

Fingering the Fringes of the Global Façade:
Towards a Mobilization of Latin American Hybridity

Fredric Jameson's reading of the Bonaventure Hotel in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* – that “kind of miniature city” that “ideally ought not to have entrances at all” (40) – is a metaphor which lucidly accounts for the movements that characterize globalization. While Jameson observes that it is “a transportation machine which becomes the allegorical signifier of that old promenade we are no longer allowed to conduct on our own” (42), his reading directs our attention to such devices, giving us an outside perspective from which we can, at the very least, catch a glimpse of the temporal and spatial grid that enshrouds this postmodern age. Besides the mechanized veins that pump people through this ever-expanding global organism, what is intriguing and *telling* about Jameson's metaphor is the special reflexive skin that marks its bounds; this special outer skin is an illustrative metaphor when considering Néstor García Canclini's theory of the hybrid.

García Canclini's hybridity is a position that swims somewhere in between a tradition that is not yet gone, and a modernity that has not yet arrived. As Jameson points out in “Culture and Finance Capital,” capitalism, rather than progressing in a linear fashion, moves in a spiral away from its centre, “mutat[ing] into a larger sphere of activity and a wider field of penetration, of control, investment and transformation” (139) along this spiraling course (this is a movement that is captured quite well, for example, on the cover of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*). García Canclini's Latin-America is one which has not yet become fully absorbed and digested by the expanding vortex of late capitalism, but, since the 1980's, this later stage is becoming increasingly apparent, and

Latin-American consumers are being teased by its shiny and enticing contours. When Jameson speaks of the Bonaventure, he explains that the reflexive exterior prevents one from seeing the hotel itself; all that can be seen upon its skin are the “distorted images of everything that surrounds it” (42). García Canclini’s hybrid, then, is *precisely* this distorted reflection that occurs on the faces (or fringes) of the impending stage of late capitalism. The distorted reflection of which Jameson speaks is *hybridity*. García Canclini’s writing, which comes from, and whose object is, a specific locality, is necessarily the type of writing that is concerned with presenting a city that is situated outside of the global structure in a distorted and strange way upon its special skin.

If Jameson’s and García Canclini’s models are amenable in this fashion, it would be useful to proceed by analysing the ways in which García Canclini’s propositions might relate to the inner functionings of the model which Jameson has outlined. What García Canclini proposes in *Consumers and Citizens* is that, rather than pumping capital into historical-territorial culture, Latin-American nations must implement policies and provide capital for developments in mass media and information technologies. In this age of deterritorialization, historical-territorial culture is not amenable to those mechanical promenades that map out the interior of the new global structure. It is, rather, mass media and information technologies that are the means of identity production (a politicized identity that is, in García Canclini’s writing, equated with the idea of citizenship), and it is these two circuits, therefore, that act as the elevators and escalators that move subjects through the mechanized global narrative. To foster the development of such technologies in the nation-state is to *enter* into the global community rather than to be *consumed* by it; *to own, operate, and deploy messages over these now crucial technologies is to build new*

transportation machines, and to surround them with new, and most importantly, distinct, scenery.

What is most important about Jameson's Bonaventure is its potential status as a flagship that signals the need for the theory and political mobilization that would clear the reflexive glass that surrounds the global organism; it is this type of theorization and action that will allow the rays of local cultural production to shine through. The importance of this has everything to do with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's notion of the commons, and we will get to that later on.

Beyond the Binary: The Global and / in / is the Local

As Hardt and Negri stress in their encyclopaedic study of the origins and contemporary constitution of Empire, there is no longer an "outside" to global society. While an outside is essential to the survival of capital, Hardt and Negri argue that "in the process of capitalization *the outside is internalized*" (226), eliminating the necessary space for the realization of surplus value. It would seem, then, in a world in which the boundaries and functions of the nation-state have become superficial at best, that capital has reached the crisis that was impending since its genesis.

Hardt and Negri's notion of power is amenable to Jameson's metaphor for the postmodern, and it is by understanding the dynamics of this special form of power that we can come to grasp the persistence of capital in spite of the lack of frontier-space. Rather than describing a global society in which power is centralized, Hardt and Negri argue that there is no centre to Empire. We no longer live in a disciplinary society where the parameters of mental and physical propriety are sanctioned by regulatory apparatuses.

