

# Transformations in the Map

## Identities and Culture Industries

by

**Jesús Martín-Barbero**

*Translated by Zilkia Janer*

Until a few years ago, to think about culture was to survey a clear map without creases: anthropology took care of *primitive* cultures, and sociology was in charge of the *modern* ones. This implied two opposed ideas about culture. For anthropologists *culture is everything*, since in the primordial magma that primitives inhabit an ax is as much culture as myths are, and dens are culture as much as kinship and the inventory of medicinal plants or ritual dances are. For sociologists, in contrast, *culture is only* a special type of activities and objects, products and practices, almost all belonging to the canon of arts and letters. In the late modernity that we now inhabit, the separation that established that dual idea of culture is blurred in part by the increasing communicative specialization of culture, now “organized in a system of machines which produce symbolic goods that are transmitted to its consuming publics” (Brunner, 1992: 21): that is what schools do to their students, the press to its readers, television to its audiences, and the church to its faithful. But at the same time culture is experiencing another radically opposed movement, one of *anthropologization*, whereby the whole of social life becomes—*is transformed into*—culture. As if the unstoppable machine of modernizing rationalization, which knows only how to separate and specialize, were spinning in circles, culture escapes all compartmentalization, irrigating life completely. Today art and health, work and violence are the subject/object of culture, and we have political culture and drug-dealing culture, organizational culture and urban culture, youth, gender, professional, audiovisual, scientific, technological culture, and so on. The articulation of this dual movement is found today in the hegemony of a *communicational reason* that—confronted by the dialogical consensus that, according to Habermas, nourishes “communicative reason”—is burdened with the discursive opacity and the political

Jesús Martín-Barbero is coordinator of the Cultural Studies Program of the Center for Social Studies of the National University of Colombia. He is the author of *Communication, Culture, and Hegemony* (1993). Zilkia Janer is an assistant professor of Hispanic studies at Connecticut College. Her current project is U.S. Latino autobiography and the construction of transnational identities.

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ambiguity introduced by technological and mercantile mediation and whose devices—the fragmentation that dislocates and decenters, the flow that globalizes and compresses, the connection that dematerializes and hybridizes—implement the *turning of society into a market*. In that movement are now inscribed certain cultural and communicational industries transformed into the most efficient engine for the disengagement and incorporation of ethnic, national, or local cultures into the space-time of the world market and global technologies.

Thus to think about *cultural industries* is not to be confused with a return to the initial meaning given to that concept by the Frankfurt School: the de-sublimated “fall of art into culture” and the reduction of culture to a commodity (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1971). That would prevent us from recognizing the contradictions that dynamize the cultural complexity of end-of-the-century society. Neither is industry opposed to art, as the existence of cinema has amply demonstrated, nor does standardization imply the total annulment of innovation, of creative tension, as E. Morin (1962) proved some time ago. Nevertheless, in the ongoing operationalization of the concept—which made possible its pluralization by UNESCO in the late 1970s (UNESCO, 1982)—there are persistent remnants of the erudite opposition between masses and culture that manifest themselves in the majority of cultural politics limited by contentism—culture reduced to the noble content of the mass media—and the diffusionism of an instrument for cultural propagation or publication and therefore incapable of assuming the heterogeneity of cultural production in our societies and the structural importance of cultural industries in placing our peoples in communication. For this we need to think of cultural industries relieved of the “weight of causal gravity,” that of their “chain remission to totalities” (Piccini, 1988), in order to conceive them more as places of condensation or interaction of multiple cultural webs, as cross-roads of different areas of social production, made up of complex devices that are not merely technological, mercantile, or political and in which affiliations weigh less than alliances, heavy machines of fabrication less than sinuous trajectories of circulation, and both appropriation stratagems and the logic of property should be taken into account.

What the cultural industries are creating today is a complex *reorganization of hegemony* (Martín-Barbero, 1997), and it requires that we conceive of them as key devices for the construction of collective identities, that is, the differentiation and recognition of subjects who make up diverse social groups. Breaking the circle that goes from identity conceived as separation or exclusionary withdrawal to its negation by integration into the calamity of homogenization, contemporary reflection proposes identity as *a construction that is narrated*. What this new way of thinking about identity means is

the crisis of *monoidentities* and the emergence of multiculturalisms that overflow at top and bottom both ethnicity and nationality. Economic and technological globalization reduces the importance of territoriality, devaluing the traditional referents of identity. Contradictorily and complementarily, local and regional cultures are constantly revalued, constantly demanding greater self-determination—the right to count in political and economic decisions and to create their own images. The contemporary “discontent with nationality” responds to dynamics of the economy and the world culture that mobilize not only the heterogeneity of groups and their readaptation to the pressures of the global but also the coexistence of very diverse codes within a single group, shaking the experience of identity that we have had up to now.

