

"Logics of Antagonism, of Difference, and of the Limit: Questions of Cultural Identity in Latin American Cultural Studies"

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In a world where "older" social structures, national in scope, such as industrial labor market, social welfare institutions, and trade unions, are being displaced by global information and communication structures, the notion of a unified, homogeneous identity cannot survive "intact" and has indeed been called into question. Clearly, Latin America could not remain alien to these global social changes. Yet the question arises as to what implications these dislocations entail for Latin American identities. What kind of cultural identity can emerge or has emerged amidst the social, political, and cultural changes that took place in these societies in the last two decades? In this paper, I shall answer this question by focusing on three different approaches that might be or have been applied successfully to Latin American identities. First, I shall examine Ernesto Laclau's theorization of identity. Laclau's individual work as well as his collaborative work with Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy (1985), has significantly contributed to British and American cultural studies supplying a theoretical framework for questions of identity, race, ethnicity, and gender.² For the relevance of Laclau's theoretical work to the theorization of new Latin American identities, and because Laclau, a social and political theorist who now teaches in Great Britain and frequently lectures in the United States, is originally from Argentina (where he grew up, studied, and started his teaching activities), I shall address his work within the context of my presentation. Subsequently, I shall focus on two notions which emerge as two different although related responses to the specificity of Latin American identities: the notion of "hybridity" as discussed by Néstor García Canclini, an Argentinian anthropologist based in Mexico, and the notion of "border crossing" as discussed by the Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa as well as by the American critic D. Emily Hicks.

I. Is It Possible To Establish Identity Without Exclusion? The Logic of Antagonism and the "Constitutive Outside"

Aligning himself with poststructuralism, Laclau acknowledges the discursive nature of the social. Moreover, Laclau asserts that perhaps one of the most serious limitations of sociological theories is their "objectivism," their tendency to regard the social as a finished, closed, fully constituted order. By contrast, Laclau declares the "impossibility of the social" conceived of as an absolute, completed objectivity. For him, the social is not a "positive" entity that can be called simply "itself" but a relational entity, which emerges only in and through its relation to an "outside." Within this context, Laclau appropriates Derrida's notion of "constitutive outside" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 127-34, Laclau 1990: 17-26, Mouffe 1993: 2). But let's examine in detail Laclau's appropriation of this notion in relation to the Western philosophical tradition.

Since Aristotle, there has been a clear distinction between essence and accident. Essence has been regarded as the set of properties or features of an object that we identify when we provide a complete and accurate definition of that object. Accident, by contrast, has been used to refer to the properties, features, or events that characterize an object but whose presence or occurrence is not viewed as necessary for the constitution of the object as-such. Moreover, essence has always been considered as necessarily exposed to the possibility of accident, although accident as a property has never been named among the properties of essence. On this traditional essence-accident relationship, Laclau, following Derrida, operates something like a figure-field switch. As a result of this procedure, the accidental or "outside" becomes the necessary condition of possibility for the existence of the object as-such. Accordingly, an object will always have a "special" accident ("outside") "that will be the limit to its own as-such and that will constitute it as a particular kind" of object (Staten 16). Thus, as opposed to Hegel, who posits a "provisional" "outside" that is merely present to be reclaimed by the inside, Laclau postulates the existence of a "true" "outside," which cannot be absorbed in any *Aufhebung* or higher unity.³ Furthermore, because a particular "outside" is necessary for a given kind of entity to emerge, the "outside" is no longer to be regarded as accidental and, instead, it may be called "constitutive."

However, it may happen that a particular "outside," which Laclau has until now considered only under the mode of difference, begins to be perceived as negating the entity's identity and questioning its very existence. From that moment onwards, the relation between the entity and its "constitutive outside" becomes the site of a struggle. The theoretical distinction between an entity and its "outside" leads therefore to a powerful principle of antagonism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 122-27, Laclau 1990: 5-17, Mouffe 1993: 3). Indeed the theorization of the "constitutive outside" plays a decisive role in the acknowledgment of an always possible conflict or division in the context of difference. Once it is accepted that there cannot be any entity without a "constitutive outside" that can always negate it, we will no longer attempt to create an order from which antagonism, conflict or division has allegedly been banished.