We have shifted from that old Disciplinary Society to the Society of Control, a society in which “mechanisms of command” are “ever more imminent to the social field,” where, in contrast to discipline, “control extends well outside the structured sites of social institutions through flexible and fluctuating networks” (23).

This is that same postmodern space that Jameson speaks. The densely controlled space in which it is not only elevators and escalators that are configured in order to signify a subject’s experiences, but all of the empty space itself feels absolutely packed due to a “constant busyness” (14). Emptiness in such a space is “an element within which you yourself are immersed, without any of that distance which formerly enabled the perception or perspective of volume. You are in this hyperspace up to your eyes and body” (43). The Bonaventure is an illustration of that “immanent social field” which Hardt and Negri claim characterizes the present state of power relations.

García Canclini’s notion of power is derived from that same Michel Foucault whom Hardt and Negri employed via Deleuze: power, for García Canclini, can no longer be seen as a force that is deployed from dominant to dominated. As he explains in *Consumers and Citizens*, power should be read as “decentred” and “multidetermined” (142). Most importantly, as García Canclini is explaining his notion of power, he states that “conflicts among different and unequal actors are processed within the (reversible and negotiated) order established by institutions and more or less institutionalized everyday structures of interaction” (143). While García Canclini’s use of the terminology of discipline– “institutions”– would seem to suggest that he is still speaking in terms of that old mode of power, he is careful to modify the traditional notion of the institution by subsuming everyday interactions under the rubric of things institutionalized. For all three

thinkers, then, institutions operate through imminence – one is always already institutionalized in the society of control.

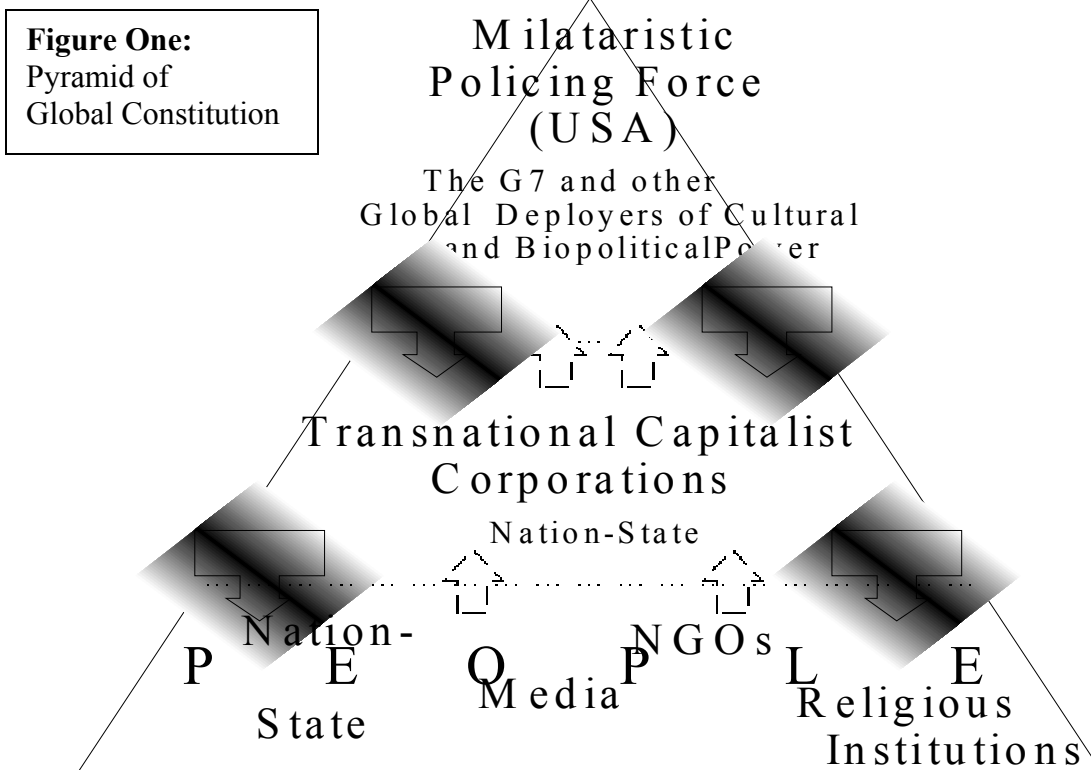
If García Canclini's hybrid is a figure that is created through its distorted reflection on the *outer* skin of the Bonaventure, how are we to conceive of the hybrid as being *inside* – a necessary concern when considering a society that operates without an outside. When Jameson speaks of the reflexive exterior of the Bonaventure, he states that “it is not even an exterior” as “you cannot see the hotel itself, but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it” (42). Incomplete integration in the stage of late capitalism, then, does not suggest non-participation within a system of immanence. It is crucial to recognize Jameson's qualification that there is no exterior to the Bonaventure. The hotel operates without parameters; the walls cannot be seen from the outside, and those that stand outside, seemingly signalling their status of non-integration, are still captured within the immanent reins of the structure. Although they are not, by means of the mechanically signifying promenades, structured at the innermost depths of the Bonaventure, the narratives that fall “outside” of the Bonaventure are still *inside* of this metaphor for the global as they are structured by its invisible and, therefore, virtually non-existent parameters. Power is deterritorialized; it operates outside of place, within the grand and boundless space of immanence.

