cathedral, and the pope. The “real” image, of the man walking by on the street, is mobile and uncertain. The pope, who seems to be watching from his inert photo, is watched by us, who are watched over by him while we observe the nudes. Who is more real, who controls, in a society where ecclesiastical iconography coexists so fluidly with the erotic? Photos that comment on other photos, display windows that multiply the fiction: these are resources for “becoming conscious” of the fact that we live in a world of metalanguages and oblique powers.
All of them oppose the more extended social function of the mass media, which would, according to Lyotard, strengthen a certain recognizable order of the world, revitalize realism, and "preserve the consciousnesses of doubt." They concur with the theorist of postmodernism in thinking that the task of art consists, in the midst of those easy certainties, in questioning the conditions in which we construct the real.

I do not see in these painters, sculptors, and graphic artists the theological will to invent or impose a meaning on the world. But there is also not the confused nihilism of Andy Warhol, Rauschenberg, and so many practitioners of "bad painting" and the transvanguard. Their critique of artistic genius, and in some cases of elitist subjectivism, does not prevent them from warning that there are arising other forms of subjectivity in charge of new (or not so new) social actors, who are no longer exclusively white, Western, and male. Stripped of any totalizing or messianic illusion,
these artists maintain a tense, interrogative relationship with societies, or fragments of them, where they think they see living sociocultural movements and practicable utopias.

I know how narrow the use of these words is among the precipices left behind by the collapse of so many traditions and modernities. But certain works of artists and popular producers allow us to think that the theme of utopias and historical projects is not closed. Some of us understand that the collapse of the totalizing accounts does not eliminate the critical search for meaning—or better yet, for meanings—in the articulation of traditions and modernity. On the condition of recognizing the instability of the social and semantic plurality, perhaps it is possible to continue asking ourselves how to construct meanings of high and popular art in their inevitable mixtures and their interaction with mass symbols.

Impure Genres: Graffiti and Comics

We spoke of artists and writers who open the territory of painting or the text so that their language migrates and is crossed with others. But there are constitutionally hybrid genres—for example, graffiti and comic strips. They are practices that from birth ignored the concept of patrimonial collection. Places of intersection between the visual and the literary, the cultured and the popular, they bring the artisanal nearer to industrial production and mass circulation.

1. Graffiti is for the cholos of the border, the youth gangs of Mexico City, and for equivalent groups in Buenos Aires or Caracas—a territorial writing of the city designed to assert presence in, and even possession of, a neighborhood. The battles for control of space are established through their own marks and modifications of the graffiti of other groups. Their sexual, political, or aesthetic references are ways of enunciating modes of life and thought for a group that does not have access to commercial, political, or mass-media circuits to express itself, but that affirms its style through graffiti. Its manual, spontaneous design is structurally opposed to “well”-painted or printed political or advertising legends and challenges those institutionalized languages when it alters them. Graffiti affirms territory but destructures the collections of material and symbolic goods.

The relation of property to territories is relativized in recent practices that seem to express the disarticulation of cities and political culture. Armando Silva describes three principal stages in the evolution of graffiti, which are associated with three cities (1987, 22-24). That of May '68 in Paris (also in
Berlin, Rome, Mexico City, and Berkeley) was made with antiauthoritarian, utopian slogans and macropolitical ends. New York graffiti, written in marginalized neighborhoods and in the subway, expressed ghetto references with micropolitical purposes; at times incomprehensible for those who did not control that hermetic code, it was the one that most typically wanted to delimit spaces in a disintegrating city and to recover territories.

In Latin America both modalities existed, but in the last few years, as a simultaneous manifestation of urban disorder, loss of credibility in political institutions, and utopian disenchantment, a mocking and cynical graffiti has
developed. Silva gives Colombian examples. When the pope's visit in 1986 overwhelmed the streets of Bogotá with processions and propaganda, the walls responded: "Jesus Christ is coming soon. Let's go," "God doesn't do his job. Not even on Sundays." Criticism of the government adopts the open insult, poetic irony—"I cede a cloud in the presidential sector"—or desperation: "Don't believe anyone. Go for a walk."

