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consumers and citizens
GLOBALIZATION AND MULTICULTURAL CONFLICTS
Translated and with an Introduction by George Yúdice

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One way of introducing this book is to say that it examines globalization as a process of fragmentation and recomposition; rather than homogenize the world, globalization reorders differences and inequalities without eliminating them. Hence, the rise of multicultural societies should be seen in connection with globalizing movements.

The research projects presented here take Latin American cities and culture industries as their basic objects of study. Although this book may be understood as having been written from the specific locale of Latin America, its perspective should not be considered to be outside the reach of globalization, nor as a difference that leads directly to radical alternatives, that is, to a totally different society. What is the meaning of our thoughts and actions when we acknowledge that they necessarily take place within globalization processes, that is, within the hegemonic tendencies of urbanization and the industrialization of culture? Some interpret this fact as the triumph of “one way of thinking” and as the end of ideological diversity. I prefer to consider this situation as a framing horizon, albeit an open and relatively undetermined one. To get beyond the binarism of local versus global it is necessary to focus on the concrete conditions in which cultural practices develop in different...
countries, on the interaction of globalizing projects and the specific multicultural social arrangements obtaining in given regions.

It is now a commonplace of history that Latin America was "invented" by Europe. Initiated by Spain and Portugal through conquest and colonization, this invention was reeledaborated through the interventions of France, England, and other metropolitan nations. The ensuing relations of dependency, characterized in each period by conflicts and hybridizations, were succeeded in the twentieth century by new linkages with the United States. This displacement cannot be seen, however, as the simple replacement of one master for another. The transition from dependency on Europe to subordination to the United States was paralleled by changes in agricultural, industrial, and financial markets, transformations in the production, circulation, and consumption of technology and culture, and an upsurge in demographic flows of migrants, tourists, and exiles. All this altered the structure of dependency.

The changes in the four areas examined in the following pages—cities, markets, technology-culture connections, demographic displacements—rendered obsolete past characterizations that helped explain the relations between Latin America, on the one hand, and Europe and the United States, on the other. The connections that now make us dependent on the United States and on global powers cannot be explained as relations of coloniality, which imply the occupation of a subordinated territory, or as imperialism relations, which entail a linear domination by the imperial center over the subaltern nations. Only if we focus on the exception of Puerto Rico can one discern a colonial condition; but all other Latin American countries ceased to be colonies one or two centuries ago. However, U.S. imperialism relegated these countries to dependency and a peripheral position within the world system of unequal and uneven exchanges.

Another clarification is in order. Sometimes the displacement of dependency from Europe to the United States is interpreted as the passage from a sociopolitical subordination to a socioeconomic submission. We Latin Americans presumably learned to be citizens through our relationship to Europe; our relationship to the United States will, however, reduce us to consumers. France, England, Germany, and to a degree the United States inspired our constitutions, the construction of republican regimes, and the participation of our citizens in political parties, labor unions, and social movements. These liberal influences were reeledaborated in the circumstances of our multiethnic social composition and the peculiar evolution of our democratic regimes.

In the past few decades, the intensification of economic and cultural relations with the United States has encouraged a model of society in which many state functions have disappeared or been assumed by private corporations, and in which social participation is organized through consumption rather than through the exercise of citizenship. This new metropolitan model has compounded the already existing problems of the inadequate development and instability of our democracies, and the stranglehold on representative institutions by the dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s; the resulting synergy has a greater capacity to transform Latin American civil societies into atomized ensembles of consumers.

This book attempts to understand why the argument that relations with the United States have intensified a new mode of dependency is inadequate for explaining the current transformations in our citizen and consumer roles. The relation between citizens and consumers has been altered throughout the world due to economic, technological, and cultural changes that have impeded the constitution of identities through national symbols. Now they are shaped by the programming of, say, Hollywood, Televisa, and MTV. For many men and women, especially youth, the questions specific to citizenship, such as how we inform ourselves and who represents our interests, are answered more often than not through private consumption of commodities and media offerings than through the abstract rules of democracy or through participation in discredited political organizations. This process could be understood as loss or depoliticization from the perspective of the ideals of liberal or enlightened democracy. But we may also posit, as do James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, that the political notion of citizenship is expanded by including rights to housing, health, education, and the access to other goods through consumption. It is in this sense that I propose reconceptualizing consumption, not as a mere setting for useless expenditures and irrational impulses, but as a site that is good for thinking, where a good part of economic, sociopolitical, and psychological rationality is organized in all societies.

