

Studies in
Latin American
Popular Culture

Volume Fifteen

1996

Special Volume Editor:

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International Standard Serial Number US ISSN 0730-9139

Luso-Brazilian Review

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Editors: Mary L. Daniel Published: 2 / yr.
 Robert M. Levine ISSN: 0024-7413

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On Transculturation: Toward a Political Economy of Culture in the Periphery

Abril Trigo
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The mega-concept of *transculturation* stands as one of the major contributions of Latin American scholars to the field of cultural studies, perhaps only second to dependency theory, the star of sixties and seventies political and social sciences. *Transculturation* was coined circa 1940 by Fernando Ortiz in his now classic *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* [*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*],¹ to capture the complexities of Cuban cultural history and to circumvent the doubly ideological term, *acculturation*. *Acculturation* was overly impregnated by a cultural relativism that, although hypothetically viable in improbable cases of "pure alterity,"² became a mere alibi for referring to "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups," according to the authorized definition from the "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation."³ In the introduction to Ortiz's book, Bronislaw Malinovsky accepts *transculturation* as "an exchange between two cultures, both of them active . . . from which a new reality emerges, transformed and complex." Actually, this definition differs very little from standard *acculturation*, although Malinovsky denounces on etymological grounds the latter's ethnocentric bias, which implies that "the 'uncultured' is to receive the benefits of 'our culture'," a variant for assimilation.⁴ Curiously enough, this usage of *transculturation* is still current in North American cultural psychiatry, ethnopsychology and cross-cultural folklore studies.⁵

* Translated by Christine McIntyre, Wittenberg University.

Ortiz's transculturation does emphasize fusion and synthesis (neoculturation), but it also foregrounds the idea of a transitive process of successive deculturations (or exculturations) and acculturations (or enculturations), characterized by confrontation and struggle, which has allowed for later Marxist dialectical readings.⁶ Nevertheless, Ortizian transculturation stops short of being posited as a dialectic in Hegelian-Marxian terms, while it describes a transitivity and an undecidability which transcend any neocultural synthesis:

There was no more important human factor in the evolution of Cuba than these continuous, radical, contrasting geographic transmigrations, economic and social, of the first settlers, this perennial transitory nature of their objectives, and their unstable life in the land where they were living, in perpetual disharmony with the society from which they drew their living. Men, economies, cultures, ambitions were all foreigners here, provisional, changing, "birds of passage" over the country, at its cost, against its wishes, and without its approval.⁷

This promiscuous dialectic that, according to Antonio Benítez-Rojo, bursts into a proto-postmodern polyphonic chaos, depicts a scenario anticipating Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's Cuban-American "unhousedness" and Homi Bhabha's "unhomeliness," the colonial and post-colonial condition of migrancy and extraterritoriality.⁸

During the 1970's Angel Rama reformulated the concept in *Transculturation narrativa en América Latina* [*Narrative Transculturation in Latin America*] within the framework of dependency theory, injecting it with a continental dimension.⁹ Although Rama applies the term exclusively to literature, after him transculturation became a fundamental tool in the field of Latin American cultural theory, a sort of wild card capable of interweaving anthropological, sociological, political and literary studies from a liberating and anti-imperialist Latin American perspective. It was the most suitable instrument for analyzing and, why not, for developing Latin American modernity, in as much as it "reveals" and induces "resistance to considering one's own traditional culture, which changes under the impact of external forces, as an entirely passive or even inferior entity destined to be lost, without any kind of creative response".¹⁰

Rama opened out the transculturating process into two moments, thus developing the dialectic sketched by Ortiz. During the first moment, modernization, introduced by/through the port cities, impacts the traditional cultures of the countryside, generating a cosmopolitan transculturation under the hegemony of an urban modernizing avant-garde (e.g., Jorge Luis Borges). During the second moment, traditional cultures respond either by acculturating to modernization, or by rigidly resisting it,

in order to later negotiate it, thus producing a transculturated transculturation under the hegemony of regional cultural matrices (e.g., José María Arguedas). Consequently, if modernizing transculturation

is the norm for the whole continent, in what we would call the cosmopolitan line as well as in what we specifically designate as transculturated, it is in the latter that we understand that a superior feat has been accomplished, and which consists in giving historical continuity to the cultural forms profoundly elaborated by social masses, adapting them, with only a minor loss of identity, to the new conditions established by the international framework of the hour.¹¹