Some artists see in the intercultural and intertemporal fusions of postmodernism only the opportunity for getting rid of the solemn accounts of modernity. León Ferrari exacerbates the disintegration of religious and political collections in his collages in order to affirm the liberating impulses of modern thought. His montages of sacred icons with Nazi and warlike images, of the threatening angels of Rafael and Dürer with erotic scenes, seek to renew critical irony on history.

The rereading of religious iconography leads Ferrari to find in fundamentalist Christianity bases for the institutionalized terror of modern dictatorships. It is no accident that the god who separates those who fear him from the others, and sends the latter to that type of "concentration camp" that is hell, serves as a justification for totalitarian political doctrines. That hell exalted by Giotto and Michelangelo, in works admired as supreme examples of sensitivity and progress, is associated by Ferrari with torture and the Ku Klux Klan.

In the crisis of hyperinflation and ungovernability of the Argentine economy of 1989 we find a multiplication of legends. While the languages of political parties became unrealistic (36 percent of voters remained undecided a week before the presidential elections), the walls were filled with indignation and skepticism: "Put your representative to work: don't reelect him"; "The country is not for sale; it's already sold," "Yankees go home, and take us with you." As tends to occur with graffiti, they promote anonymous dialogues: "Argentina will soon be paradise: we're all going to walk around naked." Someone responds: "Will there be apples?" Romantic and political idealizations diffused by the mass media are taken up sarcastically: "Silvio Rodríguez was the only one who had a unicorn... and the dummy goes and loses it."

Graffiti is a syncretic and transcultural medium. Some graffiti fuse word and image with a discontinuous style: the crowding together of diverse authors' signs on a single wall is like an artisanal version of the fragmented and incongruent rhythm of the video. In others, the strategies of popular language and of university students are changed around, observes Armando Silva. There is also a "synthesis of urban topography" in a lot of recent
graffiti that eliminates the border between what was written in bathrooms or on walls (1988, 192). It is a marginal, deinstitutionalized, and ephemeral way of assuming the new relations between the private and public, between daily and political life.

2. Comic strips have become so much a central component of contemporary culture, with such an extensive bibliography, that it would be trivial to insist on what we all know of their novel alliance, since the end of the nineteenth century, between iconic culture and literary culture. They take from art and journalism, are the most read literature, and are the branch of the publishing industry that generates the highest profits. In Mexico, for example, seventy million issues are published every month and their revenues are greater than those of books and magazines combined.

We might remember that comic strips, in generating new narrative orders and techniques by means of an original combination of time and images in a story of discontinuous frames, contributed to demonstrating the visual potential of writing and drama that can be condensed in static images. It has already been analyzed how the fascination with its hybridized techniques led Burroughs, Cortázar, and other cultured writers to use their discoveries. Studies have also been done of the correspondence between the comics' synthesis of various genres, their "heteroclite language," and the attraction they arouse in audiences from various classes and in all family members (Gubern 213ff.).

I am interested in exploring here an author of comic strips who incorporates into his work on gender several of the concerns that run through this book. I am referring to Fontanarrosa. One of his main characters, *Boogie, the Greasy*, comes out of a reworking of the literary and cinematographic thriller, the adventure novel, and the political discourse of the U. S. political right. The other, *Toilet Pereyra*, takes up the folkloric language of gauchoesque songs and legends, and of radio theater and television programs about "the national identity." When it appeared in 1972, it parodied the exuberant kitsch of the folkloric thematic in the media of that era. How does he do it? On the one hand, by exaggerating the linguistic turns and visual stereotypes of "the gaucho"; on the other, by making more evident the fact that this earthly exaltation was excessive when it appeared together with the diffusion of the modern culture of the elites and mass culture by the same electronic media that were promoting folklore. In Fontanarrosa's comics, Toilet is found with, among others, Borges, Zorro, Antonio das Mortes, E.T., Superman, Don Quixote, and Darwin. He cuts across the arts, genres, and epochs.

It has been pointed out that the assiduous use of literary sources makes an
inter textual space of these stories: "Toilet Pereyra is a gaucho who is born not of the pampa but of gauchoesque literature" (Campra, 40). I would add that he comes out of the cross between literature and the media. The first episode of the first book of stories is significant: Toilet finds himself in a situation similar to that of Martín Fierro in encountering a group of soldiers, from which he is saved by an equivalent of Cruz, who invites him to flee with him "to the Indian camp." Toilet rejects the offer, arguing: "It seems like I already read this somewhere else and I want to be original." The author's comic strip introduces the preoccupation of art with innovation in mass culture and, at the same time, Toilet's reply suggests that history has changed and it is not possible to repeat Martín Fierro.