Hence, through the theorization of the "constitutive outside," Laclau makes at least three points.

First, the notion of the "constitutive outside" affirms difference as the very condition for the formation of the social, breaking thus with the myth of a "positive" entity which manages to remain impermeable to otherness. Indeed, this claim also applies for the political, which, too, becomes understood as necessarily constituted through differential relations.

Second, because Laclau's notion of the "constitutive outside" emphasizes the always present possibility that the differential relationship between entity and its "constitutive outside" turns into an antagonism, it proves fundamental for the understanding of the political. Thus, as opposed to the view that advocates for the elimination of conflict, struggle, or resistance from any "healthy" political space, Laclau celebrates antagonism as the very condition of the political and seeks to secure its perpetuity. Accordingly, rather than treating the "constitutive outside" as a potential agitator whose only goal is to disrupt an otherwise "harmonic" relationship, Laclau theorizes the "other" as a constitutive force whose primary function lies in maintaining alive an agon which should never be over. Indeed the relevance of Laclau's notion of antagonism has been acknowledged by diverse sectors, particularly by psychoanalysis and feminism. Thus, while Slavoj Žižek claims that real achievement of Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy is crystallized in the theorization of antagonism (1990: 249), Judith Butler, for her part, stresses the bearing of Laclau's category on feminist concerns insofar as the "grounds of politics ('universality,' 'equality,' 'the

subject of rights') have been constructed through unmarked racial and gender exclusions" (1994: 154).

Third, Laclau's highlighting of the "constitutive outside" that inhabits any entity amounts to asserting its contingency and radical historicity (1990: 19-23). Indeed it is precisely the contingent and historical character of the social and the political that accounts for the emergence of different antagonisms in both fields. Furthermore, as we will see later on, the recognition of the contingent character of the political is what allows a logic of hegemony to emerge, which, in turn, highlights the constant shifts of the terrain of struggle.⁴

Yet the question arises as to how we might envision the existence of any social or political formation in a framework where the social as well as the political are no longer theorized as a tight net of institutions or identities, with predetermined forms of link and logics of developments.⁵ In other words, if the "constitutive outside" always threatens the social as well as the political and precludes them from achieving full identity, how is it possible to conceptualize them? To answer this question we must turn to Laclau's theory of articulation.

II. Is There a Monopoly over the Signs? Articulation, Hegemony, and "Floating Signifiers"

A crucial feature of Laclau's theorization of the social (and the political) lies in his questioning of the myth of the "ready-made [social] world"--in a phrase taken from Hilary Putnam (1992: 123)--, according to which the social divides itself up into entities and institutions in one definite unique way. Following Derrida's denial of a "metaphysics of presence," Laclau rejects the idea of a social (or political) realm that is "present" in the sense of determining its own unique description. By contrast, in Laclau's view, if the social (as well as the political) fails in its attempt to constitute itself as a unique, objective order, it does exist at least as diverse "efforts" that carry out that constitution in a plurality of ways (1990: 214). Articulation is, for Laclau, the name of this effort. Through it, the social (as well as the political), understood as an agonistic and contingent changing field, momentarily stabilizes around certain "nodal points" or partial fixations that define one of its possible descriptions. Articulation is thus the name for the temporary arrest of a basically unsteady structure and becomes

"the primary ontological level" in Laclau's theorization of the social (1990: 184).

Perhaps the most relevant feature of Laclau's notion of articulation, as it appears in his early work, Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory (1977), is the fact that there are no necessary relations between the multiple elements that constitute an articulation. By contrast, Laclau stresses the dimension of contingency inherent in any articulation, for an articulation is always organized around certain configurations that cannot be predetermined (1990: 184). In other words, according to Laclau, no sign has a necessary, permanent belongingness--political, ideological, related to class, or of any other kind. In this way, Laclau's theorization of articulation leads to his "logic of hegemony," which he defines as a "logic of articulation and contingency" (Laclau 1977: 161, Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 85, Laclau 1990: 28).

