

## The Hybrid: A Conversation with Margarita Zires, Raymundo Mier, and Mabel Piccini

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**Néstor García Canclini**

*Mier*: I would like to introduce the notion of the hybrid, so very important, it seems to me, in Néstor's book.<sup>1</sup> The notion of the hybrid suggests to me, perhaps because of my complete ignorance of biology, a frontier species, a happening, the sudden eruption of a morphology still without a well-established place in the taxonomies. The entrance of the hybrid into taxonomy necessitates the abandonment of this category in favor of another, less drastic, one, which might be the variant, species, et cetera. The hybrid designates a liminality, a material whose existence exhibits the dual affirmation of a substance and its lack of identity, that which is in the interstices, which profiles itself in a zone of shadow, which escapes, at least in appearance, repetition. The hybrid is the name of a material without identity, of an evanescent condition. The hybrid could then be a very fortunate name because of the density of its evocations of the singular, of an event. In this

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1. Néstor García Canclini, *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico, D. F.: Grijalbo, 1990).

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marginality with regard to taxonomies, the hybrid permits only an oblique analysis, a zone of effects, of detachments. It can be understood, but only through the traces of its anticipated or confirmed disappearance, through the modalities of its hardening.

To me, the idea of hybrid cultures, then, seems extraordinarily suggestive, because it permits the imagination of social morphologies, fields of singularized regularity, designations of catastrophe, but a catastrophe that is not a limiting border, a mere point of singularity, the space of a fracture. Hybrid culture does not designate a void, a fissure, in the process of transition, rather the very material of a culture, of its vitality and its force of singularized and dissipated invention. In this way, however, it confronts us with a challenge. How do we analyze this dense, interstitial "material" of a liminal culture if its meanings appear only in order to anticipate its disappearance as such, its precipitation toward more stable orderings of meaning? It seems to me that this proposal of hybrid cultures is a methodological challenge in all fields of culture. Specifically, the adjective *hybrid*, referring to culture, pushed to its extremes, seems to put the very concept of culture into interdiction.

*Zires*: In relation to the point you raise, Raymundo, I believe it's important to recall the notion of culture until now in effect within anthropology and sociology and that has also penetrated other fields, such as communications. This notion of culture is tied to the idea of homogeneous nuclei of more or less coherent beliefs, products, or social behaviors pertaining to a community, group, or nation. Homogeneity is emphasized, coherence is emphasized, and with them the possibility of classification.

Now, in your book, Néstor, you speak about hybrid cultures, which leads us to think about a different notion of culture. According to this notion, culture would not have the coherence that has been attributed to it, nor would it refer to a static body of products or specific cultural elements, but rather to processes of the interrelation of discursive elements that have multiple forms, genres, or formats and that are in permanent transformation. This interrelation, I believe, would always be fragmentary. It would put into question the homogeneous character of the operative conception of culture and its implicit notion of identity as an immovable nucleus.

On the other hand, the hybrid refers us to something that belongs to different areas at the same time, and, in this sense, I believe that what is hybrid cannot have a permanent identity. I think it's important to point out that the processes of hybridization are not a new phenomenon—they have always existed and are always going to exist in societies in general,

although they have been called other names. For example, in Mexico, much has been said about how the Aztecs assimilated the religion and culture of the peoples they came to dominate in the pre-Hispanic age. Many have documented the process of religious and cultural syncretism that was produced later during the time of colonization. Some authors who have studied the processes of syncretism as forms of hybridization have pointed out the way in which cultural and political identities are put in jeopardy in these processes.

But these examples shouldn't lead us to think that it's only during periods of the domination of one people over another that processes of hybridization exist, especially if we consider this phenomenon from the perspective of intertextuality. In this sense, we would have to ask whether all culture is not simply a hybrid amalgam and, in that case, we would have to argue that there are no cultures that are not hybrid.