Cities

Recognizing these transformations does not mean endorsing the dissolution of the city in consumption, nor nations in globalization. Nor do I believe that this is what is happening. In order to understand the shift from "classic" identities (nations, classes, ethnicities) that no longer con-
tain us to new global structures that satisfy in different ways our interests and desires, we must take into consideration the recomposition of social relations and the obstacles to satisfaction today. These obstacles may well be an expression of the zeitgeist and of the universal crisis in paradigms and certainties, as we read in much postmodern theory. But they may also be studied empirically as they accommodate to different contexts. Both Anglo-American humanities and cultural studies traditions, more in keeping with the first approach, as well as the predominantly social-scientific Latin American approaches to the study of culture, are legitimate. My own focus on narratives of multicultural crisis in an age of globalization as well as my empirical research on how multiculturalism plays out in cities and communications processes speak to the relevance of working in both modalities.

This desire for a dialogue between Latin American and Anglo-American thought, between the social sciences and the humanities (without accepting any necessary correspondence between both pairings), was motivated by preoccupations about how globalization processes, led but not governed by U.S. culture, might affect the future of Latin culture. This concern was not all that evident to me while I was writing, but two years after the Spanish-language edition was published, I realized (with the help of reviews in Latin American and Anglo-American forums) that it guided my explorations of changes in communications industries and their publics in Latin America and my interest in comparing these with European audiovisual industries and publics. Somewhat less obviously, this concern also guided my analysis of the decomposition and transformations of large Latin American cities.

The passage from a Latin-European origin to a North American “destiny” has modified not only Latin American societies, but also the social sciences, the arts, and sources of authority and prestige in mass culture. In less than fifty years, the capital cities that set the trends of our thought and aesthetics ceased to be Paris, London, and to a lesser extent Madrid, Milan, and Berlin; their places within the regional imaginary came to be occupied by New York for intellectual elites; by Miami and Los Angeles for middle-class tourists; and by California, Texas, New York, and Chicago for migrant workers.

A revealing indicator of the waning importance of the European conception of the city as a center of civic, commercial, academic, and artistic life is that the U.S. metropoles preferred by many Latin Americans are not even cities. Academics prefer Stanford, Duke, or Iowa (a campus without a city) over the great urban centers. The middle classes yearn to realize their fantasies in Disneyland or Disney World, as well as in shopping centers that, even when they are in the middle of a city, require one to move in a deurbanized manner, according to European standards of urban life. There are very few European-style cities like New York or San Francisco in the United States.

What does all this have to do with the disintegration of Latin American megacities (and many medium-size cities) such as Mexico City, São Paulo, Caracas, Lima, and Bogotá? It is obvious that we are not dealing with imperialist impositions here, nor with mere degraded copies of U.S. urbanism. This book contains analyses of certain Latin American megalopolises as global cities; however, the transformations that grip them are manufactured inextricably by processes of unequal development and contradictions internal to them: mass migrations; the contraction of labor markets; flawed urban and housing policies; social services inadequate for an expanding population and urban sprawl; interethnic conflicts; the deterioration of the quality of life and an alarming increase in crime. The large cities of our continent, imagined by governments and migrants until very recently as the avant-garde of our modernization, are today the chaotic scenes of informal markets where hordes of people try to survive under the most archaic forms of exploitation, or by having recourse to networks of solidarity or violence.