Transculturated or regional transculturation, according to Rama, theoretically conceives and makes politically attainable an endogenous modernity without "simply ceding to the external modernizing impact":¹² thus accomplishing the sempiternal dream of Latin American (cultural) independence. This model, fostered by dependency theory and suitable for the insurgent Latin Americanism of the '70s, in fact configures, alongside Roberto Fernández Retamar's "calibanism," René Depestre's "cultural marooning," and Edouard Glissant's "métissage," one of the many late versions of the ideologies of *mestizaje* cemented by the populisms of the first half of the twentieth century, in particular José Vasconcelos's "cosmic race" and Gilberto Freyre's "racial democracy."¹³

Despite its constant "versioning," transculturation, as an instrument "to be able to better found the firm criteria for a greater national integration," as Ortiz stated in "Preludios étnicos de la música afrocubana" ["Ethnic preludes to Afrocuban Music"],¹⁴ proves to be irredeemably anachronistic. And not precisely because modernity has been achieved, nor because postmodernity has abolished the (necessity for a) nation-state, but rather due to the limit(ation)s of the dialectics the modernizing transculturators had to apply in order to elude mere phenomenological description or mystificatory functionalism. Dialectic, even in Rama's expert hands, fell infallibly into the tautology of the authentic/spurious binarism, according to which authenticity is irreducible to any effect of transculturation, since "The original in any culture is its very originality, the impossibility of reducing it to any other, no matter how many common bases both cultures share. This creates its difference with the modernizing historical factor."¹⁵

It is Neil Larsen, in *Modernism and Hegemony: A Materialist Critique of Aesthetic Agencies*, who begins the theoretical analysis of what he identifies as "two effectively alternative paradigms of postcolonial oppositional culture: the 'transcultural' and the 'anthropophagous'," whose final aim is to build up a hegemonic national culture.¹⁶ According to Larsen, transculturation "describes the mediatory agency whereby the

Latin-American work of art actively transforms and regrounds the modernism of the metropolis by prompting a synthesis of the metropolis's antirationalism with the pre-rationalization of rural peasant and indigenous tribal cultures.¹⁷ Larsen distinctively captures three nodal points in Rama's transculturated transculturation: its translational intervention upon Occidental modernity, its countermediational agency, and its ideological surrogation for hegemony. Rama admits, though indirectly, that there is no possible mediation except from a position of power when he writes that "Arguedas, in not being a governor, nor a political power, nor a revolution, can not place the process of transculturation on the best path," and so he opts instead for a "reduced," symbolic "model," on the literary plane, where he authorizes himself.¹⁸ Faced with the impossibility of building a hegemonic block, Arguedas' writings fictionalize hegemony and invert the lapidary Sarmientian formula, so that barbarism "poses itself as the actively mediating agency" of modernity, thus promoting a countermediation from/by subaltern cultures.¹⁹ But the problem of who, or what, is to mediate whom is left pending. If, as Larsen maintains in Rulfo's case, the countermediation implements the nation-state's strategy of containment of subaltern cultures, transculturated transculturation would be nothing more than a populist ruse, a symbolic compensation for the endemic crisis of hegemony in Latin American nation-states. Modernizing transculturation, in both its cosmopolitan and transculturated versions, would be "a cultural surrogate for hegemony rather than a hegemonic culture": the ideological manifestation of peripheric modernity.²⁰

Alberto Moreiras, in his article, "Transculturación y pérdida del sentido" ["Transculturation and Loss of Sense"],²¹ re-works transculturation departing from Larsen's main contentions, but while Larsen tested out a Marxian critique of the concept, Moreiras attempts it from a radically post-structuralist stance. Despite their opposite approaches however, they coincide in most of their conclusions. Moreiras begins:

The marginality and backwardness of any colonial society with respect to what is happening in the metropolis leads Latin American culture from its origins to be a culture of translation, or of transculturation. What has been taking centuries to translate is European modernity, in the futile attempt to accede to a modernity of its own.²²

The difficulty a reasoning of this sort presents stems from its polysyllogistic montage, in which the conclusions of syllogism A are the premises of syllogism B and so on successively; moreover, they are arranged as enthymemes, which means that many of their premises are completely elided. This renders a systematic reduction, and hence, falsification of certain premises. One could synthesize the polysyllogism in

the following formula: transculturation = translation => Latin American transculturation = translation of occidental modernity => failure (lack) of Latin American modernity + mourning for the loss of occidental modernity. There are two synecdoches pertinent to our inquiry: the reduction of transculturation to a mechanism of translation, and its identification with cosmopolitan modernization, only one of transculturation's many variants.

