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consumers and citizens

GLOBALIZATION AND MULTICULTURAL CONFLICTS

Translated and with an Introduction by George Yúdice

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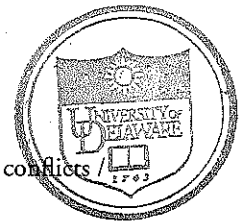

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For Sandra

Chapter 5

Identities as a Multimedia Spectacle

Identity is a narrated construct. It involves the establishment of a set of founding events, which almost always refer to the appropriation of a territory by a people or the independence gained in the struggle against foreigners. The narrative proceeds by adding up the feats through which the inhabitants defend their territory, order their conflicts, and establish the legitimate ways of life there in order to distinguish themselves from others. Textbooks and museums, civic rituals and political speeches were for a long time the mechanisms by which each nation's Identity (with a capital I) was formed and its narrative rhetoric consecrated.

Radio and film contributed in the first half of this century to the organization of identity narratives and the meaning of citizenship in national societies. In addition to epic tales of heroes and great collective events, they introduced the chronicle of everyday life: common habits and tastes, ways of speaking and dressing, that differentiated one people from another. Radio helped previously distant and unconnected groups from diverse regions of a country to recognize each other as part of a totality.[1] The news programs that linked disparate zones, like the films, portrayed intercultural conflicts and showed the migrating masses how to live in the city, and proposed new possible syntheses of a national identity in transformation.

Whereas in the 1940s and 1950s, Mexican and Argentine cinema projected their identity narratives through mass visual culture, in the 1960s, allied with the emerging television industry, they changed course and structured the imaginary of developmentalist modernization. The mass media were agents of technological innovations, they sensitized us to the use of electronic appliances in everyday life, and they liberalized customs within a more cosmopolitan framework; but they also unified the patterns of consumption in line with a national vision. Because the media were owned predominantly by national capital and adhered to a developmentalist ideology, which sought modernization through import substitution and the upgrading of industry in each country, even the most internationalized agents at this point in time—such as TV and advertising—beckoned us to buy national products and encouraged the dissemination of local knowledge.

All of this waned throughout the 1980s. The opening of each country's economy to global markets and processes of regional integration diminished the role of national cultures. The transnationalization of technologies and the commercialization of cultural commodities attenuated traditional forms of identity. Now it is within globalized networks of symbolic production and circulation that trends in art, publishing, advertising, and fashion are set.

An Anthropology of Transcultural Citations

Where does identity reside? By what media is it produced and renewed at this end of the century? To answer this question, we shall contrast the way in which classical anthropology defined identity with how it is constituted today.

If anthropology—the social science that has studied the formation of identities more than any other—encounters difficulties today in dealing with transnationalization and globalization, it is because of the habit of considering the members of a society as belonging to one homogeneous culture and, for that reason, having one distinctive and coherent identity. That singular and unified vision, confirmed by classic ethnographies and many national museums established by anthropologists, is not adequate for understanding intercultural situations.

Theories of "cultural contact" have always posited contrasts between groups only on the basis of what differentiates them. The problem with this approach is that most intercultural situations today are constituted not only in relation to *differences* among cultures that have developed

separately, but also by the *unequal* ways in which groups appropriate, combine, and transform elements from several societies. Subject to fewer restrictions and greater speedup, the circulation of people, capital, and messages brings us into daily contact with many cultures; consequently, our identity can no longer be defined by an exclusive belonging to a national community. The range of legitimate objects of study should therefore not be limited to differences, but should extend to hybridization.

According to this alternative view, nations become multidetermined scenarios where diverse cultural systems intersect and interpenetrate. If social science is to say anything significant about identity-formation processes in an age of globalization, it will have to attend to the heterogeneity and coexistence of various symbolic codes in a group and even an individual subject, as well as discern intercultural borrowings and transactions. Identity today, even among broad sectors of the popular classes, is polyglot, multiethnic, migrant, made from elements that cut across various cultures.