All of this is internally driven but at the same time related to new modes of subordination of peripheral economies and to transnational restructuring of markets for material and communicational commodities. Just as in the cities of the first world, many Latin American cities serve as laboratories for degraded multicultural encounters and simultaneously develop as strategic centers for commercial, informational, and financial innovation, dynamizing the local market as it is incorporated into transnational circuits. For this reason, Mexico City and São Paulo are as revealing as New York or London for research that explores the rearticulations between the global and the local, between the flows of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This research also introduces some “heterodox” issues into the debates on urbanism and globalization, or perhaps it only accentuates contradictions that are also visible in metropolitan multicultural centers.

Communications

The increasing dialogue among cultural studies scholars in the United States and Latin America is usually carried out in the domain of discursive analyses, especially those oriented toward literary or artistic production. Although, to their credit, they have provided legitimacy for
testimonios,

popular texts, and other discourses excluded from the canon, their scope is usually limited to nonindustrialized culture, and their critical discussion circumscribed within academic institutions. There is little place within this academic discussion for what takes place in the mass media, except when the latter is legitimized in relation to issues of importance in the educated sphere. The vast expansion of communications research in the United States and Latin America, and particularly hard data concerning investment, the industrial restructuring of symbolic production, and mass consumption, is rarely incorporated into cultural studies. The “encyclopedia” Cultural Studies, edited by Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler, offers almost no data, tables, or other empirical materials in its eight hundred pages, although several essays deal with communications, consumption, and the commercialization of culture.

It is remarkable that a few of the contributors, Grossberg among them, do demonstrate an acute understanding of mass culture in other research not necessarily published under the rubric of “cultural studies.”

For more than half a century, the cultural exchanges between the United States and Latin America have taken place less in literature, the visual arts, or traditional culture than in communications industries. But even the “high” arts undergo industrialization in keeping with market criteria and the search for mass audiences, and this massification is certainly a key dimension in the meaning of exhibitions such as the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art’s blockbuster Mexico: The Splendors of Thirty Centuries, or of the novels of such best-selling authors as Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and Gabriel García Márquez. Something similar takes place in the use of historical patrimony in the tourist industry and in the circulation of ethnic or national musics in world music, all of which contribute to the reproduction and renewal of North and South American imaginaries. But it is in the competition and mergers among communications corporations dealing with TV, informatics, and even magazine publishing that we see the greatest ferment in inter- and multicultural activity.

This book, like others written in recent years by the likes of Jesús Martín Barbero, Renato Ortiz, and Beatriz Sarlo, tries to relocate the theory and debates on identity, heterogeneity, and hybridization within the context of competing claims to audiovisual space among the United States, Europe, and Latin America. Beyond the struggles over the expansion of communications, which reproduce and recontextualize Latin Americans’ concerns about their “Latinity” and their “Americanness,”

conceptual analysis and empirical research on the differences and coincidences in this interregional triangle are crucial for rethinking cultural policies. We academics must come to grips with the fact that state policies have become outdated, be they for the preservation of monumental and folkloric patrimonies or for the promotion of high culture with ever-diminishing resources. The effects of the U.S. preference to consider radio, TV, and other communications media as nothing but business enterprises, a view being taken up in Europe and Latin America, should provoke us to reexamine questions of property among these media, be they state- or privately owned. These effects should compel us researchers to conduct careful analyses of the reconstitution of public spaces and the mechanisms, whether defunct or re-created, by which the multiple voices present in each society are recognized or excluded.

The criticisms of this book by a few European specialists lead me to think that I have overidealized the exemplary value of European audiovisual space. The privatization of communications media in Spain and France since the late 1990s forces us to be less optimistic about the ability of the European Union to protect the mediated public sphere from the pressures of the international market. Nevertheless, I think that the general description of the cultural policy options that I offer here, and the analysis of their significance for multicultural societies, are still pertinent for the discussion that is only now getting under way in Latin American studies of culture and in U.S. cultural studies. Perhaps this is an area where it would be appropriate to take into consideration the contributions of British cultural studies, which are more sensitive to the importance of examining the industrialization of culture, and whose vitality and remodeling I had the opportunity to witness in the interventions of scholars such as Stuart Hall and Philip Schlesinger, among others, at a meeting of European and Latin American media specialists in October 1996 organized by the University of Stirling.