Considering the translational fallacy, and from a strictly linguistic point of view, the Spanish term *traducción* does not nowadays carry the meaning of spatial displacement so prominent in English "translation," which thus allows for a connotative duplicity so aptly exploited in postcolonial studies. Although they share similar motional origins (from Latin *traductio*, and *translatio*, respectively, both meaning transferring), *traducción* can only convey the idea of physical movement by means of an etymological deconstruction and a metaphoric reading.

Beyond linguistics, transculturation, doubtless, verifies a translation (both as *traducción* and *traslación*) between two cultures, "so as to form a larger tongue in the course of a survival that changes them both,"²³ bidirectional impact that involves many other procedures, such as appropriations, expropriations, fusions, negotiations and articulations of all sorts. Transculturation is not by any means exhausted in translation, and especially not in a single, one-directional sense, even if it is the translation of a post-Adornian, postmodern original that "announces itself in dissolution." In Moreiras's reading, postmodern translation, a model "inspired by the wholly political desire to translate the loss," does not seek to reproduce the original, but to resist it, to the point that "this concept of resistance should be included in the notion of transculturation."²⁴ In this sense, "contemporary Latin American culture will be determined by the text it translates, understood as a force of domination, since the specific act of production is a reaction to it. But in this same process of translation there is implied a production of surplus not exhausted by the first text."²⁵ This definition, stemming from an analogy between Latin American culture and popular culture as defined by John Fiske, is pertinent in as much as both constitute the subaltern pole in relation to hegemonic culture, but this is not enough to emancipate translation from servitude to the original. A negative servitude, if you wish, since "no longer the original, but rather the original as loss of itself, the post-auratic original" is translated. Following deconstructionist readings of Benjamin, Moreiras collapses "The Task of the Translator" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," two texts which, written in 1923 and 1936 respectively, do not authorize the identification of the post-auratic reproduction with the act of translation, "rarely met with in the

sphere of nonlinguistic life."²⁶ For Benjamin, the task of the translator is to recover "the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself . . . thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel."²⁷ The incomplete restoration of an Ur-language of quasi-mystical resonances is reached through the supplementation of each language's underlying intentions, where true authenticity and originality reside, according to Derrida. Benjamin's yearning for the impossibility of fully translating this true language of truth does not authorize, despite the well-known ambiguity of the text, mourning for the loss of the original, a definitely Adornian (and Kantian) ground for the second fallacy: the characterization of Latin American culture as a supplement to/of the loss of occidental modernity, that is, the equivalence of *cosmopolitan transculturation* with *transculturation tout court*. Moreiras writes:

transculturation laments the loss of the original [occidental modernity] as a metaphysical ground, but also reconciles itself to the loss by internalizing it, absorbing it, incorporating it . . . This double task of mourning is in my opinion one of the essential processes in the Latin American cultural relation with the occidental world.²⁸

This argument yields a negative mystification of the original in its very loss; a mystification which restores "a fetishized relation in the paradoxical presence of an original always unattainable beforehand,"²⁹ and which only through metonymic abuse can be attributed to Benjamin, since whoever is situated from/in the post-auratic cannot truly feel nostalgia for any original. Mourning for the loss of the original is absolutely incompatible with Benjamin's celebration of the distracted use of reproduced/reproducible popular culture by mass consumers in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Only those who pay tribute to the authenticity of the original (its aura) or to its untranslatable *intentio* can mourn for its loss.

Beyond the impossible intervention of a non-auratic mourning, the second fallacy originates in a synecdoche and a metonymy. As I stated previously, the synecdoche consists of attributing to Latin American culture as a whole, traits that, strictly speaking, correspond to Rama's cosmopolitan transculturation; the metonymy lies in translating to literary texts that are not, theoretical models elaborated for the popular, while at the same time disregarding that very vast field. This amputation is of grave consequences, since the sphere of the popular is where a non-auratic transculturation, in which the original is not necessarily occidental modernity but rather premodern or marginal cultures, for instance, takes

place with the greatest efficiency and with no need for postmodern mediations. This disregard for the popular allows Moreiras, in agreement with Larsen, to condemn Latin American culture to "the impossibility of its mere modernity, but also the impossibility of abandoning the project of modernity."³⁰ A double postcolonial bind, indeed.