What we can point out with regard to the present situation, which you allude to in your book, Néstor, is that we are witnessing a particular process of hybridization in contemporary societies in which communication technologies play a very important role.

*Canclini:* I detect two different movements in what Raymundo and Margarita are saying. If I understand Raymundo's concern, it would follow that the hybrid is the indeterminate, something that is constantly changing, while Margarita spoke of processes of hybridization, in which the hybrid becomes formalized. For me, the hybrid is almost never indeterminate, it does not present itself, even in contemporary societies, by degrees of indeterminacy, although cultural crossings have become much more intense recently, and I find in this intensification one of the explanations for the collapse of paradigms and the difficulty of grasping meaning. The hybrid is almost never something indeterminate because there are different historical forms of hybridization.

I tried to work out the following problem in the book: How have combinations of pre-Columbian and colonial traditions with the processes of modernization historically arisen in Latin America? I find historical logics that organize the successive hybridizations. Even the artistic avant-gardes, which were accused of being disintegrative, can be read as searches for modernization; they involve ways of assuming local traditions, of understanding the folklore of a country, of asking oneself what can be done with the heterogeneity of Latin American societies. In a similar way, the principal cultural configurations identified in modernity—high, popular, and mass culture—are the result, as are their crossings, of processes of hybridization

that occur in conditions partially predetermined by social systems. For example, modern art can incorporate both artisanal objects and television, but these objects, which until recently were seen as strange and which many criticized when they appeared in museums of modern art, are received by a certain logic, a grammar. The museum gives them a defined space that subordinates them to a history of art and perception, that organizes intercultural hybridizations.

The same occurs when our record collection combines salsa, rock, classical music, ranchera, et cetera—all that we habitually do, in fact, combine in a personal collection. But this doesn't mean it is entirely random. Even though we may want to buy this variety of records, we know that not all of them are sold in the same place, that there are classifications for these goods, that some are for listening with some friends and others with different ones in different social situations. There are no entirely arbitrary crossings, and often we ourselves construct the system that contains them. There are artists who deliberately choose to belong at once to high, popular, and mass culture circuits. In the structure and composition of the messages, a type or style is especially underlined or marked. It's possible to mix salsa and baroque music, but at the same time to mark the predominance of a category, that of rock, jazz, or classical music, at times according to the venue in which the music is going to be played: in the Palace of Fine Arts or at a rock concert, for example.

I agree with what you were saying, Margarita, that objects belong to different fields; I would also say that as subjects, we belong to different areas and we enjoy cultural and artistic goods in different spaces—we can relate them fluidly with different genres. To be a resident in a big city at the end of the century implies being able to relate oneself to varied fields, simultaneously to high, popular, and mass cultural levels. It implies listening to Zabludova on television, going to the folk concerts of the Nezahuacóyotl, going to a rock concert, and dancing to salsa in California: All of these fragmentary experiences coexist in an urban resident, but they are not totally arbitrary. This fragmentation is regulated in part by objective social systems and in part by rituals established by subjects themselves. The rituals serve to classify the real, to establish a before and after, to establish procedures of passage from one situation to another. In the middle of the crossings and hybridization, they establish separate fields that can be connected but that are not totally mixed up. We need rituals because we do not tolerate excessive hybridization.

Certain antiauthoritarian philosophical positions tend to see rituals

only as forms of discipline and repression, but the persistence of rituals in contemporary societies can also be interpreted to mean that as subjects we can't live in permanent indetermination and transgression. In order to perceive the complexity of the real and to accept it as people do in fact experience it, we should take into account that people live a great deal of time in the midst of rituals, that they need forms of classification of the real. That is why we don't understand the hybrid if we only look at it as complete dissemination, rather than as something that is also ordered, that is experienced as classified or as in need of classification in order to contain the dissolution of the signifieds.

*Zires:* Yes, Néstor, but rituals are tied not only to systems of ordering but also to forms of breaking such systems, to the transformation of classifications.