We thus confront a double challenge. We must endeavor to understand, simultaneously, postnational formations and the remodeling of subsisting national cultures. A great part of current artistic production still expresses national iconographic traditions, circulating only within the confines of a given country. As such, the visual arts, literature, radio, and film remain sources of nationalist imaginaries, providing scenarios in which the signs of regional identity are consecrated and communicated. Yet an ever-expanding sector of the creation, dissemination, and reception of art operates today according to deterritorialized procedures. As with the writers of the "Boom" mentioned in the preceding chapter, the great national painters—say, Tamayo or Botero—have gained an international resonance by opening up local iconographies to the international avant-gardes. Even those who choose to speak for the narrowest imagined communities—Rio de Janeiro or the Bronx, Zapotec myths or the Chicano borderlands—achieve their meaningfulness precisely because their work operates as a "transcultural citation" within art markets and exhibitions in [hemispheric—*Trans.*] American metropolitan centers.[2]

It is not unusual to see the particularities of each country condensed into the framework of transnational conceptual networks at international exhibitions. "Paris–Berlin," "Paris–New York," two shows at the Centre Georges Pompidou, revisited contemporary art history not by parceling it into national patrimonies but according to trends that cut across borders. The art market, however, is inflexible in subordinating

the local meanings of artworks, converting them into secondary, folkloric references within a homogenized international discourse. The leading galleries, with their headquarters in New York, London, Milan, and Tokyo, circulate these works in a deterritorialized fashion and encourage the artists to accommodate to "global" publics. Fairs and biennials also contribute to this multicultural enterprise, as evidenced in the 1993 Venice Biennale, where most of the fifty-six countries represented did not have their own pavilions. Almost all Latin American contributions (from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, and Peru) were included in the Italian section. This was not apparently of great concern in an exhibition titled "The Cardinal Points of Art" and dedicated to demonstrating that art today is constituted by "cultural nomadism."[3]

The Regional and the Global

As in other eras, when identities were displayed in national museums, a new phase in economic transnationalization and in the very character of communications technologies (from television to satellites and fiber optic networks) has, since mid-century, contributed to the increasing protagonism of those world cultures exhibited as multimedia spectacles. Consider that today no "national" cinema can recoup investment in a film from ticket sales within its own borders. It has to target multiple sales venues: satellite and cable TV, networks of video and laser-disk rental outlets. All of these systems, structured transnationally, facilitate the "defolklorization" of the messages they put into circulation.

Cinema's survival problems have been dealt with by acquiescing to the tendency to transnationalize, eliminating in the process most national and regional features. This involves the promotion of a "world cinema" that seeks to use the most sophisticated visual technology and marketing strategies in order to gain a foothold in a market of global proportions. Coppola, Spielberg, and Lucas, for example, construct spectacular narratives—*Jurassic Park, Frankenstein, Batman*—from myths intelligible to most spectators, independent of culture, educational level, national history, level of economic development, or political system. World cinema, according to Charles-Albert Michelet, "is closer to Claude Lévi-Strauss than to John Ford."[4] The point is to fabricate such a dazzling spectacle that it will persuade viewers once or twice a year that it is worth the trouble to leave the living room sofa for the lesser comfort of a dark theater.

Regional cultures, nevertheless, persist. Even the global cinema of Hollywood leaves some room for Latin American, European, and Asian motion pictures that, precisely because they capture certain local issues, have the power to interest multiple publics. Brazilian cinema of the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, for example, widened its mass-market appeal inside and outside of Brazil by combining testimonies about identity with an imaginative and parodic treatment of the internationalization of the country. *Macunaíma, Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands,* and *Xica da Silva* are representative of this tendency. We could also mention the example of political rereadings of detective stories in the Argentine context, as in Adolfo Aristiráin's films; or historical narratives told from the perspective of everyday intimacy as in the Mexican pictures *Red Dawn* and *Like Water for Chocolate.* The latter, which in a few months surpassed Mexican box-office records (1.5 million), is at best a well-filmed *telenovela.* Its success is not, however, unconnected to the themes dealt with by other, less conventional Mexican films—*La Tarea, La mujer de Benjamín, El bulto*—that ironically, irreverently, and without complacent nostalgia rework stock crises in family identity and national political projects.