But the existence of Latin American modernity has already been argued, and convincingly enough, by José Joaquín Brunner, Norbert Lechner and many other social scientists, on the premise that it is no longer sensible to think of a single modernity, but rather of conflicting, overlapping manifestations of the unequal development of capitalism. Latin America has (had) its own modernity, which is, obviously, heteroclitic, heteronomous, and heterogeneous with respect to canonical occidental modernity, both of them equally translational, if you wish, from a true Ur-modernity.³¹ The corollary of failed Latin American modernity, so differently argued by Larsen and Moreiras, reveals however, a common ethnocentrism (a Marxian or postmodern remake of the worn out cliché of Latin American culture as some sort of lack), and a very modern reverence, although negative, for the aura of occidental modernity. In spite of this, Larsen and Moreiras contribute greatly to a further theorization of the problem, to the extent that they propound avoiding any indiscriminate celebration of transculturation as a solely emancipatory tool. Instead, Larsen frames it within a political economy, while Moreiras introduces the key post-structuralist concept of supplement *qua* surplus, as the site or moment of true productivity. Moreover, both of them hint at the problematic of the popular and, most concretely, to the theories of consumption wherein lies, I believe, the key to transculturation at the postmodern crossroads. In effect, use as cultural appropriation is the crux around which diverse interpretations of the popular revolve, from the pure and simple production of pleasure, to recycling, resistance, subversion, style.³² No one captures the nuances of use as consummately as Michel de Certeau, for whom

a rationalized, expansionist, centralized, spectacular and clamorous production is confronted by an entirely different kind of production, called "consumption" and characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation (the result of the circumstances), its poaching, its clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products (where would it place them?) but in an art of using those imposed on it.³³

There are two central concepts here: the molding of use in consumption, and the consecration of a new type of productivity lodged in the daily practice of the possible. This displacement from the productive focus

transforms cultural merchandise into the raw material of the truly productive act embedded in consumption. This is a revolutionary re-focalization which leads to the conclusion, as it re-conceptualizes "popular culture not as the consumption of images, but as a productive process," that "every act of consumption is an act of cultural production, for consumption is always the production of meaning."³⁴ The risk of this celebratory attitude resides in the easy slippage from consumption to consumerism, to the indiscriminate and acritical consumption of the culture industry's products as "raw materials," losing sight of the fact that consumption is a conflictive instance, a moment of struggle where the economic and the cultural necessarily flow together.³⁵ This happens to an otherwise very sophisticated critic like John Fiske, who, in order to preserve the productivity of consumption uncontaminated, resorts to a heuristic breaking-up of the process into two parallel economies: a financial economy which circulates wealth in two subsystems (1 and 2), and a cultural economy (3), which circulates meanings and pleasures:

- | | | | |
|---------------|----------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1) production | program- | distributor | |
| studio- | | | |
| 2) | program- | audience- | advertiser |
| 3) | | audience- | meanings/pleasures- |
| | | | audience |

All the three systems reproduce the structure producer-commodity-consumer, but the commodity in the previous system becomes the producer in the following one, so that

the original commodity (be it a television program or a pair of jeans) is, in the cultural economy, a text, a discursive structure of potential meanings and pleasures . . . In this economy there are no consumers, only circulators of meanings, for meanings are the only elements in the process that can be neither commodified nor consumed.³⁶

What began as a methodological distinction culminates in an ideological mystification, in as much as the cultural economy is transformed into a watertight compartment totally autonomous from capitalist economy: an autarchic cultural solipsism. The consequence of this line of analysis is less the fomentation of use as productive labor in consumption, than an oblique celebration of consumption per se. The solution is not to be found in an antiseptic compartmentalization of the cultural and the economic spheres, but in exactly the opposite. Since under transnational capitalism there is no possible cultural product outside the market economy, "an integral analysis of consumption, understood as the whole of social

processes of appropriation of products," is necessary.³⁷ In a word, consumption must be (re)thought along the lines of a political economy of use.

It is Neil Larsen who introduces the dialectic of the commodity outlined in Marx's *Grundrisse* to the concrete analysis of Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia*, whose strategy of cannibalization (importation of hegemonic occidental culture) and regurgitation (exportation of local production) is contrasted with Rama's transculturated transculturation. Larsen says:

what underlies the phantasmagoric operations of *antropofagia* is a formal identification of autonomy with *consumption* itself as the moment of synthesis . . . As an emblem of autonomy, cannibalism is less important for its shock effect that for its formal correspondence to an arcane and paradoxical form of economy, or mode of production. This is a mode resting exclusively on a consumption that accomplishes in itself the socially necessary tasks of both production and reproduction. Marx refers to this abstract economic form in the first pages of the *Grundrisse* as "consumptive production."³⁸