Indeed the non-belongingness of signs is of great importance to the analysis of cultural identities, for it precludes the assumption that there are certain beliefs, concepts, ideas, discourses, strategies, or tactics that can be exclusively appropriated and articulated by certain cultural identities and not by others. To demonstrate that this is not so, Laclau discusses the discourse on nationalism. Thus, nationalism is, according to Laclau, a "floating signifier," which may be equally appropriated by different groups that respond to different class interests. In this sense, continues Laclau, it may be articulated in a feudal project, which attempts at maintaining a traditional order, or in a bourgeois project, which appeals to unity in an attempt at neutralizing class conflict (Laclau 1977: 160). Clearly, as Stuart Hall claims, Laclau's logic of hegemony or contingent articulation breaks radically with the Marxist logic of necessity, which assumes the necessary, intrinsic, transhistorical belongingness of ideological elements (1996b: 142). Against this logic of necessity, Laclau argues convincingly that because signs have no necessary belongingness to any one discourse, they may be disarticulated from one discourse, appropriated, and rearticulated into another discourse that might be oppositional to the former. Moreover, in the same way, there is no "intrinsically progressive" struggle; any struggle or antagonism, any resistance to inequality, like that of the "new social movements," for example, can equally well be articulated to the Right or to the Left.⁶ Hence, as Kobena Mercer puts it, no one has the "monopoly" over the signs we share (1992: 427). Once we accept the

constitutive ambivalence of the various elements that go to make up an articulation, we are in better shape to understand the constant struggles over the signs.

Indeed through Laclau's theorization of hegemony and articulation, we gain the awareness that in a world of "floating signifiers," where the same signs might be employed as a means of political resistance as well as for projects of domination, the social and the political can no longer be conceptualized as relatively static fields. Rigid categories cannot certainly account for the fluidity of these fields as well as for the possibility of the signs being articulated into a variety of political projects. Because the frame of analysis which Laclau applies to the social and the political is also applicable to the subject, we will now turn to the issue of the subject in Laclau's work.

III. Who decides What? A Hybridized Subject and the Logic of Equivalence

Laclau asserts that the subject is "constructed through language, as partial and metaphorical incorporation into a symbolic order" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 126). Yet Laclau explicitly rejects the conception of the subject as passively constructed by structures. In fact, although we can find a largely elaborated Althusserian theory of interpellation in his early work, Laclau distances himself from Althusser's theorization of the subject. He claims that Althusser's notion of interpellation leaves no room for considering the "construction of subjects from the point of view of the individuals receiving those interpellations" (1990: 210). Indeed it has been repeatedly argued that what is missing in Althusser's work is a theory of the mechanisms by which an individual identifies (or not) with the positions to which she is interpellated or summoned (Hall 1996a: 13-14). Yet how does Laclau theorize the subject as "constructed through language" without arriving at the same difficulty which Althusser failed to resolve, that is to say, without arriving at a view of the subject as passively constructed by structures?

Drawing on Lacan and Derrida, Laclau develops his theorization of the subject. According to Laclau, the subject is essentially lack. Because there is no identity, that is to say, there is nothing that the subject already is, acts of identification are required (Laclau 1990: 44, Mouffe 1988: 90).

Identification signals thus the acquisition of being through the assumption of different subject-positions (Laclau 1996a: 55). However, each position or structure to which the subject is interpellated or "summoned" entails a decision. And here Laclau clearly distances himself from the problems encountered by Althusser in his theorization of interpellation. Laclau argues that insofar as a structure is "constitutively undecidable, decisions are required that the structure (...) does not predetermine" (1996a: 57). These decisions signal thus the moment of the emergence of the subject as different from subject-positions. Consequently, Laclau's subject is not passively constructed by the structure or subject-position to which it is interpellated. Indeed, as Derrida summarizes Laclau's assertion, "the subject does not exist prior to the decision but when I decide I invent the subject. Every time I decide, if a decision is possible, I invent the who, and I decide who decides what; at this moment the question is not the who or the what but rather that of the decision, if there is such a thing" (1996: 84). Significantly in view of Laclau's articulation of Lacanian and Derridean theories, Laclau emphasizes that "the decision constituting the subject is one taken in conditions of insurmountable undecidability" (1996a: 57). Yet the question arises as to what function this Derridean undecidability fulfills in Laclau's theorization of the subject.