Such films reveal that identity and history—including local or national identities—can still be custom-fit into cultural industries that require a high profit margin. The deterritorialization of art does not tell the whole story; simultaneous to it, there are strong reterritorializing tendencies, represented by the local demands of social movements, on the one hand, and mass-media processes, on the other. Differences and forms of local rootedness are produced and reproduced by regional radio and television, niche markets for folkloric musics and crafts, "demassified" and "mesticized" consumerism.[5]

Research on the ideology of global managers suggests that corporate globalization, which tends to homogenize in order to reap profits, should pay greater attention to local and regional differences. What do anthropologists discover when they read the *Harvard Business Review* and the *Journal of Consumer Marketing*? In his most recent book, Renato Ortiz, for example, finds that the intellectuals of corporate globalization foster universalization by exploiting the coincidences in thought and taste in all societies. Computers, credit cards, Benetton clothing, Barbie dolls have all contributed to this form of globalization. However, once these forms of homogenization come to be understood as the antithesis of the local, a new view envisages universalization and regional particularization to be complementary:

Coca-Cola was only able to make profits in the Spanish market when it shortened its bottles to the size of other soft drinks in the country; a German publicity campaign using U.S. basketball stars had little effect because they were unknown to European sports fans; Brazilian jeans are cut more tightly in order to emphasize women's body shape; Japanese manufacturers know that Europeans tend to buy high-end compact stereo components that can be kept hidden in a cabinet, while U.S. consumers prefer jumbo speakers.

Once it is evident that a recognition of multicultural differences does not disappear even in the most pragmatic of corporate strategies, the contrast between homogeneous and heterogeneous, Ortiz argues, loses importance. It then becomes necessary to understand how world segments—youth, senior citizens, the oversized, the disaffected—share converging habits and tastes. "The world is a differentiated market constituted by strata defined by their affinities. Rather than produce and advertise commodities for 'all' consumers, they are promoted globally among specific groups." Consequently, Ortiz advocates abandoning the notion of homogenization and speaking, instead, of "cultural leveling" as a way of "capturing the process of convergence in cultural behavior, while preserving the differences in the various strata."[6]

Nations and ethnic formations continue to exist. For the majorities, however, they are less and less important as determinants of social cohesion. We need not fear that these forms of identity will be eradicated by globalization; rather, ethnic, regional, and national identities are being reconstructed in relation to globalized processes of intercultural segmentation and hybridization. If we conceive of nations as relativized settings, crisscrossed by other symbolic matrices, then the question that arises is what kinds of literature, film, and television are capable of narrating the heterogeneity and coexistence of several codes within a group and even in one individual subject.

In the Media: Identity as a Coproduction

Current reflections on identity and citizenship have couched themselves within several cultural contexts characteristic of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century nationalisms; they can no longer be confined, however, to folklore or political oratory. These reflections have to take into account the diversity of artistic repertoires and communications media that contribute to the reelaboration of identities. Moreover, the study

of identities cannot be the task of a single discipline (anthropology or political sociology), but the concerted effort of transdisciplinary work, with contributions from specialists in communications, semiology, and urbanism.

Multimedia and multicontextuality: these are two key notions for the redefinition of cinema, other communications systems, and culture in general. Just as the survival of cinema depends on its relocation to a multimedia audiovisial space (along with television and video), so too national and local identities will endure to the degree that we resituate them within multicontextual communications processes. Dynamized in this way, identity will not be seen simply as a ritualized narrative, the monotonous repetition proclaimed by certain fundamentalisms. As a narrative that we renew continually, that we reconstruct with the collaboration of others, identity should also be understood as a coproduction.

Nonetheless, this coproduction is accomplished under unequal conditions among the various participating actors and powers. On the one hand, national economies and cultures have eased their border controls in response to the pressures of cultural globalization and regional economic integration. On the other hand, the asymmetrical circumstances in which international agreements are crafted can be aggravated by trade liberalization. A theory of identities and citizenship has to take into account the diverse forms of their recomposition as they move through unequal circuits of production, communication, and cultural appropriation.

Globalization processes have a lesser effect within the space of *historical-territorial culture,* that is, the set of regional and ethnic knowledges, habits, and experiences reproduced more or less according to a set profile throughout the centuries. Inasmuch as profits on investment are small and symbolic inertia quite protracted in the areas of historical heritage, artistic and folkloric production, and certain forms of peasant culture, the impact of economic liberalization is likely to be limited.

In a second circuit, that of the *mass media* that disseminate (via radio, television, video) entertainment and information to majorities, we can speak of certain peripheral countries such as Brazil and Mexico that have the human, technological, and economic resources to continue producing nationally, with a measure of autonomy, and even expand to international markets. The majority of Latin American countries, however, are quite dependent, not so much on global capital in general but on U.S. production.