In moving from humor magazines to being published weekly or biweekly in the best-selling daily newspaper in Argentina, Clarín, this comic strip's references to contemporary events increase: "I am not obliged to make something of the present, but I cannot tell anachronistic stories in a newspaper either." Although Fontanarrosa says that for reasons of narrative efficacy he conserves a "certain gauchoesque atmosphere"—"there never appears a late-model car"—the comic strip transcends all folklorism. It works on "the complicities of the people" and therefore—in contrast to Boogie, which is published in various countries—attempts at publishing Toilet outside of Argentina did not succeed. But this complicity implies that the author accepts that, for the people, traditions form part of modern processes. In this sense, I would say that Toilet is, over the course of its seventeen years of publication and of the thirteen volumes its issues make up, an attempt—with the ironic sobriety that corresponds to humor—to redefine the opposition between unitarian and federalists.

For a century, Argentines have been discussing whether cultural policy should opt for the civilization of the metropolises, rejecting the barbarism of the indigenous, or for an energetic recovery of the national-popular. As we approach the twenty-first century, when cultural industries like the comic strip and soap operas cause us to inhabit an international space, faced with the question of whether we prefer Sarmiento or Rosas, we would do better to get closer to Toilet Pereyra.

There is a story in which Fontanarrosa thematizes the uncertain situation of territorial borders. The story begins with an opposition between Toilet and another character whom we will call Pursued. Toilet is sitting drinking maté; to his situation of rest and serenity are opposed the running and desperation of the man who is fleeing. There is also an opposition of
the tragic ("Police from fifteen countries are chasing after me!") and the gaucho’s humorous reply ("Why so successful?").

In the second scene the humor arises when Pursued clarifies that they are looking for him for having done something that we might call metasmuggling. He does not smuggle across borders but rather smuggles borders themselves: “Landmarks, barriers, stone markers, barbed wire, dotted lines.” Toilet represents the person in gaucho mythology who does not recognize borders, the inhabitant of “the immensity of the pampa”; Pursued is the one who transgresses borders to the point of distributing new ones and selling them with defects. Before, he was a common smuggler—he dealt in hides; now he deals with borders: from illegal practice in trade to illegal action in politics.

Halfway through the story, the deceitful mechanisms used by the market to expand, independent of “natural” necessities, are caricatured. To bring wraps of toad skin to Paraguay, to a tropical area, and argue that there is no skin colder than that of the toad is a justification similar to those invented by advertising in its persuasive tactics. The commercial dissemination of products also appears to be mocking the limits between what territories and climates establish as reasonable.

Then the pursuit interrupts the dialogue. But it is no longer the police but Interpol, the international defenders of order. In the face of the transgression of speculative trade, Toilet declares himself a defender of an ethic based

![Image of a cartoon showing a person saying, "¡Oculteme, aparceto! ¡Me persiguen policías de quince países!"]

Pursued: Hide me, sharecropper! Police from fifteen countries are chasing after me!
Toilet: Son of a gun! Why so successful?
on the preservation of nature: “As an ecologist, I don’t protect anyone who has skinned God’s little animals.”

Finally, Toilet joins in solidarity with Pursued and tells him to pretend that he is part of a procession that is passing by. Toilet’s dog, Mendieta, discovers that it is not a procession but a demonstration. And in the last frame Toilet gives a new surprise: it is a demonstration, but of police on strike for a raise. There is thus a chain of disguises: Pursued becomes a marcher in a procession that is a demonstration, that it is a demonstration of strikers, but one by the people who usually repress them.

Mendieta provides the moral of the story: “One never knows what one is going to be caught up in tomorrow.” The same conclusion, in its ambiguity, contains uncertainty. It can be understood as meaning that we do not know where we are going to be situated tomorrow, or that we do not know where one is going to be, on which side of which border, tomorrow.