Strictly speaking, Marx does not describe "an arcane form of economy," but rather a complex dialectic of the commodity systematically mystified by bourgeois economics, which legitimates the hegemony of the productive moment (and consequently of the producer and its product), over consumption. According to Marx, production implies the (objective) consumption of raw materials and the (subjective) consumption of the producer's faculties. This is called productive consumption or, simply, production. However, consumption is also production, as the basic transformation of things, and as such he calls it consumptive production. "But, says economics, this production which is identical with consumption is secondary, it is derived from the destruction of the prior product. In the former, the producer objectified himself, in the latter, the object he created personifies itself."³⁹ It is against this secondariness of consumptive production that Marx develops his dialectics. Consumption produces production in two ways: objectively, it realizes the product by annihilating it ("the product . . . becomes a product only through consumption"), and subjectively, it creates the necessity for new production, when it "posits the object of production as an internal image, as a need, as drive and as purpose."⁴⁰ Production, of course, produces consumption, by providing it with its material object, and by determining the manner and by creating the desire for consumption, to the point that "production thus creates the consumer."⁴¹ This moment in productive consumption (the reproduction of wants) is the foundation of consumerism, inferred as the suspended

satisfaction of desire, a euphoria in unhappiness as Marcuse put it, or, ideology materialized in the productive process itself.⁴² But, although Marx concludes that production is the predominant factor in the process, consumption "is thus not only the concluding act in which the product becomes product, but also that in which the producer becomes producer."⁴³ In other words, if productive consumption shows us that the producer also consumes, consumptive production demonstrates that the consumer is also a producer.

Larsen's stroke of genius consists in having detected these two distinctive strategies for overcoming cultural dependency, defined as consumption severed from production. According to Larsen, while Andrade's *antropofagia* is devised as consumptive production, transculturated transculturation is mediated as productive consumption. In other words, while the former attempts to resolve the question of a self-mediating cultural economy cannibalizing imported products in the act of their consumption, transculturated transculturation prohibits the direct consumption of imported cultural products in order to enable the development of local producing agencies. These transculturators act mainly as producers who consume occidental modernity purely as a means of production, as raw material destined for a final local product. But both models fail in establishing an autonomous cultural economy. Transculturated transculturation fails because in configuring itself as an effect of productive consumption, it reproduces the cleavage of capitalist production, and "is unable to specify, so to speak, a mode of consumption that can carry over and preserve the regional autonomy of its productive moment."⁴⁴ Otherwise stated, it remains anchored in auratic aesthetics, and fails to articulate an autonomous space of consumption: a market.

Antropofagia, on the other hand, while inaugurating a fundamental shift in the political economy of culture, amounts for Larsen to "little more than the effort to outsmart rhetorically the dialectic of dependency," especially in its early formulation in the "Manifesto da poesia pau-brasil" ["Manifesto of Brazil-wood Poetry," 1924] and the "Manifesto antropófago" ["Anthropophagous Manifesto," 1928]. It is another modernizing project, closely linked to the elite vanguardists who theorized the model and put it into practice, an aesthetic response to modern traumas in the periphery. What Larsen fails to notice is that these vanguardists end up exercising a mediatory and productory agency, as productive consumers, rather than just consuming products, as consumptive producers. Their strategy was to produce a text already imbedded with consumptive productivity, which happens to be the traditional vanguardist project Roland Barthes calls a "writerly text," an open text challenging the reader to incessant rewriting that overdisciplines, though negatively, the consumer's behavior. Consump-

tive production, meanwhile, cannot be inscribed in the produced text, but works instead as its supplement at the moment of consumption; we are facing a "producerly text," as attributed to popular culture by Fiske, a text that stimulates consumptive productivity without implying it.⁴⁵

Both modernizing transculturation (in its cosmopolitan and transculturated versions) and avant-garde *antropofagia*, remain in the rut of an almost demiurgic role of the intellectual-mediator, and privilege, in consequence, the productive moment of auratic aesthetics. Trapped in the dialectic of productive consumption, they reproduce the neocolonial capitalist mode of production and fail at the primordial task of creating a market that guarantees a truly productive autonomy. The shift from productive consumption to consumptive production, intuited so early by Andrade, would wait several decades for its complete realization under the auspices of the transnational. Larsen, following Roberto Schwarz, once again identifies the present autonomy of Brazilian film and TV industries with "the aesthetics of consumptive production," and then counterposes tropicalist consumerism to the supposedly predigested production of *estética da fome* [aesthetics of hunger].⁴⁶ Neither *tropicalismo* nor *estética da fome* truly qualifies as consumptive production, however, because both present some sort of countermediational strategy. While *tropicalismo*, operating within the culture industry apparatus, produces a readerly text that necessarily remains in the logic of the commodity, *estética da fome*, tangentially positioned with respect to culture industry, produces a writerly text unable to reach the mass consumer. They are not produced, strictly speaking, from consumptive production, which would require a whole new mode of production, on the line, perhaps, of Mexican *corridos* and Brazilian *cordel* literature, Uruguayan *carnival murga* and artisan cooperatives, community radios and reggae's toast-over and dubbing techniques, all sustained in some sort of informal cultural economy.⁴⁷