### **IDENTITIES: BETWEEN MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY AND COMMUNICATIONAL GLOBALIZATION**

To the movement of nationalities and liberation of colonized peoples were added movements of women and sexual minorities, and also of ethnicities, since the increasing economic globalization awakened forces and forms of identity increasingly profound, less social and more cultural, related to language, to relationships with the body, and to memory. There is a complete change of perspective: it was considered that the modern world was unified while traditional society was fragmented; today, to the contrary, modernity seems to take us from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous in thought and cult, in family and sex life, in diet or clothing.

—Alain Touraine

### **DECENTERINGS OF THE NATIONAL AND RECONFIGURATIONS OF IDENTITY**

Until not many years ago the cultural map of our countries was that of thousands of culturally homogeneous communities—strongly homogeneous but isolated, dispersed, almost not in communication with one another and very weakly linked to the nation. Today the map is different: Latin America is experiencing a displacement of population from the country to the city that is not merely quantitative—70 percent of those who lived in the countryside 40 years ago are now in the cities—but an indication of the appearance of a heterogeneous urban cultural fabric that is densely multicultural—a heterogeneity of ways of living and thinking, of structures of feeling and narrating—but very strongly communicated. This is a multiculturalism that defies our notions of culture, nation, and city—frames of reference and comprehension built on a foundation of clear identities, strong roots, and sharp boundaries. Our cities

today are the ambiguous and opaque setting of something not representable either from the exclusionary and excluded difference of the autochthonous-ethnic or from the unifying and dissolving inclusion of the modern. We are facing a change in the content of our “ways of being together” (Maffesoli, 1990: 133 ff.), that is, of experiencing belonging to a territory and of living an identity.

But multiculturalism in Latin America, both in discourse and in social experience, mobilizes old and new contradictions. As the Chilean N. Lechner (1990: 99) asserts,

the history of Latin America could be narrated as a continuous and reciprocal occupation of territory. There is no stable demarcation recognized by everyone. No physical frontier and no social limit grant security. In this way is born and internalized, from generation to generation, an ancestral fear of the invader, of the other, of the different, whether coming from the top or from below.

This fear is still expressed in the tendency for politicians to perceive difference as disintegration and rupture of order and for intellectuals to see it as a source of contamination and deformation of cultural purities. Authoritarianism in our countries, then, would not be a perverse tendency of their militaries or politicians but a response to the precariousness of the social order, the weakness of civil society, and the complexity of miscegenations that they contain, making the state the figure that counterbalances societal weaknesses and the forces of dispersion. This has meant the permanent substitution of the state for the people and its taking the leading role to the detriment of civil society (Flifisch et al., 1988). The countries of Latin America have a long experience of the inversion of meaning through which national identity is put at the service of the chauvinism of a state that, instead of articulating cultural differences, has subordinated them to centralism and destroyed them. Until very recently the idea of the national was, on the right as well as on the left, incompatible with *difference*: the people was one and indivisible, society a subject without textures or internal articulations, and political and cultural debate “shifted between national essences and class identities” (Sábato, 1988).

It is this equivalence between identity and nation that the multiculturalism of contemporary Latin American society explodes. On one side, globalization is reducing the importance of the territories and the founding events that essentialized the nation, and on the other the revaluation of the local is redefining the very idea of the nation. Seen from the world culture, the national

seems provincial and burdened with statist and paternalist vestiges. Seen from the diversity of local cultures, the national equals centralist homogenization and officialist rigidity. Thus it is the idea as well as the social experience of *identity* that overflows the Manichaeian frames of an anthropology of the autochthonous-traditional and a sociology of the universal-modern. Identity, then, cannot continue to be thought of as an expression of a single homogeneous, perfectly distinguishable and coherent culture. The monolingualism and uniterritoriality that the first modernization recovered from the colony hid the dense multiculturalism that makes up the Latin American and the arbitrariness of the demarcations that traced the boundaries of the national. Today our identities—including indigenous ones—are increasingly multilingual and transterritorial and are constituted not only of the difference of separately developed cultures but of the various groups' unequal appropriations and combinations of elements from other societies and from their own.

This returns us to the multiculturalism of the city, where much more than in the state new identities are formed from national imaginaries, local traditions, and transnational flows of information and where new forms of representation and political participation, that is, new modalities of citizenship, are configured. Thus the boundaries between positions today are not only blurred but mobile, moving from one field to another and displacing, confounding, and compounding the meanings of cultural identities—ethnicities, races, genders—and of ideological and political positions. This should not be read either optimistically, as the disappearance of boundaries and the emergence (at last!) of a universal community, or catastrophically, as the “liberation of differences” that will destroy the social fabric—the elementary forms of social coexistence. As J. Keane (1995) has pointed out, there is already an *international public sphere* that mobilizes forms of *world citizenship*, as is demonstrated by international organizations in defense of human rights and the nongovernmental organizations in every country mediate between the international and the local. But there are also fundamentalisms that, disguised as policies that modernize the economy or as labor rights of natives versus immigrants, reinforce social and cultural exclusion—and let us not forget the perversions of the excluded communities and minorities that entrench themselves (Hughes, 1994: 95 ff.)—from New York to Paris, passing through the Colombian Pacific coast—in a perverse reconversion of racism. The challenge raised by the complexity of the imbrications between frontiers and the mediations that secretly link the figures and movements of identity can, I think, be captured by the image/metaphor of the *palimpsest*: the referents and

meaning, the territories and discourses of identity today have the fragile texture of a palimpsest, *a text in which an erased past emerges tenaciously, although blurred, between the lines that write the present.*