In British research we also find a greater concern with the role of the state, owing to its function in Britain as a representative of the public sphere and as a regulator of private interests. The state’s role in cultural matters in Britain is historically more important than in the United States.

Multiculturalism(s)

If the Anglo-American and Latin American worlds experience globalization differently it is because of the different ways in which they con-
ceptualize their multicultural character. This is something that was not completely clear to me when I wrote this book. In my presentation at the Stirling conference I suggested that the key difference between the Latin American study of culture and cultural studies might be summarized as follows: What in Latin America has been called cultural pluralism or heterogeneity is conceived as part of the nation, whereas in the U.S. debate, as various authors explain, "multiculturalism means separatism" (Hughes, Taylor, Walter).\textsuperscript{6} We know that in the United States it is convenient, as Peter McLaren notes, to distinguish between conservative, liberal, and leftist multiculturalisms. The first one subordinates ethnic separatism to the hegemony of WASPs and their canon, which stipulates what should be read and learned in order to be culturally correct. Liberal multiculturalism postulates the natural equality and cognitive equivalence of all races. Leftist multiculturalism explains the breaches in equality as the result of unequal access to resources. But only a few writers, like McLaren, advocate the need to "legitimize multiple traditions of knowledge" and to prioritize the construction of solidarities over the demands of each group. That is why thinkers such as Michael Walzer express their concern that "the sharp conflict today in North American life is not the opposition of multiculturalism to hegemony or singularity," or to "a vigorous and independent North American identity"; it is, rather, the antagonism of a "multitude of groups to a multitude of individuals." "Equally strong voices and varied intonations do not produce harmony—contrary to the ancient image of pluralism as a symphony in which each group played a part (although one might ask who wrote the music?)—but cacophony."

The Latin American canon, or what we might construe as such, owes a lot to Europe. Throughout the twentieth century, however, it combined influences from different European countries and articulated them in a heterodox manner with diverse national traditions. One can see the traces of German expressionists, French surrealists, Czech, Italian, and Irish novelists in the works of authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Carlos Fuentes. All of these authors were unknown to each other, but writers from peripheral countries "can handle" them "irreverently and without superstition," as Borges liked to say, not without some exaggeration. Although Borges and Fuentes might be considered extreme cases, I find that Latin American humanities and social-science scholars, and more generally cultural producers, make a critical appropriation of metropolitan canons and reconvert them, so to speak, responding to different national motivations. Moreover, Latin American societies are not structured by a multiplicity of ethnocommunitarian groupings, but—as I suggested earlier—more in keeping with French models of secular republicanism and Jacobin individualism. These models, of course, are rendered more open and flexible as they come into contact with the multicultural realities of Latin America.

On account of this different history, the tendency to resolve multicultural conflicts in Latin America through affirmative-action policies has not been prevalent. This is not to say that in Latin America there have not been nationalist and ethnicist fundamentalisms, promoting exclusivist self-affirmations and resisting hybridization by constructing a single absolutist patrimony that illusorily casts itself as pure. There are analogies between, on the one hand, the separatist emphasis that takes self-esteem as a key factor in the rights claims of women and minorities in the United States, and, on the other hand, some Latin American indigenous and nationalist movements that interpret history in a Manichaean manner, reserving all virtues for themselves and blaming others for the problems of development. However, this has not been the dominant tendency in our history. And much less in this era of globalization in which it becomes more obvious that ethnic and national identities are hybrid constructions, asymmetrically interdependent and uneven. Indeed, it is in this unavoidable relation to hybridity that each group must defend its rights. Thus, artistic and intellectual movements that identify with ethnic or regional demands, such as the Zapastas in Chiapas, construe this particular problem as a matter for debate concerning the nation and how it might be relocated within the framework of international conflicts. It is ultimately a critique of modernity. This is, in fact, the Zapastas' own strategy. There are, of course, lingering controversies about indigenous autonomy, particularly the ambivalence evident in cultural or political independence as it intersects participation in national and global processes.