*Canclini:* Yes, but insofar as they are ordering rituals, they also incorporate the possibility of social transgression. Bourdieu says that there are rituals that involve the simple reproduction of the social, that are tied to the most natural activities of life (birth, marriage, death), and that there are rituals that have to do with the institutionalization of transgression: Through these, it is accepted that transgression exists. Rituals institutionalizing transgression tend to occur in a marginal context, for example, carnival, but although it is possible to cross-dress in carnival (so that men may be women, or women men, or the poor rich), all of this has limits; they are restricted transgressions that have a defined period in which symbolic efficacy can be exercised. When they seek to reach a real efficacy, then repression appears.

*Mier:* I would like to turn to the question of the incidence of this reflection on the hybrid in the political field. In fact, to me, the notion of hybrid culture poses the problem of how political strategies arise as moments of signification, as precarious regimes of confrontation between systems of discourse. The very notion of power, of strategy, would appear intimately tied to this appearance of hybrid regularities in the construction of signification. And this, I believe, also leads, perhaps, to another problem that is very evident in everyday discourse: the perception of cultural, social, and political processes as being in crisis. The notion of crisis seems to offer another matrix, to unfold an analogous, but divergent, face of the notion of the hybrid and its resonances with political strategies and discursive tensions. Perhaps it would be interesting to introduce an element of differentiation: Crisis appears as a "scene" in different senses of that word. In this scenic dimen-

sion, the notion of crisis would have its support in an "effect of meaning" caused by certain conditions of culture in the perception of a subject. This has to do with the perception of a vacuum, of a substantial fracture in the order of experience and of the imminence of the dissolution of that order, of its collapse. This notion of crisis refers me to crucial question, in spite of its apparent distance from Latin American political conditions. What is the condition—the political, strategic condition—of the subject? What are the resources for the re-creation of the meaning of a subject in a liminal culture whose orderings, processes of exchange, and regimes of reciprocities and solidarities find themselves submitted to mobile tensions and incessant transitions, and that therefore also offer mobile and varied "scenographies" in permanent abandon?

I would like to expand a little more on this question of the subject and its experience of dissolution of solidarities in societies in disintegration, in contrast, if there is one, to the subject and its experience of cultural hybridization. If crisis and hybridization are two moments with antagonistic political polarities, is there a fragile tension in this dualism that prevents the catastrophic passage from one to the other? Do hybrid cultures construct the order of their own scenification, the scenification of their provisional stability, of changing modalities of life under other forms of representation, of "perceptible" deployment? This dualism between crisis and hybridization, to me, seems to be at the center of a relevant political question. It is said that in conditions of the collective perception of crisis, there is an exacerbation of conservatism. The uncertainty and the anxiety experienced by the political classes and subjects in tension, faced with the vacuum of the dissolution of the networks of solidarity and symbolic exchange, provoke a return, a relapse to the most rigid and authoritarian regimes, including despotic and fascist ones, which preceded the crisis or which lie buried as potential regimes in weakened institutions. The dualism of crisis and hybridization would seem to suggest, as I pointed out before, two divergent outcomes for diverse collective subjects: a tension between the restoration of disciplinary fields or a relapse to more harshly instituted systems that encourage ultraradical movements that are inevitably conservative, on the one hand, and the invention of new fields marked as mobile, destined for greater flexibility, on the other. This second outcome is perhaps impossible, but the image of hybridization appears at least to suggest it.

*Piccini:* Radicals are conservative of what? Could you please explain this a bit more?

*Mier*: Conservative in the sense that radical movements tend to resolve the perceived tensions by struggling for regimes of maximum stability.