From this perspective, *difference* in Latin America has ceased to mean the search for an authenticity in which a form of being is conserved in its original purity to become the investigation of the deviant and decentered form of our inclusion in and appropriation of modernity: a form of difference that cannot be digested or expelled, an alterity that resists from within the modernity-imposed universality project itself. To this dual task are contributing sociologists and anthropologists who have placed on the agenda for analysis the double *decentering* suffered by modernity in Latin America: its having less to do with erudite doctrines and lettered aesthetics than with the massification of schooling and the expansion of the cultural industries and therefore with the formation of a cultural market in which the sources of cultural production, instead of the dynamic of communities or the authority of the church, are the logic of industry and specialized apparatuses that *replace* the traditional ways of life with lifestyles formed by publicity and consumption, secularize and internationalize symbolic worlds, and segment the people into publics constructed by the market.

At the same time, the modern differentiation and autonomization of culture suffers a second decentering: such autonomy is produced in Latin America when the state can no longer order or mobilize the cultural field, having to limit itself to securing the freedom of its actors and the access opportunities of diverse social groups while leaving the coordination and dynamization of that field to the market, and when cultural experiences have ceased to correspond precisely to the spheres and repertoires of ethnic groups or social classes. Still heavily laden with premodern components, modernity becomes the collective experience of Latin American majorities because of social and perceptual dislocations of a clearly postmodern imprint, effecting strong displacements of the compartments and exclusions that modernity has instituted in the course of more than a century, that is, generating hybridizations between the popular and the cultured and between both and the mass, between vanguard and kitsch, between the autochthonous and the foreign—all of them categories and demarcations that are no longer capable of accounting for the ambiguous and complex movement that dynamizes the cultural world in societies in which (García Canclini, 1990: 18)

modernity relocates art and folklore, academic knowledge and industrialized culture under relatively similar conditions. The work of the artist and that of the craftsman approach each other when each experiences that the specific symbolic order that nourished it is being redefined by the market and can less and

less avoid modern information and iconographies, the disenchantment of their self-centered worlds, and the reenchantment favored by the spectacle of the media.

#### DISLOCATIONS OF POPULAR AND URBAN CULTURES

There was a time when we believed we knew what we were talking about with regard to the rural and the urban, since the urban was *the contrary of the rural*. This dichotomy is being dissolved not only in the discourse of analysis but also in social experience itself by deterritorialization and hybridization. *The urban* is no longer identified only with what pertains to the city (Monguin, 1995: 25 ff.) but also with *what integrates us into the global* and permeates with more or less intensity the peasant world—especially but not only by the action of the mass media—so that even the more strongly local cultures are undergoing changes that affect the way of experiencing belonging to a territory and of living an identity. We are dealing with the same movements that are displacing the old frontiers between traditional and modern, popular and mass. These changes and movements are crucial today in two spheres: popular cultures and youth cultures.

The *popular world* is inserted in the urban dynamic through the transformations of working life, the identification of progress with public services, the cultural maladjustments produced by technological development, the merging of the informative discourses of the media with the means of communication that, like sayings, gossip, or jokes, refer to the persistence of an oral culture but in a *secondary orality* (Ong, 1987: 130 ff.) that is itself already crossed by formats of radio and soap opera. We face a cultural map very different from the one to which we were accustomed by the Manichaean rhetoric of developmentalism. It is a map made up of discontinuities and wrong timings, of secret approximations and exchanges between modernity and tradition, between urban country and rural country. It is a map with many populations halfway between peasant village and urban neighborhood, with *villages* where social relations no longer have the stability or elemental nature of the rural and with *neighborhoods* in which feudal authoritarianisms survive alongside the horizontality woven into urban illegality and informality. These are villages that remain centered on religion while at the same time experiencing changes that affect not only the world of labor and housing but also the world of subjectivity, affectivity, and sensuality. For their part, the suburbs—our enormous squatter neighborhoods, favelas, or *callampas*—have become a strategic place for *cultural recycling*: for the formation of a *culture of illegalities* in which delinquent complicity, neighborly solidarity, and die-hard loyalties intermix, a fabric of exchanges and exclusions that

speak to the moral transactions without which it is impossible to survive in the city, about the mix between the violence that is suffered and the violence of resistance, about the ethnic sonorities and the urban rhythms of rock or rap (Giraldo and López, 1991: 260):

The marginalized that inhabits the large urban centers of Colombia and that in certain cities has taken on the figure of the hit man is not only the expression of backwardness, poverty, and unemployment, the absence of state action in its place of residence, and a culture that sinks its roots in Catholic religion and political violence. It is also, perhaps more predominantly, the reflection of hedonism and consumption, the culture of the image and drug addiction, in a word, of the colonization of the world of life by modernity.