The dissolution of national and regional identities is even greater in the third circuit, composed of computers, satellites, fiber-optic net-

works, and other *information technologies* linked to decision making as well as expanding and highly profitable forms of entertainment (video, video games, etc.). The effects on the reconstitution of identities of this kind of technological and economic globalization, particularly in the workplace and in consumption, are just beginning to be studied. Current discourses on competitive productivity, the rituals of integration among workers and corporate management, the subordination of entertainment iconography in keeping with delocalized codes are some of the processes in which the refashioning of local identities according to global matrices is quite evident. Many traditional habits and beliefs survive in these spaces, providing input for the differential styles that manifest themselves in different countries, even where production and consumption are high-tech. But it should be obvious that as we come under the logic of world competitiveness, as we watch television and inform ourselves electronically, use computer systems for many everyday activities, identities based on local traditions are reformulated according to "cultural engineering."[7]

One of the greatest challenges for rethinking identity and citizenship today is finding a way to study how relations of continuity, discontinuity, and hybridization are produced among local and global, traditional and ultramodern systems of cultural development. We have to examine not only coproduction, but also conflicts that revolve around the coexistence of ethnicities and nationalities in the workplace and in sites of consumption. Although *hegemony* and *resistance* continue to be useful analytical categories, the complexity and nuances of these interactions also compel us to study identities as processes of *negotiation,* inasmuch as they are *hybrid, flexible,* and *multicultural.*

When we take into consideration the social conflicts and the multicultural changes that accompany globalization, it becomes evident that the media spectacles we see cannot account for what takes place in industry. It is necessary, then, to clarify a statement made at the beginning: identity is a construct, but the artistic, folkloric, and media narratives that shape it are realized and transformed within sociohistorical conditions that cannot be reduced to their mise-en-scène. Identity is theater *and* politics, performance *and* action.

Chapter 6

Latin America and Europe as Suburbs of Hollywood

December 1993, in Brussels: for the first time, controversies over cultural policies took center stage in international economic debates. This meeting of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), at which 117 countries approved the most far-reaching trade liberalization in history, nearly broke down because of disagreements in three areas: agriculture, textiles, and the audiovisual industry. The conflicts in the first two areas were resolved through mutual concessions negotiated between the United States and European governments. An analysis of the discrepancies that led to the exclusion of film and television from the agreement is of the greatest importance for understanding the predicaments confronted by national cultural policies in this age of globalization and the possibilities for waging a more effective politics of citizenship from the purview of culture.

The Conflict of Economic and Cultural Strategies

The United States demanded unrestricted circulation of audiovisual products; the Europeans sought to protect their media industries, especially cinema. The discrepancy derives from two ways of conceiving of

culture. The U.S. position is that entertainment should be treated as a business—not only because it is, but also because it is the second-largest, after aerospace, of all sources of export income. In 1992, U.S. producers sent more than $4.6 billion in entertainment programs and films to Europe.[1] In this same period, European exports totaled $250 million.[2]

This asymmetry is evidenced further in European movie-theater and television programming. U.S. distributors controlled 80 percent of the French and 91 percent of the Spanish film markets in 1993. The resulting loss of screen time for the national cinemas of these countries generated great unrest among local artists and producers. The greatest expressions of irritation occurred when *Jurassic Park* premiered simultaneously in 180 Spanish and 400 French theaters.

Latin America is not to be outdone in this competition among the largest importing nations of U.S. entertainment. The figures have grown in the past few years because we receive not only film and television programs, but also films, games, and other forms of entertainment on video. Mexico, for example, barely in sixteenth place in 1990 among importers of U.S. films, had the distinction of reaching tenth place worldwide in 1993, with investments totaling $36.9 million.[3]

In debates prompted by GATT negotiations, European motion-picture worker associations defended their jobs, but they also put forth the argument that film is not exclusively a commodity. It is also a powerful instrument for the expression and self-affirmation of one's language and culture, and their dissemination beyond one's borders. They made reference to the contradiction whereby the United States demands the free circulation of its communications in foreign countries, while article 301 of its own commercial law permits restrictions on cultural products from abroad. U.S. radio and television stations broadcast nationally produced programming almost exclusively and, furthermore, disqualify imports through advertisements such as "Why buy music you don't understand?" Various experts have asked what if any advantage there might be for Europe to open its telecommunications markets without restriction to the two countries—the United States and Japan—that have closed their own markets to European products.[4]