Latin America and the Horizontal Hierarchy

If we are to think of power in terms of inequality across a globe that Hardt and Negri claim operates by means of a *horizontal* plane of immanence, in order to understand the unequal power relations which place Latin-Americans in a paradoxically

subordinate position on this horizontal plane, it might be helpful to turn to Hardt and Negri's "pyramid of global constitution" (Figure One). This pyramid represents the entirety of the global – it has no outside – and it provides a semi-coherent structure for the unequal power relations that characterize the constitution of Empire. It is separated into three interrelated tiers, where, in the first tier, the pinnacle is occupied solely by the hegemonic militaristic policing force of the United States. The first tier broadens to include the G-7 as the regulatory body that governs international exchanges and, finally, in this tier there also exists a set of associations which "deploy cultural and biopolitical power on a global level" (310). The second tier broadens to include transnational capitalist corporations, below which are the nation-states who act as filters and regulators. Nation-states essentially play the role of mediators, "distribut[ing] the flows of wealth to and from the global,"(310) and policing their own populations. Finally, on the broadest third tier, the multitude is represented as a people through organizations such as the nation-state, the media, religious institutions, and NGOs (311-313).

Although Latin-America is fully integrated within this global structure, their subordinate positioning within the global network is illustrated in quite a lucid fashion by this model. Latin-America completely lacks representation on the first tier. The first level of *active* integration for Latin-Americans within this global pyramid is at the second, *intermediary* level of the nation-state. This position, it is crucial to realize, is not so much one of action as it is simply a passive position through which wealth and juridical order are filtered.



It is the third tier that is most important to García Canclini; this is the tier where the multitude is represented as a people by the nation-state and media. García Canclini's project is to have Latin-American nation-states enact policy that will ensure that the multitude is accurately represented as a people through their own cultural productions. As Hardt and Negri articulate, "only a space that is animated by subjective circulation, and only a space that is defined by the irrepressible movements (legal or clandestine) of individuals and groups can be real" (362). They also make the important distinction between "emancipation," which is the entrance of otherwise non-represented nations and peoples within the hierarchies of the society of control, and "liberation," which is characterized by the destruction of boundaries and the "reappropriation of space" (363). Liberation empowers the multitude as it allows this otherwise disregarded mass to actively "determine the global circulation and mixture of individuals and populations"

(363). García Canclini's project is promising precisely because it is one of liberation; it is an assertion that the present bounds that characterize contemporary Latin-American media need to be broken down, and that this space must be reappropriated – it must be used as a site for different articulations: the articulations of the multitude. At the heart of García Canclini's propositions, it is crucial to realize, is a strong anti-capitalist sentiment; liberation has always been central to the discourses that speak of the fetters that bind the multitude, and it is precisely these fetters which García Canclini wishes to throw off.

This is where a turn to Hardt and Negri's notion of the commons would be appropriate. In the process of maintaining its stronghold, "capitalism sets in motion a cycle of private reappropriation of public goods: the expropriation of what is common" (301). A new turn in this spiral, they point out, has been the privatization of energy and communication services. García Canclini's work has been to foreground the impact that this new turn has been having upon the Latin-American public – the impact of the immanent relation between the public and the commons being replaced by the transcendent power of private property. The commons of which Hardt and Negri speak is achieved as the incarnation, production, and liberation of the multitude. Communication and information networks constitute a means of "constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities" more effectively than ever. These are the common lines which García Canclini is working towards emancipating.