*Piccini*: I would like to add something to the already complex panorama of hybrid cultures in the present reorganization of cultural spaces. Now, Raymundo introduces the idea that there might be hybrid subjects located in certain planes of interstitial character. I wonder whether these figures arise on the contemporary scene as the result of the philosophies called postmodern—that is, do they become visible just because of a particular theoretical focus, or are they also constitutive features of the cultural scene at the end of the millennium? I have the impression that these hybridizations are characteristic of any cultural process in any historical period and that it is, above all, a theoretical perspective that permits us to distinguish the mixtures of cultures, of symbolic forms, or the processes of intertextuality. I agree, of course, that there is another factor that facilitates the full visibility of these new anthropological landscapes; I believe that the new audiovisual techniques intensify these processes—they confer upon them a new certainty at the same time that they permit us to distinguish, in a different way, the recomposition, articulation, and disarticulation of the cultural fields, the migration of symbolic meanings and forms from one field to another, from one message to another, in the signifying chains.

Now, in the particular, I'm interested in taking up the characteristically political aspects of the modern reorganization of cultural spaces, the new ties that are established between political systems and symbolic processes. In Néstor's book, there is an attempt at explaining the particular efficacy that neoconservative policies have acquired in our countries, an efficacy that has a special relevance to the topic of hybrid cultures and the new subjects of hybridization. I'm interested in a discussion about these things, especially because it's recently become intellectually fashionable to emphasize the so-called forms of resistance of the popular sectors in the face of mass media messages, or the variety of "readings" social groups can make of something, or the need to de-center the idea of a "verticality of power" in relation to new cultural technologies and political practices. No doubt these positions opened new paths for understanding the cultural life of groups and classes in our countries and also for reposing the problem of social conflicts and domination. But I feel it's necessary to remember, just in case we forgot, that along with the new utopias of democracy, we are witnessing new forms of domination, and that domination is central in order to understand the behavior of our political systems and the exercise

of cultural power. With respect to this, Néstor introduces an idea that is of great interest to me: the idea of "oblique powers" as a notion that serves to analyze the new exercise of social controls coming from the hybridization of cultures.

If the new rituals reorganize chaos by establishing certain kinds of social pacts between the members of a group or community; if they seek to establish new relations of complicity between the citizens and the government (which are now called, as in early sociology, relations of solidarity) just at the very moment when our societies are making possible, with the new projects of economic and political modernization, the ideal of an informed community, I wonder: What is the basis for the success of neoconservative politics? What relation do these policies have to the reorganization of the cultural field? What are the "oblique powers"? What are the new techniques for recruiting wide sectors of society?

There is much talk in current social theory of the appearance of a new individualism in modern democracies. The rhetoric of the individual at the end of the twentieth century is certainly not the one we inherited from the nineteenth century. We have to recognize that the new forms of retreat into private life and the consequent defense of "individual liberties" and the "consumer society" manifest a cultural transformation of major proportions and a substantive reorganization of rituals, symbolic forms, and social and political disciplines. In these changes, I believe that the development of communication technologies, and the power that these networks have to diagram new forms of daily life, occupies a central place: In the majority of cases, they involve domestic "terminals," networks that define the space of the family as the place of encounter with the new symbolic forms of modernity.

I'm interested in reconsidering all these things, situating the emergence of hybrid cultures, the generalized syncretisms, the technologies of domestic seclusion, the simultaneity of information and of cultural contacts in the frame of the new systems of control and domination in our societies.

*Canclini:* For me, what has given up the ghost is much clearer than the kind of society we are entering. In order to understand what has happened, I believe that we have to address centrally the transformations of symbolic markets or cultural structures. Lamentably, this is still almost always absent in analyses. For example, when one speaks about the loss of the credibility of political parties and of the low representativity of politicians, one alludes to matters like corruption and verticalism. No doubt, these must be taken



into account, but it seems to me that there are changes in the sociocultural structure of society that explain why certain forms of the development of domination or hegemony have entered into crisis and are being replaced by others.