This probably explains the rapid spread of the multifaceted term hybridity, which seems to have displaced transculturation in Latin American theoretical jargon. Although the term was advanced earlier by Jesús Martín-Barbero among many others, it was popularized in Néstor García Canclini's *Culturas híbridas* [Hybrid Cultures].⁴⁸ García Canclini, from the field of cultural anthropology, and Martín-Barbero, from media communications, brought about the displacement of the canonical by the popular and the national by the migratory that hybridity encompasses. The success of hybridity is understandable, faced with the inefficacy of modernizing transculturation, *antropofagia*, and the diverse ideologies of *mestizaje* in adequately rendering the complex reality of peripheric postmodernity.

Despite Larsen's fierce Adornian criticism of hybridity in "La teoría crítica brasileña y la cuestión de los 'Cultural Studies'" ["Brazilian Critical Theory and the Question of Cultural Studies"],⁴⁹ García Canclini's otherwise imprecise use of the term provides an immense mural, an unsubstitutable phenomenological profile of Latin American cultures. Moreover, many of Larsen's warnings about the dangers of a reification of the transnational cultural industry and the mystification of consumerism involved in the confusion of any and all processes of hybridization, can hardly be applied to García Canclini's work. However, hybridity's polysemy is open to these lines of interpretation, as proved by Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's banal strategy for bypassing transculturation and for designing a theoretical framework, which he brands "biculturation," describing Cuban-American culture as appositional, contiguous, and collusive rather than oppositional, conflictive, and collisional.⁵⁰ But hybridity is not just an "intercultural mixture," of course. It's something else besides, something that can only be grasped through sheer description or wild metaphors, such as *rascuache* or *cambalache aesthetics*, which are best summarized in Guillermo Gómez-Peña's self-definition: "I am a post-mexica [Aztec], pre-chicano, pan-latin, trans-xiled, americanartist . . . it depends on the day of the week or the project in question."⁵¹ Gómez-Peña does not possess a mestizo identity, but rather an agonizing, fragmented and fragmenting id/entity, ironically eccentric rather than decentered, liminal when not liminoid, more shattered than split, always pending on the edge: a circumstantial, portable, transportable, transmutable, transmissible, transitory, transmigratory, transgressing id/entity: an articulating, negotiated id/entity, more productivity than product, more praxis than ethos. It is not by chance that this concept of a border(ed) id/entity has been developed by Chicano and North-Mexican studies, because the United States-Mexican border is an unsurpassed locus of hybridity, "not an abyss that will save us from threatening otherness, but a place where . . . otherness yields, becomes us."⁵² The instability in/of the margin nurtures a state of betweenness, traceable to *nepantla*, the Mexica colonial condition, and comparable to the hyphenated experience of Cuban-Americans, as coined by Pérez-Firmat. The hybrid condition nurtures a "multidimensional perception," or "the ability to see not just from one side of the border, but from the other side as well." It provides the basis for the possible theorization of "border writing" as a mode of production peculiar to Latin American peripheral postmodernity; a mode of production that deterritorializes the producer's agency and counts on the producerly use of a text overconscious of its openness by an active consumer: consumptive production.

Thus hybridity, best theorized by Homi Bhabha, refers to an id/entity articulated through cultural difference, a social construct negotiated in enunciative practices, and not a pre-given, (ec)static identity, consecrated through the epistemological function of cultural diversity. This is a fundamental distinction, because while cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology, "the concept of cultural difference focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the *name* of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation." Cultural diversity imposes "the historicist teleological or mythical time and narrative of traditionalism," while cultural difference plays "the shifting, strategically displaced time of the articulation of a historical politics of negotiation." Always forced to wander in-between, the hybrid can be best apprehended as a subject who oscillates "from *mimicry*—a difference that is almost nothing but not quite—to *menace*—a difference that is almost total but not quite." This subject-in-question lives in a postmodern *nepantla*, because "hybridity has no such perspective of depth or truth to provide: it is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures." Obviously not a synthesis, it is not "anti-dialectical" but anadialectical, as Enrique Dussel maintains, a moment beyond (*ana-*) the horizon of dialectics: "a moment of political change [which lies] in the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One . . . nor the Other . . . but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both"; a strategic displacement and an arbitrary closure, as Spivak and Bhabha would say: truly less than one and double.⁵³