Concerning the world of urban youth—which, as mentioned before, is no longer identified with the city—changes point toward a profound reorganization of socialization models: neither do parents any longer constitute the pattern for behavior nor is school the only legitimate space of learning or the book the axis that articulates culture. As was already pioneeringly stated by Margaret Mead in the early 1970s, “Our thought still ties us to the past; born and raised before the electronic revolution, the majority of us do not understand what it means. The young of the new generation, in contrast, are like members of the first generation born in a new country” (Mead, 1971: 105-106). Young people today are experiencing the emergence of new sensibilities endowed with a special empathy with technological culture, which ranges from the information absorbed by the adolescent through his relationship with television to the capacity to learn his way around the complexity of information webs. In contrast to the way in which a great many adults resent and resist that new culture, which devalues and makes obsolete much of their knowledge and skill and which they hold responsible for the decay of intellectual and moral values that society suffers today, young people are experiencing a *cognitive empathy* arising from a great facility for relating to audiovisual and information technology and from an *expressive complicity* with their narratives and images, their sonorities, fragmentations, and speeds, in which they find their language and rhythm. Whereas lettered cultures are associated with language and territory, electronic, audiovisual, and musical cultures go beyond this, producing new *communities* that respond to new ways of *being together*, of perceiving and narrating identity. We are facing new, less long-term identities, more precarious but also more flexible, capable of amalgamating ingredients from very diverse cultural universes. Their best expression is perhaps *Spanish rock*, a language in which the deeper generation gap and some of the more content-related transformations of political representation are expressed. It is a rock that has been transforming itself into

a vehicle of a consciousness of social disintegration, the daily presence of death on the streets, labor deadlock, moral uneasiness, and the exasperation of aggressiveness and the macabre (Cruz Kronfly, 1994: 60):

In our popular neighborhoods we have whole groups of young people in whose heads there is room for magic and witchcraft and for Christian guilt and pious intolerance, for messianism and narrow and rigid dogma and for utopian dreams of equality and liberty, indisputable and legitimate, for feelings of emptiness, absence of totalizing ideologies, fragmentations of life, and the tyranny of the fleeting image, and for musical sound as the only background language.

### **LATIN AMERICAN INTEGRATION: CULTURAL MATRIXES AND INDUSTRIAL FORMATS**

A contradictory and challenging reality is that of a mass society which, in the perverse logic of a savage capitalism, makes the new out of the old and remakes the old with the new, making coexist and merge, in a paradoxically natural way, the sophistication of the mass communication media with masses of feelings coming from the most traditionally popular culture.

—Marlyse Meyer

Suspended between the discourses of the state and the logic of the market, the meaning of the acronyms that in multiple and compulsive ways speak of the Latin American desire for integration is obscured and fragmented, because the integration of Latin American countries today is inevitably held to be its integration into a world economy governed by the purest and most rigid logic of capitalist competitiveness. This is fracturing regional solidarity, especially by the *exclusionary incorporation* modalities of subregional groups (the Free Trade Agreement, MERCOSUR) into macrogroups of the North and Europe. The technological revolution, in turn, raises clear integration demands while making the national space an increasingly insufficient framework for taking advantage of or being protected from it (Shutz, 1980), and at the same time reinforcing and intensifying the inequality of the exchange (Castells and Laserna, 1989). It is in terms of globalized integration that the governments of our countries justify the enormous social costs of “opening up”—the technoeconomic modernization that once again threatens to be passed off as the sociocultural project of modernity in our countries. Thus if there is a powerful integration movement—understood as the overcoming of barriers and dissolution of boundaries—it is the one that is handled by the cultural industries of the mass media and information technologies. But at the same time

these industries and technologies themselves are the ones that most strongly accelerate the integration of our peoples and the heterogeneity of their cultures into the *indifference* of the market. The cultural survival of our collective identities depends today on the possibilities of understanding, without provoking old Manichaeisms and integrisms, and politically facing the contradictions mobilized by that paradox.

#### ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND CULTURAL BLURRING

Contrary to the process that until the 1970s was called *imperialism*, the globalization of the economy redefines center/periphery relations: what "globalization" means is no longer *invasions* but transformations produced from and within the national and even the local sphere. It is from within each country that not only economies but cultures are being *globalized* (Ortiz, 1994: 21 ff.). What is at stake is not a greater diffusion of products but the rearticulation of relations between countries through a decentralization that concentrates economic power and a dislocation that hybridizes cultures.

In Latin America, economic globalization is perceived in terms of two scenarios: that of the *national opening* demanded by the hegemonic neoliberal model and that of the *regional integration* whereby our countries seek competitive incorporation into the new world market. Both make the "market society" an entry requirement for the "information society." The stage of economic opening is characterized by the social and political disintegration of the national sphere, because the rationality of neoliberal modernization substitutes for social emancipation projects the logic of a competitiveness whose rules are determined not by the state but by the market transformed into an organizing principle of society. How are we to build democracy in countries where social polarization is increasing, placing 40 percent of the population below the poverty level? What viability can national projects have when transnational financial entities substitute for states in development planning? The increase in inequality atomizes society, destroying political and cultural cohesion mechanisms, and, since symbolic representations are worn out, "we do not manage to form an image of the country we want, and thus politics does not manage to establish the direction of ongoing changes" (Lechner, 1987: 253).