García Canclini, with his portrayal of the current trends in Mexico, makes a strong case for the necessity of moving beyond historical-territorial culture, into the terrain of information technology, for the purposes of articulating the commons. The trend of urban sprawl is an important consideration in García Canclini's work. As he

points out, there are more than 263,000 indigenous Mexicans who belong to more than 30 ethnic groups who each have different languages. He aptly adds that “one does not have to be an indigenous migrant to lose touch with one’s language or have only a fragmented experience of the city” because the Mexican territory, which only a century ago was 9.1 km², is now over one hundred times bigger (51). Within this city space, the surveys that García Canclini conducted show that there was an extremely low use of public cultural infrastructure – whether to go to the movies, attend a concert, or partake in the offerings of a festival. As García Canclini notes, “territorial expansion and massification of the city, which reduced interneighbourhood interaction, took place simultaneously with the reinvention of social and cultural bonds via radio and television” (53).

The retreat from public to private space leads to the bombardment of the subject by mass media – identities circulate in the diffused multimedia space of communication technologies. The individual *subject* becomes the *object* in the home, and traditional culture – museums and other such venues of traditional culture – are isolated within the centre of a city that has physically moved away from its centre through urban sprawl. The individual commutes to the city by means of personal transportation, and leaves the city once the workday is completed. There is no venue for public communicative interaction.

Latin-American peoples hardly go out to the cinema, or numerous other public sites in order to consume cultural products. In order for products of national culture to succeed economically they must be multimedia and multicontextual productions – they cannot simply rely on theatre ticket sales, but also satellite and cable TV, and video rental outlets – each system being structured transnationally (García Canclini 102). These multicontextual reproductions– video and television in particular in a Mexico that is

characterized by urban sprawl, are the most effective mediums to reach the Latin-American public.

Latin America, in 1993, was in tenth place world-wide as an importer of US films. Until a few years ago, Latin-America had protected national screen-time, ensuring that 50% of screen-time would be given to nationally-produced cinema. Cinema, however, has become a non-issue, as attendance declined by 50% in six years – from 1985-1991. What occurred in these years was a shift from public, cinematic viewing, to the private viewing of television and videos. In this vein, as García Canclini notes, the United States rules the market as the majority of stock in video stores is American – 70-90%. (102), and juxtaposing another statistic that he provides – in the same years of 1985-1991 that saw a drop in 50% attendance to theatres in Latin-America, income from the rental and sale of American videos tripled (110).

García Canclini delineates some of the work that has been done by Latin-American governments in recent years to assist cultural production and dissemination in a national context. He cites accords that have been signed to facilitate the exchange of books, and works of art; mutual co-operation programs; book collections; and Latin-American and Carribean Culture Houses. He criticizes all of these measures as they are limited to the fields of written culture and “classical” plastic arts and music (128-131). Through such actions, Latin-American governments may be helping such mediums to tread water in the midst of the flood of global culture, but they are not investing money in the mediums which would reach the masses. Statistics gathered by the Working Group on Cultural Policies of the Latin-American Social Science Council suggest that the audience for high culture is only comprised of about ten percent of the population (129). On the

flipside of this seemingly ineffectual funding strategy, government institutions that provided subsidies for film production in Latin-America have stopped providing capital for film. Beyond this, radio and television stations have been privatized, leaving mostly US-based transnational private corporations to head the most profitable and influential communications media (133, 155).

The US also owns most of the “communication highways” that structure the paths of cultural communication. Turner Communications, which owns Multivision, distributes the films, cartoons and news in most Latin-American countries. Brazil is the only Latin-American country that has state policies for investment in this sector of high-end research. As Gordon Wilson argues, “knowledge is embodied in technology: in the decisions about what constitutes the problems that technology might solve; in the choice of, design of, and actual hardware that is developed; and in the eventual use of that hardware” (59).