I see one of the symptoms of this senility in the loss of pertinence of the traditional versus the modern distinction, or of the divisions among the institutional apparatuses dedicated to high, popular, and mass culture. In Mexico, there is the INBA [National Institute of Fine Arts], which concerns itself with the fine arts; then there are the organisms of popular culture, dedicated to indigenous education or the cultural promotion of ethnic and popular groups; and finally, there is a communicational apparatus, generally in the hands of private companies, but that still occupies a certain place in the political system. These three scenarios, or these three kinds of apparatuses, have been moving in different directions since the forties in Mexico.

In the postrevolutionary period, cultural policies aimed at some kind of integration of high culture, popular culture, and mass culture: This is what occurred with the *Vasconcelist* or *Cardenist* policies for the appropriation of popular culture. On the one hand, they incorporated popular culture in education, the murals, and the great monuments; on the other hand, they promoted the popularization of elite international culture in the schools and in popular and worker collectives. These attempts at integration, or reconciliation, under a national patrimony of the learned and the popular, began to weaken with *Alemanismo*. In 1947 and 1948, the National Indigenist Institute and the Institute of Fine Arts were created, along with a series of institutions that fragmented and segmented cultural development. This segmentation in Mexico resembled what happens in nearly all nations where high, popular, and mass cultural levels are separated. Through various processes, which I analyze in the book, however, this tri-partition of the cultural sphere practically does not exist anymore. It was always artificial, but now, due to crossings in which each of the systems appropriates elements of others, there is a fluid interconnection. This is recognized by the cultural organisms themselves when their most innovative leaders talk about how fine arts should appear on television or how popular culture benefits from the development of fine arts. Nevertheless, there are no institutional structures capable of grasping the hybridism of this intercultural reality. These kinds of phenomena demonstrate the confinement, the exhaustion, of a style of compartmentalization of state apparatuses and political conceptions with regard to culture.

Perhaps there is another newer, and more radical, issue here, though. I'm referring to the decline of the communicative strategies of traditional politics that have been centered in the written culture. Even those who seek to represent the popular sectors, such as the parties of the Left, still have a Gutenbergian conception: lots of books, lots of pamphlets, but an almost unanimous inability to intervene in the cultural industries. Neither the state nor the opposition parties have developed alternative policies appropriate to the rapid development of the cultural industries. What has happened is that the most imaginative private companies, with a high dependence on models from the United States, have expanded radio, television, and other cultural industries. They have occupied a communicative space that is now clearly hegemonic, as much for the number of people it reaches as for the kinds of effects it has on communication structures and social organization. It seems to me that we're barely beginning to take account of the displacement of the state as well as the opposition parties and other traditional forms of doing politics, such as unions, by this cultural reorganization. A key to this loss of credibility, of influence, of the summoning capacity of traditional political actors, is found in their inability to insert themselves into the present structures of communication. To promote leftist, progressive, or popular politics this late in the twentieth century requires the elaboration of absolutely different communicative strategies. I see only small and beginning steps in this direction in some experiences of the Brazilian PT [Workers Party], which has done interesting work on radio and television, or the Vote-NO campaign against Pinochet in Chile, where the opposition used advertising and mass-marketing techniques with very good results. Aside from this, I find that what almost always happens when the intellectuals or "progressives" try to use the cultural industries is, as Fatima Fernández said not long ago, that instead of making cultural television, we make televised culture; instead of making political communication, we transfer structures of political thought and communication that were formed in print culture to the mass media. Thus, from the start, we place ourselves in a situation of ineffectiveness, of inability to intervene in those systems.