The stage of Latin American regional integration will perhaps be better understood in contrast with the European one, because although both respond to the challenges posed by globalization, the contradictions they mobilize are very different. The European Union, in spite of the huge diversity of languages and history that divides the countries involved and even though it is still more an economic than a political fact, tends nevertheless to create

certain conditions of social equality and to strengthen cultural exchange between and within its countries. In Latin America, on the contrary, even though it is closely united by language and long and dense traditions, economic integration is causing demands for competitiveness to prevail over those for regional cooperation, and this translates into accelerated income concentration with a reduction of social expenditures and a deterioration of the public scene. And while Europe gives priority to the issue of *nations without states*, the identities diluted or devalued in the process of integration of national states, which translates into a certain public strengthening of its audiovisual production capacity (Schlesinger, 1990), in Latin America the integration of its audiovisual production, which serves private interests almost exclusively, is producing an increasing neutralization and blurring of regional and local identities (Martín-Barbero, 1992). In the "lost decade" of the 1980s one of the few industries developed in Latin America was communications: the number of television stations increased from 205 in 1970 to 1,459 in 1988, Brazil and Mexico acquired their own satellite radio and television, global links by satellite, information webs, parabolic antennas, and cable TV were implemented, and regional television channels were established (Reyes Mata, 1988). But all this growth followed the movement of the market, with almost no state intervention and, moreover, undermining the meaning of and possibility for such intervention—that is, leaving public service without a real basis and increasing monopolistic concentrations.

While during the times of populist modernization, the 1930s and the 1950s, the communication industries contributed to the gestation of a powerful Latin American imaginary made up of cinematographic (María Félix, Cantinflas) and musical (tango, bolero, ranchera) symbols, in the past few years the cultural industries of cinema, radio, and television have been experiencing a paradoxical situation: the entry of their cultural production into the global market has been accompanied by a clear weakening of its capacity for cultural *differentiation*. The presence of companies like the Mexican Televisa or the Brazilian Rede Globo in the global audiovisual area is achieved at the cost of modeling the images of those peoples to cater to publics that are increasingly neutral and undifferentiated. What orients such changes is the demands of the model imposed by globalization, demands that are apparent in the privatizing rearrangement of national television systems in Europe and in the cultural contradictions inherent in Southeast Asia's economic opening (Richeri, 1992). The expansion of the number of channels, the diversification and growth of cable television, and satellite connections have increased programming time, driving an intense demand for programs that even further open the market to Latin American television production and creating small gaps in North American television hegemony and in the division of the world

between a North identified with producing countries and a South identified with exclusively consuming countries. But these developments also mean the triumph of the *market experience* in making cultural difference profitable, renovating worn-out narratives and linking them to other sensibilities whose vitality is resemanticized in the fraudulent offer of a *culture of indifference*. This is the other side of the cultural fragmentation produced by globalization.

The Latin American contradictions that sustain its globalized integration flow decisively into the question of the importance of the audiovisual industries in these processes. These industries play on the strategic ground of *the images these peoples form of themselves and by which they make themselves recognizable to others*. What is the meaning, from this perspective, of the huge and dispersed growth of television channels and of programming hours offered or the fact that in Latin America there are more video recorders per inhabitant than in Belgium or Italy if this is accompanied by a reduction in the percentage of endogenous production and an increasing homogenization of what is imported? Here cinema and soap operas are showing the course marked out by communicational globalization.

Cinema, caught between the abandonment of state support for producing companies, which has caused annual production to decline to less than half in countries with more tradition such as Mexico or Brazil, and the decrease in audiences, for example, from 123 to 61 million in the 1980s in Mexico and from 45 to 22 million in Argentina, is trying to choose between a commercial proposal that is profitable only to the extent to which it can escape the national sphere and a cultural proposal that is viable only to the extent to which it is capable of inserting local themes into the sensibility and aesthetic of world culture (Getino, 1989). This forces cinema to subordinate itself to video both for circulation technology and for domestic consumption: already in 1990 there were in Latin America 10 million video cassette recorders, 12,000 rental video clubs, and 340 million tapes rented annually (Getino, 1993). In Mexico City, while there is one movie theater per 62,800 habitants, there is a video club for every 4,500. This disproves the pessimistic predictions of the approaching demise of the cinema while at the same time pointing to some worrisome tendencies: almost 80 percent of the tapes offered in the video clubs are North American cinema; European cinema, including the Spanish, does not amount to 10 percent, nor does Mexican cinema, even in the presumably most nationalist country in Latin America (García Canclini, 1994). But where the logics of globalization become most explicit is in television, and especially, because of its importance in the market and because of the role it plays in the cultural recognition of these peoples, in the strategic enclave of Latin American audiovisual production that is soap opera.