Laclau's point, like Derrida's, is that in every system (or structure) there is a moment, place, or element that the system cannot account for. No system possesses resources adequate to guarantee itself. Each system necessarily needs some external elements, which are "illegitimate" from the system's vantage point because they are not predetermined by it. In this sense, it may be claimed that any system will always contain a "fault" or "fissure" which gives rise to an intervention. And, for Laclau, politics begins with this "structural fault" and its consequent demand for participation. At issue in Laclau's theorization of the subject is the location of the political, which emerges, according to Laclau, as a result of a fissure in an otherwise settled system. Because of the fissure characteristic of any system, the subject is condemned to choose in a situation of undecidability, that is to say, in a situation for which there is no "right," predetermined answer. Consequently, the experience of undecidability implies the denial of our assurance that our choices are right and leaves us wondering, What if the "right" option is not that which I choose? What if it is neither--or both? The problem is that we have the tendency to "naturalize" our choices,

depriving them of their "constructed" character and endowing them with the moral conviction that they are the only ones that conform to the "natural" course of things. By contrast, Laclau calls attention to the processes that depoliticize choices by identifying them with nature. In other words, the fact that Laclau links the emergence of the subject to undecidability entails the recognition of the fact that what is going to make a decision possible is indeed something that is going to be repressed or excluded in favor of something that is going to be "naturalized." Once again, like the theorization of the "constitutive outside," Laclau's theorization of the subject stresses the role played by exclusion in the formation of identities.⁷

There are at least three significant corollaries to Laclau's theorization of the subject that I would like to highlight.

The first corollary has to do with the liberal notion of "consensus." If we transpose the issue of the decision made in conditions of undecidability from the level of the individual subject to that of the community or collective subject, and we place it within the liberal framework of consensus, we will be obliged to acknowledge the dimension of coercion implied in any decision made by consensus (1990: 172). Indeed consensus is only achieved at the cost of repressing those voices that negate it. Against the suppression or elimination of the "other" by the operation of consensus, Laclau argues for the necessity of giving the "repressed" voices a political outlet (Laclau 1990: 172, Mouffe 1993: 5). He calls for the proliferation of political spaces. In this respect, notions like "undecidability" and the "constitutive outside" become fundamental for a cultural politics, for they both acknowledge the presence of the "other."

The second corollary of Laclau's theorization of the subject is the emergence of a logic of equivalence. Thus, if identities are differential or relational, it is equally possible for collective subjects to constitute themselves as legitimate "differences" within a social field or/and to rearticulate its demands in a larger and inclusive chain of equivalence of democratic struggles (Laclau 1990: 235; Mouffe 1993: 18-19). As Mouffe puts it, "the progressive character of a struggle" depends "on its link to other struggles. The longer the chain of equivalences set up between the defense of the rights of one group and those of other groups, (...) the more difficult it will be to neutralize certain struggles" (1988: 100).⁸

The third corollary to Laclau's theorization of the subject is the emergence of a process of hybridization. Thus, if a collective subject inscribes its demands in a chain of equivalence of struggles, this will lead to an "unavoidable hybridization" of the collective identity. However, in Laclau's view, "hybridization does not necessarily mean decline through the loss of identity: it can also mean empowering existing identities through the opening of new possibilities" (1996b: 65).

Indeed the work of Laclau (and Mouffe) has opened up a new domain of analysis for cultural studies in relationship to issues of cultural identities, disclosing, through their theorization of the notions of articulation and hegemony, the ambivalence inherent to the construction of identities as well as the dimension of exclusion, coercion, or repression inherent in consensus and any decision which, made in conditions of structural undecidability, is nevertheless "naturalized." In this respect, Laclau clearly distances himself not only from Richard Rorty's notion of consensus but from Jürgen Habermas's ideal of an unconstrained communication, for Laclau, like Mouffe, believes that Rorty as well as Habermas sweep away, with their different moves, the dimension of conflict or antagonism which, in Laclau's and Mouffe's views, constitutes the political (Mouffe 1993: 8).