Humor is constructed and renewed in this series of displacements. In all of Fontanarrosa’s comic strips the hilarity is born of the fact that borders are mobile, and that the characters and themes get confused. In this the indetermination of limits, besides being a humorous technique, is converted into a significant nucleus. The humorist—a professional of resignification, a specialist in slippages in meaning—indicates here that the uncertainty or unforeseen continuity between territories is not an invention
Pursued: But I sold a defective border and the Chaco-Paraguay War was started.
Pursued: Before, I smuggled hides: capybara, otter, astracán [unborn lamb].
Toilet: Look, I know animals but I’ve never run across an astracán.
Pursued: The hide of the astracán is a kind of intestines you can see.

Toilet: I even saw a polar bear one day. It’s so soft the skin of that animal!
Pursued: You touched it? That animal is fearsome.
Toilet: This one wasn’t fearsome. It was plush.
Pursued: I also brought wraps of hides to Paraguay.
Toilet: To Paraguay? With that heat?
Pursued: Toad skin. There’s no hide colder than that. Cool and light.
Pursued: Oh, my God! There comes Interpol! Hide me!
Toilet: As an ecologist, I don’t protect anyone who has skinned God’s little animals, innocent little creatures, good souls of the Lord!
TOILET: Look! There goes a procession! Mix in with the people, and I won’t say anything!
Pursued: Thanks!
TOILET: And he got into the crowd just like that, the bandit.
Mendieta: But... it’s not a procession. It’s a demonstration.

Son agentes de policía en huelga, reclamando aumento
Es asina, don Inodor o. Uno nunca sabe ande va a estar metido el día de mañana

Toilet: They’re policemen on strike, demanding a raise.
Mendieta: That’s the way it is, Don Toilet.
One never knows what one is going to be caught up in tomorrow.
of comic-strip authors; they do nothing more than expose a society in which borders can be anywhere. If the comic strip mixes earlier artistic genres, if it succeeds in having characters who are representative of the most stable part of the world—folklore—interact with figures from literature and the mass media, and if it introduces them into diverse epochs, it is doing nothing more than to reproduce the real; better put, it is doing nothing other than to reproduce the staging of advertising that convinces us to buy what we do not need, of the “manifestations” of religion, and of the “processions” of politics.

Oblique Powers

This crossing of some postmodern transformations of the symbolic market and of everyday culture contributes to understanding the failure of certain ways of doing politics that are based on two principles of modernity: the autonomy of symbolic processes and the democratic renewal of the cultured and the popular. Likewise, it can help us explain the generalized success of neoconservative politics and the lack of socializing or more democratic alternatives adapted to the level of technological development and the complexity of the social crisis. In addition to the economic advantages of the neoconservative groups, their action is facilitated by their having better captured the sociocultural meaning of the new structures of power.

Starting from what we have been analyzing, a key question returns: the cultural reorganization of power. It is a question of analyzing what the political consequences are of moving from a vertical and bipolar conception of sociopolitical relations to one that is decentered and multidetermined.

It is understandable that there is resistance to this displacement. The Manichaean and conspiratorial representations of power find partial justification in some contemporary processes. The central countries use technological innovations to accentuate the asymmetry and inequality between them and the dependent countries. The hegemonic classes take advantage of industrial reconversion to reduce workers employment, cut back the power of the unions, and commercialize goods—among which are educational and cultural ones—about which, after historic struggles, agreement had been reached that they were public services. It would seem that the big groups in which power is concentrated are the ones that subordinate art and culture to the market, the ones that discipline work and daily life.

A broader view allows us to see other economic and political transformations, supported by long-lasting cultural changes, that are giving a different
structure to the conflicts. The crossings between the cultured and the popular render obsolete the polar representation between both modalities of symbolic development, and therefore revitalize the political opposition between hegemonics and subalterns, conceived as if it were a question of totally distinct and always opposed groups. What we know today about the intercultural operations of the mass media and new technologies, and about the reappropriation that makes of them diverse receivers, distances us from the theses about the omnipotent manipulation of the big metropolitan consortia. The classic paradigms with which domination was explained are incapable of taking into account the dissemination of the centers, the multipolarity of social initiatives, the plurality of references—taken from diverse territories—with which artists, artisans, and the mass media assemble their works.