Until a few years ago, each national film industry was allotted, for the sake of survival, a quota of screen time (50 percent in several Latin American countries). This was one means of limiting U.S. expansionism. We know that movie-theater attendance is falling worldwide for very complex reasons. In France, where 411 million tickets were sold in 1957, sales reached only 121.1 million in 1990.[5] Latin American movie

theaters closed their doors en masse in the 1980s when attendance fell off by an average of 50 percent. In Mexico, 410 million in sales in 1984 had shrunk to 170 million in 1991.[6] In reality, the decrease in moviegoers does not signal the disappearance of film; instead, television and video have taken up the slack, propagating home viewing.[7] If U.S. enterprises have taken the lead in capitalizing on these changes in technology and cultural habits, it is because they can adapt more rapidly than the film industries of other countries. In fact, they encourage these innovations enthusiastically, thus gaining nearly worldwide control of television and video distribution as well as surviving movie-theater chains.

What can producers, filmmakers, and distributors who are not from the United States do? They do not constitute a bloc that reacts in the same way in all countries or all industry sectors. In the recent GATT debates, the English and the Germans washed their hands of "whatever might happen to the image industries: they had already given up many years earlier the possibility of creating their own culture in that sector."[8] France, Spain, and Italy tried to maintain national and European film quotas as a means to better production and to establish new sources of subsidy for their own film industry. This practice was criticized by the United States as a form of "unfair competition."

Even in Europe's Latin countries, who defend the "cultural exemption" to free trade, there are some who see film and television as nothing more than merchandise. As such, it is up to the spectators to decide what should or should not be exhibited. "They deserve what's coming to them," said a radio commentator, arguing that 90 percent of Spanish cinema is terrible. "But why take it out on film?" Eduardo Haro Tecglen responded in a newspaper article: "What percentage isn't equally bad in literature, theater, painting, carpentry, plumbing, the priesthood, or people's qualities overall?" One encouraging by-product of the debate is that it sharpened the self-criticism of Spanish cinema and society, particularly regarding the criteria of evaluation to be implemented in a democracy. Taking the size of the audience as an indicator of quality, Haro Tecglen argued, is like using election results to evaluate a government. "This is what is happening. It could be said that American film is slightly less bad: 80 percent. Perhaps because they can attract the best filmmakers in the world, they have greater economic potential. Be that as it may, it is here to stay."[9] In sum, the crisis of the film industry can no longer be understood as a problem internal to each country, nor in isolation from the transnational reorganization of symbolic markets. It

is situated at the intersection of tensions between free trade, cultural quality, and particular ways of life.

The European debate offers useful insights for the analysis of these issues in the Latin American context. In Europe, too, neoliberal reforms of the state have led to the privatization of radio stations, TV channels, and a sizable segment of informational and telematic circuits. In some countries, the cultural action of the public sector was reduced to protecting the historical heritage (museums, archaeological sites, etc.) and promoting traditional arts (visual arts, music, theater, literature). The premise here is that, given declining attendance, these forms of culture would not survive without artificial respiration from the government. Communication and information media linked to the new technologies, which require greater investment but have the power to reach vast audiences, have been sold off to private enterprise, most often U.S. and Japanese corporations.

It is becoming evident that national identities are no longer defined exclusively by cinema, television, and video, but by the whole ensemble of "communication highways." Satellite transmission and fiber-optic cable have transformed scientific communication (electronic mail, telemedicine), office information systems, financial services for banks, intercorporation transactions, and, obviously, the distribution of cultural products. From the United States, Turner Communications masterminds the distribution of films, cartoons, and news in many Latin American countries and is now even operating in several European countries, such as France. Before long, U.S. films will arrive in movie theaters via satellite in hundreds of cities in all continents, without the complexities of customs' checks, as in the case of packaged pictures and videos. Television and home computer access to video games, electronic shopping, national and international news is also becoming more common. The Europeans are asking who will control these networks: information and entertainment audiovisual production is predominantly in the hands of U.S. companies, and 70 percent of worldwide sales of electronic devices for the mass market is controlled by Japanese firms. Europe is almost as ill prepared as Latin America to compete in the mass-mediated reorganization of culture. Furthermore, because of limited production and technological innovation in this area (the exception is Phillips), only small countries—Belgium, Switzerland, Ireland, Holland, and the Scandinavian countries—have been cabled. This technology is almost nonexistent in France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece, where the preferred means of delivery is the airwaves.[10]