IV. Hybridity in Latin America and Its Multiple Logics of Development

"Neither the 'paradigm' of imitation, nor that of originality, nor the 'theory' that attributes everything to dependency, nor the one that lazily wants to explain us by the 'marvelously real' or a Latin American surrealism," claims García Canclini, "are able to account for our hybrid cultures" (Canclini 1995: 6). Thus, rejecting diverse kinds of reductionism, García Canclini proposes the category of hybridity as a means of grasping the specificity of Latin American processes of social and political modernization as well as its distinctive cultural modernism. Accordingly, rather than regarding Latin American societies as the site of a perennial struggle of a "foreign and progressive" force against the "retardant" forces of tradition, García Canclini suggests looking at Latin American societies in terms of their "multitemporal heterogeneity." Indeed diverse temporalities that are usually thought of as mutually exclusive--such as indigenous traditions, Catholic Hispanic legacies, and the democratizing project of modernity--coexist in Latin American societies (1995: 47). Once we accept

the social and political idiosyncratic hybridity of these societies, we are in better shape to understand the coexistence, in the same society, of multiple logics of development. Therefore, we are able, for example, to account for the existence of modern democratic institutions alongside archaic, authoritarian and paternalistic power relationships (García Canclini 1995: 9).⁹

Furthermore, like its political and social modernization, Latin American cultural modernism can no longer be seen as an issue of "transplant" or "copy," in a peripheral territory, of an "original" metropolitan modernism. Against this view, García Canclini argues that even in countries where the social project implied a self-denial of its own history and many ethnic traditions were wiped out--for example, in Argentina--artists that followed European developments cannot be considered as mere imitators of imported aesthetics. Thus, García Canclini gives the example of the "cosmopolitan" movement of the journal *Martín Fierro* in Buenos Aires, which, cross-fertilized by European avant-garde, redefines those influences in the midst of its country's social and cultural conflicts such as emigration and urbanization, the confrontation with the previous literary authorities, and the polemic with the antagonistic literary group of Boedo and its social realism (1995: 51-2). All these conflicts, antagonisms, and changes constitute a field which makes it simply impossible to "uproot" the cultural project of the "center" and merely "replant" it in a different context. Furthermore, García Canclini emphasizes that many of those Latin American "cosmopolitan" movements, far from denationalizing their own cultures, have given impulse to the construction of a national identity. Thus, "despite" its reception of European avant-gardes, Brazilian avant-garde of the 1920s, for example, was highly preoccupied with "Brazilianness" and participated in the struggle for raising a nation opposed to the interests of oligarchic, conservative, and foreign sectors (1995: 52). Similarly, the artists connected to Mexican muralism (Rivera, Siqueiros, Orozco) were also concerned with the construction of a national identity. However, in their search for an iconographic synthesis of Mexican national identity, they appropriated elements of the European avant-garde and articulated them to other elements belonging to Mayan and Aztec works, church altarpieces, Pueblan pottery, and Michoacán lacquers. Accordingly, García Canclini concludes that in none of these societies can modernism be simply accounted for by claiming that they have just

"adopted" foreign models in a merely mimetic way. By contrast, modern Latin American art implies a particular process of appropriation, reception and negotiation of foreign influences, resulting in a hybrid and heterogeneous product which cannot be reduced to a mere "copy" of its foreign model.

However, not only "high" modern culture is subject to a process of hybridization in Latin American societies. García Canclini argues that the so-called "authentic" national and popular culture, too, is subject to similar processes. Indeed García Canclini claims that there is no "pure" traditional and popular culture that lives its life "untouched" by industrialization, urbanization or modernization. "The problem, then," concludes García Canclini, "cannot be reduced to one of conserving or rescuing supposedly unchanged traditions. It is a question of asking ourselves how they are being transformed and how they interact with the forces of modernity" (1995: 155). Certainly, the evidence of the impossibility of traditional forms of living "uncontaminated" by any disrupting exogenous influence, was never more compelling than today, in our so-called "postmodern" world, where traditional forms have been articulated to modern processes, thus ensuring their survival. In García Canclini terms, "reconversion" has prolonged their existence. Indeed he views the process of "reconversion" of cultural forms that might appear obsolete or devalued not only as a way of conserving and increasing a symbolic patrimony by means of transferring it from one site to another, but also as a strategy for "social mobility," enabling certain groups to transfer their skills to other areas and, consequently, improve their position in an economic and social context (1992: 31-2). Furthermore, García Canclini stresses the "horizontal coexistence of a number of symbolic systems" as the very condition of possibility of hybridization (1992: 32).