#### AVATARS OF INDUSTRIALIZED IDENTITIES

Up to the mid-1970s, North American television series devastatingly dominated fiction programming on Latin American television channels. This means, on the one hand, that the average number of shows imported from the United States—mostly comedies and melodramatic or police series—occupied close to 40 percent of programming (Varis, 1973) and, on the other hand, that those shows occupied prime time, at night during the week as well as all day on weekends. At the end of the 1970s the situation started to change, and during the 1980s national production grew and began to compete with North American series for prime times. Very quickly, national soap operas in various countries—Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina—and in other countries Brazilian, Mexican, or Venezuelan soap operas completely displaced North American production (Schneider-Madan, 1992). From then on until the early 1990s, not only in the principal exporting countries of Brazil, Mexico, and Venezuela but also in Argentina, Chile, and Peru, soap opera occupied a dominant position in national television production capability (Portales, 1987; Ortiz et al., 1985; González, 1991; Coccato, 1985), that is, in the consolidation of television industry, the modernization of its processes and infrastructures, technical as well as financial, and the specialization of its resources: scriptwriters, directors, cameramen, sound technicians, set designers, editors. Soap opera production has also meant an appropriation of the genre by each country: its *nationalization*. Granted that the soap opera genre involves rigid stereotypes in its dramatic scheme and strong constraints in its visual grammar, reinforced by the standardized logic of the global television market, each country has made soap opera *a particular area of intersections between television and other cultural fields* such as literature, cinema, and theater. Most countries started by copying and some even importing scripts in the same way as they had earlier with radio soap operas, when through Colgate Palmolive scripts were imported from Cuba or Argentina. Dependence on the radio format and the conception of the image as a mere illustration of a spoken drama gradually declined as television became industrialized and human production teams mastered the new medium—that is, appropriated its expressive possibilities. Thus soap opera became a conflictive but fertile field of *political-cultural redefinitions*: while in countries like Brazil important theater actors, movie directors, and prestigious left-wing writers were incorporated into the production of soap operas, in other countries television in general and soap opera in particular were rejected by artists and writers as a dangerous trap and an extremely degrading field. Gradually, nevertheless, the crisis of cinema on the one hand and the over-coming of ideological extremisms on the other have brought into television,

above all through the soap opera, many artists, writers, and actors who contribute themes and styles that reflect key dimensions of national life and cultures.

In its moment of greatest creativity, Latin American soap opera attested to the internal dynamics of a plural cultural identity. But it is exactly this narrative heterogeneity, revealing Latin America's cultural diversity visible that globalization is progressively reducing. Paradoxically, soap opera's success, which was its springboard to internationalization and which corresponded to an activation and recognition of things Latin American in the region's countries, also marks the beginning of a uniformization of format that neutralizes the signs of a plural identity. In recent years the opening of the global market to Latin American soap operas has also incorporated Colombian and Argentine production, demonstrating the degree of development achieved by national television companies, but at the cost of an industrialization of melodrama that gradually erases the marks of the author and the signs of identity previously achieved. Thus the question is: Is it true that the globalization of markets means the dissolution of every true difference or its reduction to an inventory of frozen folklorisms? Or is not the market itself already reclaiming rigorous processes of experimentation and innovation that allow it to introduce into the languages of a globalized sensibility the diversity of narratives, gestures, and imaginaries in which the true richness of our peoples is expressed? This is what has been happening in Colombia in the past few years with the soap opera *Café* (Coffee), which, in an aesthetically innovative narrative, traces the ties that bind coffee haciendas with the New York stock exchange and its artisanal harvesting techniques with the technified production and marketing of its varieties, making evident the autonomy achieved by women, the displacements of upward as well as downward social mobility, the legitimization of divorce, etc., and whose success in Latin America has been huge. Or with series that, like *Señora Isabel*, tell of the courage of a housewife who after 20 years of marriage feels capable of demanding freedom and passion from life, unveiling the complicities of machismo with end-of-the-century moralism, and of which Mexico and Venezuela have made "their own" versions.

Even though it is burdened with heavy narrative schematicisms and is an accomplice to mystifying ideological inertias, soap opera is nevertheless part of the modern re-creation devices of the Latin American imaginary. This is an imaginary that refers, on the one hand, to the technoperceptive transformations that allow the majorities a peculiar interpenetration, or complicity, of their cultural orality with electronic visibility (Martín-Barbero, 1992; 1996) providing a strategic space for *image industries* in the processes of identity formation and, on the other hand, to the long experience of the market, and

especially of the audiovisual industries, of grasping the ritualized dimensions of daily life and connecting with new popular sensibilities to revitalize exhausted narratives.

### TOWARD A LATIN AMERICAN AUDIOVISUAL SPACE

Between fundamentalist entrenchment and commodified homogenization there is space to study and discuss what can be done through cultural policies so that economic alliances will make not only capital but cultures circulate freely. "Latin American" is not a destiny revealed by territory or blood: it has often been a frustrated project; today it is a task that is relatively open and problematically possible.