Europe's weakness in the recent GATT negotiations prompted pointed responses from leading filmmakers (Pedro Almodóvar, Wim Wenders, Bernardo Bertolucci), actors' unions, television and film directors' associations, executives, and politicians. Their interests were at stake in the options given to audiovisual communication and they urgently sought a reformulation of the concepts used in drafting cultural policies, inasmuch as such policies have to factor in how new interactions between local cultures and global processes affect the public good. Several directors and writers involved in this debate have created works of great sensitivity to regional traditions. Their films and novels are incontrovertibly Spanish or German, or even more locally based in the urban cultures of Madrid, Berlin, or Rome. Nevertheless, they understand that the possibility to go on filming or distributing pictures, videos, and books relevant to local cultures depends on the degree of control that they secure within the most advanced networks of transnational communications.

And what about Latin America? The situation in Europe may help to bolster the demands of Argentine, Brazilian, and Venezuelan filmmakers who, among others, have won international prizes in recent years, but who find little support in their home societies, racked as they are by financial and legal crises. In some countries, government institutions that provided subsidies have folded, as did Brazil's Embrafilme. Film production is bound to fall (from 40 to 70 per year to 3 or 4, as in the early 1990s in the above-mentioned countries) if those who draft cultural policies continue to ignore the importance of mass communications. It is difficult for the state to make strategic interventions if the majority of cultural ministries and councils persist in believing that culture and identity are shaped predominantly by fine arts, with a pinch of indigenous and peasant cultures, traditional crafts and musics.

If it is true that part of our identities is still rooted in those traditional symbolic formations, it should also not be forgotten that 70 percent of the population are city dwellers and that an increasing number of these live in an almost exclusive connection with the culture industries. Lacking national cultural policies, these industries are condemned to importing and distributing that world folklore whose most characteristic examples are U.S. television series and Spielberg's and Lucas's movies. Meanwhile, the public in each country becomes accustomed to a media "normalcy" embodied by the most spectacular narratives contrived from myths that are intelligible to spectators from any country. Will our cultural policies continue to trod dirt roads or will they gain access

to a paved culture, to international information and communications superhighways?

From Cinema to Multimedia Space

In the GATT negotiations, Europe proved to be more flexible in the areas of agriculture and industry than in audiovisual space. "France can forgo producing potatoes and still be France, but if we stop speaking French, lose our cinema, our theater, and our own narrative, we will become just another slum suburb of Chicago," said a French television executive.[11]

Five days before signing the GATT accord, the Spanish government passed a law establishing minimum screen-time quotas for European cinema. In cities with more than 125,000 inhabitants, at least one film from a European Community nation will be screened for every two from other continents. Other measures require television channels to pay higher rental fees for airing films. There is even talk of video distributors and rental outlets having to contribute part of their profits toward the financing of film production. It is increasingly evident that the survival of cinema does not depend on movie-theater screenings alone, but on its new role within the ensemble of factors in the audiovisual field. Nowadays, film is a multimedia product that can only be financed by contributions from the various venues in which it circulates.

When all is said and done, however, the survival of cinema, important as it is, pales in comparison to the total deregulation of the entire area of communications, the goal of U.S. trade policy. Fiber-optic networks and the digitization and compression of images will bring a "downpour of five hundred channels on Europe" before the end of the century. Juan Cueto, until recently director of Spanish TV's Canal +, has said that cinema is a McGuffin (scenes in Hitchcock films that add nothing to the plot but serve to thicken it). "Cinema is a locomotive, Hitchcock's McGuffin, and what is important is what it drags behind it."

Forecasts predict a similar fate for Latin America in the near future. Movie theaters have closed in Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Caracas, Bogotá, and Mexico City, while upwards of 50 percent of homes in these cities count videocassette recorders and cable television among their possessions. Video rental clubs, the major outlet for cinema, offer from 70 percent to 90 percent U.S. films, depending on the country. Productions representative of European cultures, with which we Latin Americans have the closest ties, together with works from other countries in the region, do not exceed 10 percent of all the disposable fare on television and video.