Subjects
These reflections imply a question insinuated at the beginning, where I stated that speaking from Latin America does not entail attributing any special prerogative to what might be discovered and critiqued from a peripheral position. The convergences and differences in conceiving multiculturalism in different regions are also evident in the varying enunciative standpoints or observational locations of cultural research. In North America one finds constant questioning of universalist theories
that, in the guise of objectivity, have smuggled in colonial, Western, masculine, white, and other biases. The deconstructive criticisms leveled at this objectivism have also been developed in Latin American social sciences and humanities: nationalists, Marxists, and others associated with dependency theory similarly objected to metropolitan social and cultural theories and made creative use, from the 1960s on, of Gramsci and Fanon. It is only recently that U.S. cultural studies scholars—and some Latinamericanists—proposed the latter as novel approaches without any reference to work by Latin Americans who had taken these precedents as a point of departure with similar objectives in mind. However, when it comes to other aspects, such as the contributions of feminist critique to the study of culture, Latin American scholars are quite weak, although the dialogue with the U.S. academy is fluid and helps to make up for this shortcoming (e.g., in the work of Heloísa Buarque de Hollanda and Nelly Richard).10

Can one hope for a radical renewal ensuing from the claims of these peripheral or excluded actors? What is the relation between epistemological creativity and social or geopolitical power? Whatever the answer to these questions might be, it is evident that in the wake of the 1960s and 1970s, when it was common to believe that the colonized, the subaltern, workers, and peasants had epistemic privilege, there are not many left who think that there are privileged positions for the legitimation of knowledge. We are discouraged from resorting once again to this belief by the many sound epistemological arguments and many lessons gleaned from the repeated historical failures of the overvaluation of the oppressed as the privileged source of knowledge.

If we are to heed the call to attend to the dangers that fundamentalism poses for conceptions of identity, and examine their self-affirmation as a central concern of research and policy, as David Theo Goldberg recommends in Multiculturalism, then we should shift the analytical emphasis to heterogeneity and hybridization. The cultural analyst gains little by studying the world from the vantage point of partial identities. It is not enough to study them only from the metropolis, or from the context of peripheral or postcolonial nations, or even from one isolated discipline, or even a totalizing knowledge. An effective study of culture focuses on the intersections.

Adopting the point of view of the oppressed or excluded can be helpful in the discovery stage, as a way of generating hypotheses or counterhypotheses that challenge established knowledges. Adopting this viewpoint also enables us to discern domains of the real that go unattended by hegemonic knowledge. But when it comes to epistemological justification, it is better to situate the analysis in the intersections in those zones where narratives encounter and cross each other. Only in these sites of tension, encounter, and conflict is it possible to pass from sectorial (or openly sectarian) narratives to an elaboration of knowledges capable of deconstructing and exercising control over the conditionings of each enunciation.

This also means that we should go beyond cultural studies limited to hermeneutic analysis and open up to a research agenda that combines signification and facts, discourses and their empirical groundings. In sum, we should construct a rationality that can encompass everyone’s reasonings as well as the structure of conflicts and negotiations.

To the degree that specialists in the study of culture want to achieve scientifically consistent research, their final objective is not the representation of the voice of the silenced but an understanding and naming of the places where their demands or everyday life enter into conflict with those of others. Contradiction and conflict are categories to be found at the core of this conception of cultural studies. Not to see the world from only one pole of the contradiction but to understand its specific structure as well as its potential dynamics. The utopias of change and justice can, in this sense, articulate with the project of cultural studies, not as a prescription for the selection and organization of data, but rather as a stimulus for exploring under what (real) conditions the real will cease to repeat inequality and discrimination, and become a setting for the recognition of others. I take up here a suggestion made by Paul Ricoeur in his critique of U.S. multiculturalism, that it would be better to emphasize a politics of recognition over a politics of identity. “In the notion of identity there is only an idea of the same, while recognition is a concept that directly integrates alterity, that permits a dialectic of same and other. The demands on behalf of identity always contain violence toward the other. The search for recognition, on the other hand, entails reciprocity.”11