The increase in processes of hybridization makes it evident that we understand very little about power if we only examine confrontations and vertical actions. Power would not function if it were exercised only by bourgeoisie over proletarians, whites over indigenous people, parents over children, the media over receivers. Since all these relations are interwoven with each other, each one achieves an effectiveness that it would never be able to by itself. But it is not simply a question of some forms of domination being superimposed on others and thereby being strengthened. What gives them their efficacy is the obliqueness that is established in the fabric. How can we discern where ethnic power ends and where family power begins, or the borders between political and economic power? Sometimes it is possible, but what is most important is the shrewdness with which the cables are mixed, and secret orders passed and responded to affirmatively.

Hegemonic, subaltern: heavy words that helped us to name the divisions between people but not to include movements of affection and participation in solidary or complicit activities in which hegemonic and subaltern groups are needed. Those who work on the border in constant relation with the tourism, factories, and language of the United States look strangely at those who consider them to be absorbed by the empire. For the protagonists of those relations, the interferences of English in their speech (to a certain extent equivalent to the infiltration of Spanish in the South of the United States) express the indispensable transactions in which everyday exchanges happen.

It is not necessary to look at those transactions as phenomena exclusive to zones of dense interculturalism. The ideological dramatization of social relations tends to exalt so much the oppositions that it ends by not seeing the
rites that unite and connect them; it is a sociology of gratings, not of what is
said through them or when they are not there. The most rebellious popular
sectors and the most combative leaders satisfy their basic needs by partici-
pating in a system of consumption that they do not choose. They cannot in-
vent the place where they work, the transportation that brings them there,
nor the school where they educate their children, nor their food, nor their
clothes, nor the media that supply them with daily information. Even
protests against that order are made using a language they do not choose
and demonstrating in streets or squares that were made by others. However
many transgressive uses they make of the language, the streets, and the
squares, the resignification is temporary and does not cancel the weight of
the habits whereby we reproduce the sociocultural order, inside and outside
of ourselves.

These realities—so obvious, but usually omitted in the ideological
dramatization of conflicts—become clearer when nonpolitical behaviors
are observed. Why do the popular sectors support those who oppress them?
Medical anthropologists observe that in the face of health problems, the
usual conduct of subaltern groups is not to attack the exploitation that makes
it difficult for them to receive adequate care, but rather to accommodate
themselves to the uses of the illness by private medicine or to take advantage
as much as possible of deficient state services. This is not due to a lack of
consciousness about their health needs, about the oppression that weighs
them down, nor about the inadequacy or speculative cost of the services.
Even when radical means of action are available for confronting inequality,
they opt for intermediate solutions. The same thing happens in other sce-
narios. In the face of the economic crisis, they demand better salaries and at
the same time limit their own consumption. Against political hegemony, the
transaction consists, for example, in accepting personal relations in order to
obtain individual benefits; in the ideological realm, in incorporating and
positively valuing elements produced outside of their own group (criteria of
prestige, hierarchies, designs, and functions of objects). The same combina-
tion of scientific and traditional practices—going to the doctor or to the
healer—is a transactional way of taking advantage of the resources of both
medicines, whereby the users reveal a conception that is more flexible than
that of the modern medical system, so attached to allopathy, and of many
anthropologists and folklorists who idealize the autonomy of traditional
practices. From the perspective of the users, both therapeutic modalities are
complementary and function as repertoires of resources starting from
which they effect transactions between hegemonic and popular knowledge.
The hybridizations described throughout this book bring us to the conclusion that today all cultures are border cultures. All the arts develop in relation to other arts: handicrafts migrate from the countryside to the city; movies, videos, and songs that recount events of one people are interchanged with others. Thus cultures lose the exclusive relation with their territory, but they gain in communication and knowledge.

There is yet another way in which the obliquity of the symbolic circuits allows us to rethink the links between culture and power. The search for meditations and diagonal ways for managing conflicts gives cultural relations a prominent place in political development. When we do not succeed in changing whoever governs, we satirize him or her in Carnival dances, journalistic humor, and graffiti. Against the impossibility of constructing a different order, we establish masked challenges in myths, literature, and comic strips. The struggle between classes or ethnic groups is, most of the time, a metaphorical struggle. Sometimes, starting from metaphors, new transformative practices slowly or unexpectedly invade the picture.