The Accentuated Importance of the Filter

At first glance, the proposition of looking towards the nation-state as the means of local empowerment, considering the reduced functions and effectiveness of the nation-state in the globalized world, might seem ineffectual. After all, as mentioned above, Hardt and Negri propose that the nation-state operates *within* this global structure and, fundamentally, its function has been reduced to that of a filter. When it is considered, however, that the filter operates in both directions, not only distributing imperatives and materials that are assigned from above, but also articulating the multitude as a people in the opposite direction, García Canclini’s propositions are, in fact, quite astute.

García Canclini's propositions for the effective cultural functioning of the nation-state can be thought of in terms of space, time, and capital. With regards to *space*, he stresses that common Latin-American markets which promote the circulation of locally produced books, film, television, and videos must be created. Quotas for minimum screen and air *time* of locally produced media must be instituted. Finally, *capital* must be provided for the creation of a Latin American Fund for Audiovisual Production and Diffusion (132). García Canclini, it seems, recognizes the imagined nature of community, and he also recognizes that global flows ultimately pass through the nation-state filter. His important conclusions come in the form of suggested policy; and his most important recognition is that the direction of flows through the nation-state filter can be reversed. This local empowerment functions, first, at the level of production, as a new space of production is created with the provision of government capital. Once a "spatial" venue is established, the "temporal" imperative of minimum screen time becomes an important qualification as it completes the circuit, so to speak, ensuring that the images produced are given a venue for their consumption. The fruition of such a project would enact the possibilities that García Canclini suggested from the beginning of his project in *Consumers and Citizens*; that "consumption can be a site of cognitive value; it can be good for thinking and acting in a meaningful way that renews social life" (47). Thus, what we have finally arrived at through García Canclini and other theorists who seriously consider the postmodern question, is the infiltration of alternative material for consumption into the Bonaventure. If such policy were to be implemented, we would see the mechanized narratives begin to shift, and we would witness a changing of scenery around the newly oriented elevators and escalators that move us through our present age.

The Cultural Pyramid

García Canclini argues that the construction of identity, a narrative that is continually being reproduced *with the collaboration of others* should be seen as a coproduction – but, it is a coproduction that is undergone under unequal conditions (2001: 95). Garcia Canclini’s demarcation of three circuits for the production of identity, which can basically be seen as the cultural infrastructure of a nation, is extremely important in considering how the Latin-American multitude might be able to articulate itself within the new global arena:

i) The first circuit that Garcia-Canclini outlines is the “space of *historical-territorial culture*.” This is a space that is left virtually untouched by globalization processes as it is a territorial space rather than the other characteristically deterritorialized media circuits. It is characterized by peasant and folkloric culture.

ii) The second circuit is *mass media*. This circuit reaches majorities through television, radio, and video. While peripheral countries like Mexico and Brazil have the technological and economic resources to produce nationality through the mass media circuit, they have become dependent on US production of mass media.

iii). The third circuit is *information technologies* comprised of satellites, computers, and fiber-optic networks. These technologies are linked to decision-making and/in the expansion of entertainment. The majority of these technologies are owned by the US. (95-96)

If we are to think of these circuits in terms of the global structure, it becomes clear that, alongside the pyramidal structure that Hardt and Negri mapped in order to delineate the unequal power relations that occur within Empire, cultural production can also be seen in terms of a pyramid: the ownership of information technologies (iii) places one at the apex of the pyramid, giving one the freedom to deploy messages via mass media (ii).

Historical-territorial culture (i), the cultural sector which is receiving the financial

attention of the Latin-American government, and which does not operate by means of information technology, is subordinate and ineffectual due to its invisibility – its lack of integration within the global structure through which culture is consumed. We may wish to remember, at this point, the dilemma which shopkeepers faced in the Bonaventure: in spite of the addition of directional aids to help people locate the shops that were dispersed around the hotel, away from the elevators and escalators that structure the interior of the Bonaventure, “nobody could ever find these stores.” (43). The transportation machines in the Bonaventure act as organized and reified routes in an otherwise disorganized and confusing space. In an age of urban sprawl, Mexicans enter and leave the industrial centre by means of paved expressways, and consume cultural products in terms of structured electronic routes. Territorial culture is lost somewhere in the confusion of the city, isolated from the reliable routes of mass cultural communication. Consumption *can* be good for thinking, but in order for this to be so, it is good to think about the lines that structure consumption. These lines need to remain as public property as they are a means to articulate that which is common to the multitude – the multitude as commons.

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