—N. García Canclini

The audiovisual scene of the 1990s in Latin America is doubly burdened with contradictions. Some of these originate in the convergence of accelerated technological change and the deregulation of markets, which at once devalue the public sphere and displace the forms of property. Others are generated by the reconfiguration of the "social identity" of the media, especially television and computers, which are affected by movements producing new forms of citizenship and new spaces in the public sphere. Latin American cultural integration is definitely experiencing the ambiguities and dynamics of this stage. Nevertheless, the participation of the audiovisual industries in subregional integration agreements (the Free Trade Agreement and MERCOSUR) is still entirely marginal "the object of annexes or parallel agreements" (Galpering, n.d.).

Let us start by clearing up this paradox. It is not any lack of economic importance that produces this marginalization, as the audiovisual industries—cinema, radio, disks, television (which includes satellites, parabolics, cable), telematics, video, video games—are growing as is no other market area (Getino, 1990; 1996; *Industria audiovisual*, 1994; Entel et al., n.d.). It has more to do with the complexity of the relations that the audiovisual market creates between economy and culture, between the deceptive zeal of businessmen regarding "the" identity of the national and the heterogeneities mobilized by regionality. As is demonstrated by the debate between the European Union and the United States over "cultural exception" at the last General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)—now OMC—meeting, the production and circulation of cultural industries require a modicum of agreement at the political level. In Latin America this agreement on common cultural policies has up to now been impossible to achieve, primarily because of

the demands and pressures of the neoliberal pattern that has accelerated the privatization of telecommunications and dismantled the few norms that in a way regulated the expansion of property. What we are witnessing now is the formation and reinforcement of powerful multimedia conglomerates that control, at their convenience, in some cases the interested defense of the protection of national cultural production and in other cases the defense of transnational flows.

In the case of Mexico's entry into the Free Trade Agreement between the United States and Canada (Guevara and García Canclini, 1992; García Canclini, 1996; Yúdice, 1996), aside from some limitations related to the percentage of foreign investments in the audiovisual sector and a more "symbolic" than real minimum screen quota, cultural industries are excluded from the agreement. MERCOSUR agreements do not contain cultural industries legislation either. In the considerations of the Asunción Treaty no clear mention is made of culture, and since then there have been several declarations of intentions—at the technical meeting in Brasília in 1992 and the specialized meeting in Buenos Aires in 1995—with regard to an agenda for cultural policies (Recondo, 1995; Achugar and Bustamante, 1996) especially oriented to the standardization of legislation, the protection of patrimony, the formation of information networks, and in general the diffusion of "high culture." This is demonstrated by the Cultural Integration Protocol signed in 1996 and the "MERCOSUR Cultural Seal" that facilitates customs transactions for plastic arts exhibitions, cofinanced publications, fellowships for young artists, and the writers' exchange program. The audiovisual industries do not seem to fit into that "seal," whereas the Clarín Group—a multimedia conglomerate that ranks third in the Latin American audiovisual space, after Redeglobo and Televisa—does. Directly economic objectives—market development, acceleration of capital flows—foreclose the possibility of proposing at least some policies regarding financial concentration and the deepening of the social division between the info-rich and the info-poor.

The other reason for the absence of cultural industries policies from Latin American subregional integration agreements is the predominance of a fundamentalist conception of national identity associated with ethnicity—which, however, as García Canclini (1988) argues, is divorced from the radical pragmatism that governs the inclusion of our countries in the processes of economic and technological globalization—and a conception of culture structurally related to the patrimonial and the "cultured." Concentrated on preserving patrimonies and promoting elite arts, the cultural policies of states have not at all acknowledged the decisive role of the audiovisual industries in the daily culture of the majorities. Major cultural industries, on the contrary, are achieving through the mass media a penetration of personal and family

life, organizing free time by supplying home-delivered entertainment and the strategic management of information. Rooted in a basically preservationist concept of identity and a disarticulation regarding what independent groups and industries (that increasingly dense “third sector”) do, public policies are to a great extent responsible for the unequal segmentation of consumption and the impoverishment of endogenous production. This is so in a moment in which heterogeneity and multiculturalism can no longer be seen as a problem but must be recognized as the basis for renovation and democracy and in which liberalism, while expanding deregulation to the world of culture, is demanding from states and international organisms the *reconstruction of the public sphere*. This cannot be achieved without an agreement between states, major industries, and independent groups—small mediating companies, NGOs, community associations—that helps to protect and develop irreplaceable collective interests.

But if cultural integration faces the obstacles just listed, there are other dynamics that militate toward the integration of the audiovisual scene. In the first place is the development of *new actors and modes of communication*: regional (such as Colombian and Mexican), municipal, and community radio and television stations or popular video production groups that constitute, as argued by Roncagliolo (1996: 53), “a public space in gestation” because they “represent a local upward impulse that seems destined to coexist with the global media. Such coexistence perhaps constitutes the clearest trend in the region’s cultural industries.” Without being among the most advanced in that field, Colombia already has 546 community radio stations and close to 400 experiments in local and community television. All of them are part of informal webs of initiatives that relate local demands to global supply, via parabolic antennas, for example, and whose “social and cultural density” should be taken into account when thinking about the possibilities of regional integration (Rey, 1998).