U.S. hegemony is even greater when it comes to the control of information and telematics. There is not one country in Latin America, except for Brazil, with state policies for investment in high-end research, production of equipment, and personnel training, all necessary to compete in the development of cultural innovations associated with cutting-edge technologies. Subordination to U.S. technological and communications production is becoming even more accentuated in Mexico since the signing of NAFTA, an eventuality to be repeated in those Latin American countries that will follow suit in joining the accord. The reason for this is that the economic opening negotiated in NAFTA actually limits investment from countries outside the region in the national economies of this hemisphere. At the very least, the United States and Canada can request preferential treatment whenever a Latin American country signs an accord with a country outside the region.

Nationalism All Over Again?

The United States has benefited in many ways from industrial development in Germany and Japan. It also has an overwhelming control of almost all postindustrial software production, that is, of electronic information and communications programs. After the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the "American Way" has jurassically expanded the dissemination of its spectacles throughout the universe. Europe's energetic negotiations in the recent GATT rounds and the measures taken by some countries to protect their audiovisual production are a few of the alternatives that make it possible to envisage a symbolic world in which not everything is in the hands of Hollywood and CNN. At least, according to Régis Debray, it helps to question whether what is good for Columbia and Warner Brothers—which we already know is good for the United States—is also good for humanity.[12]

Some intellectuals become alarmed by what they consider to be a resurgence of nationalism, an "anti-North Americanism, based on ideological myths" and statist interventions that are conducive to authoritarianism. For Mario Vargas Llosa, "when it functions freely, the market allows, for example, for films produced in the 'periphery' to reach millions of movie theaters throughout the world, as in the case of *Like Water for Chocolate* or *El Mariachi*."[13] These exceptions are exactly that, rare cases, as one can easily confirm by surveying the meager space given

to Latin American and European films (and also Asian and African films) in movie listings, television offerings, and video club holdings in any North American city, and in every country in which programming is controlled by U.S. distributors. In the United States, only 1 percent of all movie tickets sold are for films in languages other than English.[14] The numbers do not support what Vargas Llosa says: "the disappearance of borders, the integration of the peoples of the world in a system of exchange that benefits all, and especially those countries that urgently need to overcome underdevelopment and poverty." "Those ideals of our youth" that socialism could not attain have been made possible by "capitalism and the market."[15] A novelist's fiction?

To conclude, we might say that the current European debate reformulates transnational mass communications policies, in at least three ways:

1. *It calls for a reformulation of the relations between the national, the continental, and the global.* There is no dearth of racist and chauvinist outbursts as Latin Americans and Europeans confront the transnational restructuring of markets by proposing a return to a telluric nationalism, as if "national roots" were the only source of true art. This "horticulture of creation," as André Lange has called it, has always been a meager aesthetic and sociologically unverifiable: "What are Mozart's roots? Salzburg, which sent him off with a swift kick in the ass, or all of Europe, which provided him with forms, themes, librettos?" "Should André Wajda, the Polish filmmaker, have refrained from giving us a provocative Danton?"[16] It is not difficult to give a similar repertoire of Latin American examples, from the hybrid multicultural "roots" of tango or revue theater to internationally recognized writers, musicians, and painters (for example, Octavio Paz, Ástor Piazzolla, and César Paternosto, to mention only those surnames beginning with P). They are renowned for the quality of their innovations, for their way of speaking on "their own" without taking refuge in the local. The question is how to make it possible, in the current phase of the industrialization and transnationalization of communications, for Mexican, Argentine, or Colombian artists not only to communicate with one or ten thousand compatriots but to gain entry into the circuits of a *Latin American cultural space,* from which vantage point they might dialogue with the voices and images that come to us from the entire planet.

A crucial issue that will determine whether or not this Latin American space represents our multicultural societies is the degree to which it channels action in a decentralized manner, recognizing the diversity

of regional styles and aesthetics. The current tendency is to concentrate television and other audiovisual media in two or three oligopolies: the 6,000 radio and 550 television stations in Latin America "represent, in reality, 6,550 times the same fare; they compete vigorously to get a piece of the advertising pie, but to get this they all have to have the same kind of programming."[17]