There is another, more complicated issue. I'm thinking about the new kinds of mechanisms that these communicative restructurings have created. A little while ago, I read a book by Paul Virilio that speaks about different stages in the development of war. It refers to modern war as a basically communicative war, where performance takes place at long-distance and where there is practically no intervention through land attacks. In the Gulf War, there was performance at a distance by the bombardiers, guided

by computer systems, and there were practically no body-to-body conflicts as in traditional wars. This performance at a distance, through communicative exchanges and the consequent concealment of what is taking place in these very concentrated communicative spaces, represents a new contemporary development with a high concentration of communicative powers in the hands of specialists with a very high technological background, who in turn accompany their *performance* (I deliberately say performance instead of *action*) with mechanisms of simulation of informational democratization and the possibilities of participation. When we read the newspaper or watch television, which, to a great degree, involves operations of simulacra, we are confronted with this tension between the most radical concentration of information and communication that has existed in history and the simulation that the new technologies permit the realization of an amply extended participation by the public. This is the reorganization we are asking ourselves about.

*Zires*: I believe that what you're saying, Néstor, also yields a new perspective on the political problematic of culture in the present situation. You began by speaking about some initiatives of political parties of the Left to insert themselves in the contemporary political-cultural processes, and you mentioned the problems that they have had relocating themselves in a new cultural context. I would like to connect this with something you point out in your book that seems very interesting to me. You say there that we are witnessing a reordering of the public and the private spheres, the creation of a new urban culture that, we could say, is expanding rapidly in contemporary societies in Latin America, and a new role within these societies for communications technologies. All of this modifies the political-cultural order so that the parties don't know how to insert themselves in it anymore, which is due, I believe, to a too-narrow conception of power politics, as well as of the field of communication and culture.

On the other hand, it seems to me that we can learn from what is going on now: the war in the Persian Gulf. Here is something that calls our attention to cultural politics, or, better yet, the present communicative politics. Until now, the media has tried to represent the defeat of socialism or the breakup of the socialist bloc as the victory of democracy and implicitly as the victory of the North American system. Recently, we witnessed an apparent act of spectacular information democracy, which could be better classified as an invasion of images by CNN, the company that has most concentrated the power of information in this communicative war, as you

were pointing out. Now then, this invasion of images that has been so overwhelming leads me to wonder whether it has not also provoked people to begin to doubt precisely the simulacrum of information democracy and participation in current communication. For me, the protests against the war suggest this last possibility.

*Mier:* I wonder if the idea of credibility isn't itself at a crossroads, if we aren't seeing a transformation in the modalities of the construction of truth. I'm going to venture what may seem like a peculiar hypothesis: I wonder if the contemporary systems for the institutional production of knowledge, instead of improving the relation between knowledge and ethics or, in Habermas's words, between conditions of truth and truthfulness, which previously seemed more clear, have produced, rather, a separation of these. The ethical force of truth has completely dissipated, as has the cognitive capacity of ethics. The knowledge produced by specialized institutions has ceased to be an ethical problem in itself. There is only a problem with regard to its instrumentality, its practical dimension. This unarticulated duality of the dimensions of truth and truthfulness seems to project itself into the political sphere, particularly if we consider the contemporary modalities of the political representativity that is at the base of the terrible bureaucratization of the machinery of government. The problem of political representativity used to constitute, we could say, a modality of articulation between the collective regimes of the social construction of truth and those of truthfulness. In our enormous government bureaucracies, this no longer has any meaning.

The basis of political strategy seems to be drastically modified. If I know that the representative of my district not only does not represent me but that he or she absolutely ignores my existence, and that this condition is irreversible, which is as true for public administration as for cultural politics, there is no ethical reflexivity in the conditions of representation. A phenomenon pointed out in much current social thought is accentuated and disseminated: the political efficacy of specularity—politics as spectacle, life as spectacle, including the paradox of privacy as spectacle, the publicity of the private, the secrecy of the residues of the public in the private. The exploitation of visibility as a rhetoric that influences the patterns of cultural production seems to be becoming more frequent, a rhetorical primacy of visibility supported by the artificiality of the dualism between truth and truthfulness. Artistic production is completely inscribed in this logic, sometimes in order to sustain it, sometimes in order to degrade its efficacy. Aesthetics gets mixed up with this process that compromises ethics and truth in order to dissolve, it seems to me, its own equivocal position in our societies.