Another sphere to consider is the gaps and contradictions in the great machines of the multimedia conglomerates. Since I have already talked about soap opera, I will start with the presentation of the Latin American, full of schematisms and deformations but also of polyphonies, that is being conducted by the Latin American subsidiaries of CBS and CNN in countries that often receive very little international information, especially concerning other Latin American countries. The decontextualizations and frivolities that make up much of the information disseminated by these television stations cannot conceal the informative opening and contrasting possibilities that they produce, because in their interweaving of images and words imaginaries are dismantled and remade that go beyond the local to situate us in a particular globalized but Latin American space.

The great rock industries are also experiencing cultural integration movements of some significance. The Latin rock movement breaks with mere youth listening to awaken unsuspected creativities of miscegenation and hybridization: of culture with politics and of transnational aesthetics with the most local sounds and rhythms from Botellita de Jerez (Sherry Bottle) to Maldita Vecindad (Damn Neighborhood), Caifanes or Café Tacuba in Mexico, Charly García, Fito Paez, or Enanitos Verdes (Green Dwarves) and Fabulosos Cadillac (Cadillac Fabulous) in Argentina, to Estados Alterados (Altered States) and Aterciopelados (Velvety) in Colombia. According to one young Colombian researcher (Rueda, 1998),

As affirmation of a space and territory, this rock is at once an aesthetic and a political proposal, one of the “places” where the symbolic unity of Latin America is constructed, as done by Rubén Blades’s salsa, Mercedes Sosa and Cuban Nueva Trova (New Song), a place from which the borders of Latin America are seen and constructed.

That it is not about mere local/national phenomena but about *Latin America* as a specific place of belonging, and enunciation is proved by the existence of the Latin MTV channel, in which, along with musical creativity, audiovisual creativity is apparent in the hybrid, global, and *young* par excellence genre that is the videoclip.

The cinema industry shows changes in both production and consumption not at all foreseeable 10 years ago. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the disappearance of a national cinema then seemed unavoidable: the neoliberal destruction of the state institutions that supported it guaranteed this. Nevertheless, in recent years, with less economic capacity but greater capacity for negotiating with the television industry and even with some multimedia economic conglomerates, such industries are reappearing in Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia. On the other hand, coproductions involving Latin American and European countries are increasingly drawing not only on the financial capital but also on the cinematographic experience of Spain, France, and Italy to incorporate private enterprise into the sustenance of a cinematography that can be enjoyed by everyone without being purely commercial—that is, that conserves some capacity for aesthetic experimentation and cultural expression. But the sphere in which cinema is experiencing most change is in modes of consumption. The rapid closing of movie theaters—to be used as Protestant churches or parking lots—that we saw in the late 1980s and early 1990s was followed by an unexpected phenomenon: the appearance of multitheater complexes that dramatically reduce the number of seats per

theater but multiply the supply of films. And around the same time the composition of the usual cinema audiences also underwent a notable change: younger generations—who devour videoclips on television—seem to be reencountering cinema in its place of origin, public theaters. On the one hand, multitheaters, frequently located in shopping malls and offering renovated visual and auditory infrastructure in addition to security and increased supply, and, on the other hand, the growth of young audiences are breaking down the dominant tendency toward domestic cinema consumption on television or domestic videocassette players. What we are facing now is a profound diversification of cinema audiences, which implies changes in the way of watching movies and in the types of spectators (García Canclini, Holtz, and Mantecón, 1994). All this has reopened the possibility of a demand for “Latin American cinema,” as is demonstrated by the increasing attendance at film festivals and at not a few Mexican, Cuban, or Argentine movies, both those for film buffs and those that are simply considered “good pictures.” The biggest problem for cinema in Latin America is distribution and circulation monopolies. Good Latin American films are not scarce; what is scarce is distribution policies to allow for their circulation. It is absurd that more Latin American films can be seen in San Francisco, Lyon, or Barcelona than in Bogotá, Caracas, or Santiago.

In the same way, the problems and possibilities of a Latin American audiovisual space are being handled by policies capable of taking responsibility for what the media contain of and do with people’s everyday culture and of involving the educational system in the transformation of the school’s relations with the new languages, new knowledges, and new audiovisual and information writings. Such policies must spring from and center not on declarations of intentions but a serious recognition of the problems and a precise analysis of the possibilities. What is needed are policies that are diversified and directed to governments and entrepreneurs of the audiovisual sector, to audiences and social organizations, to professionals in the field and researchers, to international agencies and universities, policies capable of answering questions like those already formulated in the early 1990s at a conference in Mexico City (UNESCO, 1991):

Do we want to preserve and strengthen the human, technological, and cultural resources of the audiovisual space we have been generating for a century? Do we want to sustain and increase the capacity for production of our own images, or do we accept becoming mere transmitters of alien images? Do we try to see ourselves in the sociocultural mirrors constituted by our screens, or do we renounce constructing our identity, our possibility of collective and recognizable being?

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