2. *The articulation of public services and private interests.* Precisely because their influence is so great, and because they require huge investments and a high level of efficiency, the new audiovisual technologies should not depend predominantly on the bureaucratic apparatuses of the state. But because they constitute the cultural space where inequalities and asymmetries among societies are most accentuated, they cannot be left unmonitored and exclusively to the dictates of competition in international markets. Once the euphoria of the fall of the Berlin Wall subsided, and the complications this brought to Europe were discerned, thinkers such as Alain Touraine explained that the market might be good for demolishing the "centralized, clientliest or totalitarian state," but not for providing a principle for the construction or management of social life." New questions arise: "How can the state be made to intervene without falling into the trap of defending inward-looking national traditions?" How is it possible to combine support "for creation and the survival of enterprises capable of competing in the market" with "policies for patronage and indirect support for cultural institutions, schools, museums, universities, and associations"?[18]

Other authors, from Jürgen Habermas to Dominique Wolton, insist on the need to give greater depth to the "construction of a European public space" that provides for the combined administration of the public and the private—expanding in proportion to the multiplication of translated books, and film and TV coproductions (e.g., the Franco-German channel Arte)—and the opening of daily columns in national newspapers to foreign writers. One challenge yet to be met is the broadening of intercommunications in high culture so that they also include a public space for popular sectors. This broadening is especially needed in media such as television that are more disposed to celebrate their national sports or to disseminate "quaint" views of other societies than to provide historical references and significant intercultural confrontations.

I see in these European polemics an attempt to ensure that the neoliberal paradigm does not become a self-fulfilling prophecy. They also exemplify the search for a path that does not confuse the inevitability

of the globalization of economy and culture with U.S. hegemony. We too, on this side of the Atlantic, can benefit from this distinction. We too must recalibrate the balance of public and private on a scale larger than that of the nation by creating a Latin American culture of democratic citizenship and a Latin American space for communications. This requires that states, international organizations such as UNESCO, OAS, and others, nonmonopolistic business enterprises, and NGOs foment transnational coproductions and distribution programs. Furthermore, the continental range of these initiatives must be buttressed by national laws that establish minimum screen time in movie theaters and on television, not only for the cinema of each country, as in the past, but for a continental Latin American production, more in keeping with the European model, which has a realistic vision.

3. *The need to reposition each culture industry—film, television, video—within a multimedia policy* that also includes advertising and other commercial by-products of mass symbolic practices. Currently, the European and U.S. film industries are sustained through a combination of exhibition in movie theaters and other venues such as national and foreign television, cable and satellite broadcasts, and video. In Italy, France, and Spain the crisis generated by low movie-house attendance for local film production is mitigated by television broadcasts, which comprise up to 90 percent of financing. In the United States, two hours and forty minutes of advertising are enough to finance one hour of a series. In France, it takes ten hours of advertising to raise that amount. In Mexico, on the other hand, private television can show a film as many times as it wants over a year and a half for only twenty thousand dollars, even though the first minute of advertising during the transmission of the film earns the channel two hundred thousand dollars. We know it is not easy to balance public and artistic interests with the tendency to seek easy profits among audiovisual entrepreneurs. For example, an Argentine initiative to tax videos and films transmitted on television in order to subsidize and therefore help reinvigorate the film industry was denounced by the channels and video club owners. In order to change this situation, it is indispensable for Latin American states to take on the public interest and regulate entrepreneurial activity.

December 1994. At the end of the year, presidential and parliamentary elections were held in several Latin American countries with the largest audiovisual industries: Venezuela, Colombia, Mexico, and Brazil. Argentina held a constitutional assembly in 1994 and scheduled its presidential election for 1995. There is no reason to assume that the governments that privatized radio stations and television channels in recent years, and that—with the exception of Mexico—tore down the infrastructure that supported cinema, are going to recognize the disastrous consequences of neoliberal deregulation and absolute commercialization of audiovisual space for national cultural production. Most of the opposition parties also seem unconcerned that we will produce fewer films and books, fewer cultural television programs, or that our video clubs have become the branch stores of Hollywood. Will the integration projects and free-trade agreements being negotiated throughout America help reactivate the culture industries? We can only imagine that this will be possible if they reanimate regulation policies and publicly financed promotion of Latin American culture. These questions will only enter electoral agendas and international negotiations if there is mobilization by artists, independent producers, and some form of organization on the part of cultural consumers, say, moviegoers and television viewers. That such organization does not exist in Latin America is one of the most alarming symptoms of our lack of protection as spectators. Is it still possible for us to produce, create, and choose as citizens? Or will we become complacent with the modicum of liberty that channel surfing affords us?