At every border there are rigid wires and fallen wires. Exemplary actions, cultural rodeos, rites are ways of going beyond the limits wherever possible. I think of the cunning of undocumented migrants in the United States, of the parodic rebelliousness of Colombian and Argentine graffiti. I remember the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo walking every Thursday in a cyclical ritualism, holding photos of their disappeared children like icons, until they succeeded years later in having some of the guilty condemned to prison.

But the frustrations of human rights organizations makes us reflect also on the role of culture as a symbolic expression for sustaining a demand when political paths are closed. The day the Argentine Congress approved the Law of Ending (Ley de Punto Final), which absolved hundreds of torturers and murderers, two formerly disappeared persons put themselves into narrow booths, handcuffed and blindfolded, in front of the legislative palace, with posters that said “The end means returning to this”—the ritual repetition of disappearance and confinement as the only way of preserving memory of them when political failure seemed to eliminate them from the social horizon.

This limited symbolic effectiveness leads to that fundamental distinction for defining relations between the cultural and political fields that we analyzed in the preceding chapter: the difference between action and acting. A chronic difficulty in the political valorization of cultural practices is to understand them as actions—that is, as effective interventions in the material structures of society. Certain sociologizing readings also measure the utility
of a mural or a film by its capacity to perform and generate immediate and verifiable modifications. It is hoped that the spectators respond to the supposed "conscientizing" actions with "consciousness-raising" and "real changes" in their conduct. As this almost never happens, one reaches pessimistic conclusions about the efficacy of artistic messages.

Cultural practices are performances more than actions. They represent and simulate social actions but only sometimes operate as an action. This happens not only in cultural activities that are expressly organized and acknowledged as such; ordinary behaviors too, whether grouped in institutions or not, employ simulated action and symbolic performance. Presidential discourses in the face of a conflict that cannot be resolved with the available resources, the criticism of governmental performance by political organizations without the power to reverse it, and, of course, the verbal rebellions of the common citizen are performances that are more understandable for the theatrical gaze than for that of "pure" politics. Anthropology informs us that this is not due to the distance that crises put between ideals and acts but to the constitutive structure of the articulation between the political and the cultural in any society. Perhaps the greatest interest for politics in taking into account the symbolic problematic lies not in the sure efficacy of certain goods or messages but in the fact that the theatrical and ritual aspects of the social make evident what there is of the oblique, the simulated, and the deferred in any interaction.

Notes

1. On Chile, see Lechner's Notas sobre la vida cotidiana and Brunner's Un espejo trizado. Ensayos sobre cultura y politicas, especially the first part. With respect to Argentina, see Landi.

2. The photos of this series of monuments were taken by Paolo Gori. The book that he did with Helen Escobedo is entitled Mexican Monuments: Strange Encounters (1989). A more extensive analysis of the problems treated here can be found in my article "Monuments, Billboards, and Graffiti," included in that volume. I am grateful to the Institute of Aesthetic Research of the National University of Mexico for having facilitated my access to photos by Gori that were not included in the book, and that were donated by the author to that institution.

3. Two historians of Chicano art, Shifra M. Goldman and Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, have documented this cultural production and reflected upon it in an original way. See, for example, the introductions to their book Arte Chicano: A Comprehensive Annotated Bibliography of Chicano Art, 1965-1981; see also the articles by both of them in Rodríguez Prampolini.

4. It should be clarified that the conception of life as a constant crossing of borders, although it remains adequate, is not as easy as Michel de Certeau pronounces it when it is a question of "second-class" North American citizens—for example, blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Chicanos.

5. The report of this investigation can be read in García Canclini and Safa (Tijuana: la casa de toda la gente); photos by Lourdes Grobet. Jennifer Metcalfe, Federico Rosas, and Ernesto Bermejillo collaborated in the study.

6. With respect to the intercultural hybridization among rockers, cholos, and punks—who
produce magazines, records, and cassettes with information and music from various continents—see Valenzuela.

7. The second slogan involves a play on words that does not translate into English without losing the effect of the original Spanish: “Dios no cumple. Ni años.” But the free translation given here captures more or less the sentiment of the original.—Trans.

8. This affirmation, like others I cite from Fontanarrosa, were obtained in a personal interview with him in Rosario, Argentina, on March 18, 1988.

9. I am using here the investigations carried out by Menéndez and Módena, who extensively analyze the practices of transaction.
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