*Piccini:* I'd like to add something with respect to the emergence of a new aesthetic of war and the weight of the audiovisual cultures and information on aesthetics and ethics in our societies. There is no doubt that we are witnessing the maximum concentration of cultural powers, understanding by this the concentration of electronic circuits and effects; with this, we are witnessing, at the same time, the maximum expansion of the visible real or of the visibility of the real. I believe that this is a problem of some importance and that it opens the way to other problems in the fields of culture and cultural politics. As we all know, the forces of the Left in different countries of the continent, those represented by movements or parties as well as those active in intellectual work, engaged in a prolonged battle for what was then called, under the aegis of the United Nations, a New International Information Order. (I hesitate to recall here that Bush anticipates with the end of the Persian Gulf War the appearance of a New World Order.) That battle to balance the weight of those who did the informing with the right to information of the "underdeveloped" peoples and to see to the equitable distribution of communication resources proved to be, as we all know, yet another failure of the many struggles waged to defend the right of the oppressed to speak, to opinion, or simply, as the constitution guarantees, to the free expression of ideas.

I believe that one of the reasons for the failure can now be seen clearly. I'll discard, for the moment, a structural analysis of our countries, which would show how they lack the political and economic conditions to make "the right to information" a reality due to the absence of real democracy, the constant abuse of power, the concentration of wealth, and the increasing marginalization of vast sectors of the population. I want to stress, beyond these conditions that define the projects for "the modernization of backwardness," as someone has called them appropriately, other aspects of the new paradoxical logics of the audiovisual cultures. The electronic concentration has produced, against all expectations, the most complete experience of information ever recorded. Societies were never so "informed" as they currently are. It is then necessary to ask how this information is given, what are the new forms of censorship, institutional and rhetorical, that act to reduce the visible real through political manipulation, or what is more complicated, through a specific *take*, that is, through the typical technical conditionings the camera allows. What is certain is that we live in overinformed societies in which it is difficult even to disqualify, as we used to do routinely, the control of news by private corporations. Such control exists, but in the present conditions of electronic expansion and of the rules of communicative exchange that this expansion and its networks prefigure, I

wonder how a politics of the "redistribution" of the audiovisual space could be imagined? What would it mean, in these regimes that place "everything" before our eyes and that even change wars of destruction into an aesthetic sign, to conceive of the "democratization of culture" or of dialogue between social groups. I believe that the situation is very complex.

*Canclini*: I'd like to note a slight discrepancy with what Raymundo was saying. Although the general line of his analysis is very good, especially on the question of the differentiation of transparency and visibility, which I find to be very pertinent, there persist in Latin America, and notoriously in Mexico, forms of cultural development that we can call traditional for which the distinction between truth and truthfulness continues to be very important. The concern that political parties should represent us continues to be significant, and I think that the case of the PRD [the leftist electoral coalition built around Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas] in Mexico is an example of that. One could, from a postmodern perspective, view with amazement the fact that the dispute over electoral fraud still continues to be located at the center of the political struggle, but in fact this is what happens and probably will continue to happen for a long time in Mexico. For the peasants, and even for urban sectors, in Michoacán or Guerrero, who have been taking over the municipal offices and mounting very energetic political actions in defense of an electoral result that they want to coincide with the truth, with reality, to belong to the category of truth, it seems to me that certain parameters of the epistemology of traditional politics continue to be in effect.

I want to insist on this in order to avoid the risk of substituting the modern with the postmodern or the traditional with the modern. We live in a complex situation in which different temporalities coexist and in which, for vast sectors of the Mexican population, these problems of truth, truthfulness, transparency, and so on, continue to be of the utmost importance. This does not mean that even these "traditional" processes cannot be studied in terms of a theory of verisimilitude, with a degree of problematization that does not correspond with the precise political articulation the local actors make of them. But in any case, given the persistence and the central place of the political struggle in Mexico, they are modern, and even postmodern, processes, so I believe we need to be careful with these problems of political theory, like representativity and credibility.