In this theoretical shift, from cultural diversity as the matrix of ontological authenticity to cultural difference as political articulation, lies the tremendous impact of the concept of hybridity for the further development of transculturation. Modernizing transculturation and *antropofagia* alike had to resort in the end to a certain authenticating ground to legitimate a dialectical synthesis, founded, for this very reason, in the productive moment and in the aura of the finished product (productive consumption). Hybridity, on the other hand, operating as pure articulatory praxis, postulates an anadialectic movement, based on the productivity of the user at the very moment of consumption. Marx hints at this when he writes that "consumption, which is conceived not only as a terminal point but also as an end-in-itself, actually belongs outside economics except insofar as it reacts in turn upon the point of departure and initiates the whole process anew."⁵⁴ Even though just for an instant, the anadialectical movement that works on consumptive production allows the consumer *qua* user to transcend the trap of the commodity, that is to

say, to relinquish the economic order to accede to her/his ultimate emancipation as a free producer.

In summary, hybridity is a wild metaphor for an antipolitics of use based on consumptive production. It designates the post-auratic pragmatism of the user who discards the authenticity fetishism inlaid in the finished product by auratic aesthetics, and marks the passage from the ontology of identity to the articulatory politics of id/entity. In this sense, if modernizing transculturation (in both its cosmopolitan and transculturated versions) was defined as "a cultural surrogate for hegemony rather than a hegemonic culture," hybrid transculturation (under the sign of the transnational) should be considered as the cultural production of hegemonic articulations.⁵⁵ In a word, as the process by/in which, following Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's conception of hegemony, antagonistic social agents negotiate inherently unstable, relational, unsutureable new political and cultural formations.⁵⁶ This articulatory conception of hegemony, as a totalizing movement incessantly detotalized, as the permanent unfolding of crisis, allows us to overcome the teleological dialectic of modernity and to focus on the transnational moment. In this framework, the hybridizing shift applied to transculturation provides the exact theoretical device to confront today's cultural transnationalization, which is, obviously, part of the reconstitution of capital that, despite his ethnocentric postmodern reductionism, Fredric Jameson correctly brands as late or multinational capitalism.⁵⁷ This transnational moment shows two solidly interlinked characteristics: the crisis of the nation-state (capital being the first to denationalize itself), and a technological revolution in mass media accompanying the hegemonic expansion of culture industries. With respect to the first characteristic, if the nationalist protestations of the European bourgeoisies border on the ridiculous, such implications are quite different for the periphery, where what is at stake is no longer "a high asymmetric interdependence," but the transnationalization of a "global imaginary" which transforms culture into the privileged field of transnational conflict.⁵⁸ In this context, the crisis of the Latin American nation-state, which will be settled between democracy and compulsive neomodernization,⁵⁹ leads to the necessary revision of the national. If the nation manifests itself as the crystallization of a national imaginary (a pedagogical narrative, a homogeneous empty historical time, an imagined community), it is also

an obscure and ubiquitous form of living the *locality* of culture. This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity: a form of living that is more complex than "community"; more symbolic than "society"; more connotative than "country"; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of State; more mythological than ideology; less

homogeneous than hegemony; less centered than the citizen; more collective than "the subject"; more psychic than "civility"; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism.⁶⁰

This *other* nation, embodied in local subaltern transcultures and their postnational antipolitics, operates in the interstices of the national imaginary and obliquely with respect to the homogenizing transnational macroculture implemented by "global economic and communications networks." Local transcultures perform as the (ant)agonistic supplement of transnational macroculture, a field of struggle that materializes, in geopolitical terms and in global dimension, the reproduction of desire, that is to say, of cultural consumerism (the subjective moment of productive consumption); local transcultures pose themselves on/as the malicious (r)use of ingenuity, as Carlos Monsiváis would say, in the marginal, liminal, interstitial tactics of the consumer (the moment of consumptive production), and in the productivity of migrancy, that condition similar to the cosmopolitan perspective of exile where Angel Rama foresaw, shortly before his death, the key to postmodern, hybrid transculturation.⁶¹

NOTES

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3. Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 38 (1936): 69-72.
4. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1947), x-xii.
5. Edward F. Foulks, ed., *Current Perspectives in Cultural Psychiatry* (Jamaica, NY: Spectrum Publications, 1977); Leonore Loeb Adler, ed., *Cross-Cultural Research at Issue* (New York: Academic Press, 1982).
6. Nancy Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje en Nicolás Guillén* (La Habana: Unión, 1982); Diana Iznaga, *Transculturación en Fernando Ortiz* (La Habana: Ed. de Ciencias Sociales, 1989).
7. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, 97.

8. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva postmoderna* (Hanover: Ediciones del Norte, 1989); Gustavo Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 91; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 9.
9. Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (México: Siglo XXI, 1985).
10. Rama, 33.
11. Rama, 75.
12. Rama, 71.
13. Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Calibán: Apuntes sobre la cultura en nuestra América* (México: Ed. Diógenes, 1974); René Depestre, "Saludo y despedida a la negritud," in Manuel Moreno Fragnals, relator, *Africa en América Latina* (México: UNESCO/Siglo XXI, 1977); Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Seuil: 1981); William Rowe and Vivian Schelling, *Memory and Modernity: Popular Culture in Latin America* (London: Verso, 1991), 42.
14. In Iznaga, 63.
15. Rama, 97.
16. Neil Larsen, Foreword to D. Emily Hicks, *Border Writing: The Multidimensional Text* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), xiii.
17. Neil Larsen, *Modernism and Hegemony: A Materialist Critique of Aesthetic Agencies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), xxxvi.
18. Rama, 202-203.
19. Larsen, xxxvi.
20. Larsen, xxxvii, 63.
21. Alberto Moreiras, "Transculturación y pérdida del sentido: El diseño de la posmodernidad en América Latina," *Nuevo Texto Crítico* 6 (1990), 105-120.
22. Moreiras, 105.
23. Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," in Joseph F. Graham, *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 191; my italics.
24. Moreiras, 107.
25. Ibid.
26. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, Trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 72.
27. Benjamin, 79, 78.
28. Moreiras, 110.
29. Ibid., 106.

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31. José Joaquín Brunner, "Los debates sobre la modernidad y el futuro de América Latina," Santiago de Chile: Documento de trabajo, Programa FLACSO 293 (1986); Fernando Calderón, comp., *Imágenes desconocidas: La modernidad en la encrucijada postmoderna* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 1988); Abril Trigo, "Lumpenpoesía y neomodernidad periférica: el caso uruguayo," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 39 (1994), 256.
32. Jesús Martín-Barbero, *De los medios a las mediaciones: Comunicación, cultura y hegemonía* (México: Gustavo Gili, 1991), 57, 231; Néstor García Canclini, *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo* (México: Nueva Imagen, 1982), 17.
33. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), 31.
34. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 35, 142.
35. Néstor García Canclini, "Culture and Power: The State of Research," *Media, Culture and Society* 10 (1988).
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37. Néstor García Canclini, "Cultura y poder: ¿Dónde está la investigación?" quoted in Martín-Barbero, 231.
38. Larsen, 81.
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40. Marx, 92.
41. Ibid.
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43. Marx, 93.
44. Larsen, 82-83.
45. Fiske, 103-106; Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).
46. Larsen, 78-97; Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (London: Verso, 1992).
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48. Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (México: Grijalbo, 1989).
49. Neil Larsen, "La teoría crítica brasileña y la cuestión de los 'Cultural Studies'," *Revista de Crítica Literaria Latinoamericana* 40 (1994).
50. Pérez-Firmat, *Life on the Hyphen*, 5-6.
51. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "Wacha ese border, son," *La Jornada Semanal*, 162 (10/25/1987). Quoted in García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas*, 302.
52. Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "Border Culture: A Process of Negotiation Toward Utopia," *La línea quebrada* 1 (1986): 1. Quoted by José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 150.
53. Bhabha, 28, 34-35, 91, 114, 168; Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Cultures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Homi K. Bhabha, "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt," in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Trichler, eds., *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992).
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56. García Canclini, *Las culturas populares*, 62-3; Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 135, 105; Stuart Hall, "Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'," Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge), 1981.
57. See Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'," *Social Text* 17 (1987); Bhabha, 212ss; George Yúdice, "Postmodernity and Transnational Capitalism in Latin America," in George Yúdice, Jean Franco and Juan Flores, eds., *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 25.
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60. Bhabha, 140.
61. Angel Rama. "Los contestatarios del poder," Prologue to *Novísimos narradores hispanoamericanos en marcha* (México: Marcha Editores, 1981); Híber Conteris, "Transculturación e identidad: Signos de postmodernidad en la narrativa latinoamericana," unpublished.