This situates us not only before the coexistence of various historical temporalities, but before problems of scale that we still don't know how to confront very well. What is visible as a political fact for the peasants of Michoacán, so that they take over the mayor's office and demand that in

their town of two thousand inhabitants the electoral results be respected, has apparently very little to do with the war in the Persian Gulf or with the big decisions of the Mexican government concerning the Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada. Nevertheless, one could think that, on very different levels, these facts are interconnected. And this is not simply a matter of articulating different levels of politics but rather of seeing at each level how the conditions of social action are governed by different dynamics and logics.

*Mier:* Néstor's observation is very interesting. The democracies Néstor is speaking about are reminiscences of other systems. I don't know whether to call them reminiscences or hybrid cultures. It's difficult, however, to call these complex systems of reciprocity and collective actions democracies. The sit-ins and demonstrations in Michoacán to protest the election results conflict with the canonical representations of what has become the almost cinematographic parliamentarianism of the Western democracies, such as the United States, Germany, and France. Compared to these, local processes of collective action, such as the sit-ins, seem like violence bordering on barbarism. Maybe what we're seeing is the exercise of political practices arising out of the tensions of hybridization in our decidedly heterogeneous cultures. One could speak of the displacement of the notion of democracy toward direct action, toward the assumption of a collective responsibility for innovation or normative reproduction, and an abrogation of specularity as a means of political control.

*Zires:* Considering everything that's been said, I think that it's a question of the coexistence of different political logics, logics of representativity along with the logic of the spectacle. I believe that this is happening not only in Mexico and Latin America but also in the so-called modern democracies such as those in Europe. I'm thinking about Spain, for example. Today, I read in the paper that a new Spanish newspaper has been established, whose main purpose is to counteract the dominant media slant on the Gulf War and to contribute to peace. Side by side with this phenomenon, we see protests all over the world against the war and against the present information system. For me, these protests demonstrate a series of contradictions between the respective logics of visibility and truth, of spectacle and informational representativity. Despite the great visibility of the war, despite the enormous quantity of information about what is taking place in the Gulf, the people are rebelling, or rather, *because* of this they're rebelling. On the one hand, there are pacifist interests of certain sectors of the population that do

not see themselves being listened to or represented by the media chains. On the other hand, the logic of spectacle and hyperrealism is functioning so perfectly or has arrived at such an extreme that it goes beyond the notion of the visible generally accepted by the public, by the spectator, so that he or she rejects it and then applies the logic of truth and representativity.

I believe that this also deserves to be examined with more care. It is clear that the way in which information is interpreted in the case of the war, as well as in other situations, is not homogeneous. The way in which the logics of verisimilitude and truth interact varies in different social groups and in different social contexts.

*Piccini:* I'd like to synthesize a little of what we've been saying. I continue with my obsessions. Something that seems central to me is the increase in the volume of information and disinformation people experience every day. A little while ago, some friends were telling me that, confused by the news reports of the Gulf War they were watching on television or reading in the national newspapers, they decided to buy some European newspapers in order to get a better picture of what was going on. The surprising thing was that this new supply of reports and facts didn't help them understand the conflict or its underlying causes any better, beyond the generalities about it we all share to one degree or another. It seems that we are undergoing a serious crisis of the comprehension of reality—or that reality itself has become particularly complex—and also a crisis of belief. I understand that this is a general phenomenon in Western countries that doubtlessly becomes more acute in our own. But it is clear that we are now before a cultural paradox of massive proportions: ever-greater levels and volume of information, and ever-diminished levels of credibility. Collective beliefs have been fatally wounded. We need to determine what is the new kind of contact with reality (in quotation marks) that is gestating with the new cultures of complete visibility.