Of course, García Canclini acknowledges that the strategy of hybridization is not exclusive to Latin American countries. However, "in Latin American countries," García Canclini argues, "where numerous traditions coexist with varying degrees of modernity, and where social-cultural heterogeneity presents a multiplicity of simultaneous patrimonies, this process of interchange and reutilization is even more intense" (1992: 32). Certainly Canclini takes up here an issue, the question of hybridity, that is also discussed by British cultural studies, particularly in reference to

issues of postcoloniality and most prominently by Homi Bhabha (1991, 1994). But let's examine briefly Bhabha's approach.

Bhabha connects the category of hybridity to the issue of colonial representation. For Bhabha, hybridity points to the moment in which the "discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning" (Young 22). It is indeed the colonial power the one that, according to Bhabha, inscribes the trace of the language of the "other" in its own colonial discourse. Hybridity operates then, in Bhabha's own words, as a "reversion" of the "effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that the other 'denied' knowledge enters upon the dominant discourse and estranges the basis of its authority" (1994:114). In this way, the supposedly single colonial voice reveals itself as a double-voice, which not only pronounces a statement but, at the same time, reverses and subverts it. Once the "effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization," we can better understand the emergence of a "form of subversion (...) that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" (1994: 112). Interestingly in regard to our discussion, Bhabha's hybridization deprives "the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has for so long imposed politically (...) but even of its own claims to authenticity" (1991: 57-8).¹⁰

It is certainly possible to draw several parallels between Bhabha's and García Canclini's understanding of hybridity. For one thing, both critics reject the traditional "one-directional" understanding of the relationship between the metropolitan and peripheral culture. Against this view, both critics conceive of hybridity as the moment or space of negotiation, resistance, and incorporation of elements of the metropolitan culture, which are reshaped and redefined by the peripheral culture. In so doing, both of them challenge the metropolitan culture's claims of "originality" or "authenticity" and emphasize, instead, the emergence of a "new" heterogeneous product. However, while García Canclini's hybridization involves the creation of a new "material" form, whose emergence presupposes a process of negotiation with an old form against which it can be set, Bhabha's hybridization, by contrast, does not necessarily generate a new "material" form; it operates within those "interstitial" or "in-between" spaces which are always carried by the official dominant culture.

To further assess García Canclini's notion of hybridity, I would like to pursue another line of thinking which leads us to a very different terrain,

that of hermeneutics, particularly Hans-Georg Gadamer's account of hermeneutics. I am certainly aware of the differences, in terms of their projects, that exist between the Latin American critic and the German philosopher. García Canclini's sociological and anthropological preoccupations with the periphery are completely alien to Gadamer's ontological version of hermeneutics. However, I think there is a common ground between these two positions, on which I intend to focus.

There is perhaps no contemporary "metropolitan" theorist more concerned with the historical and situated nature of interpretation than Gadamer. Indeed Gadamer recovers the totality of an individual's beliefs, assumptions or preconceptions, which are generally excluded by a way of thinking that dichotomizes the world into objects and subjects that stand over against them. By contrast, in Gadamer's view, there is no hermeneutic path that leads us "directly" to those objects independently of our process of understanding, which, in turn, necessarily implies the prejudices (*Vorurteilen*) passed on to us by our own social and historical environment.¹¹ In this way, Gadamer reveals the importance of prejudices as constitutive parts of any hermeneutic situation.¹² And it is precisely the hermeneutic moment assumed in García Canclini's narrative of the emergence of the subaltern culture that enables the drawing of a connection between our critic and the philosopher. Thus, just as Gadamer rehabilitates the notion of "prejudice" as the very condition that, far from hindering, makes understanding possible, García Canclini brings to the fore the colonized or peripheral space as the very condition that, far from obstructing, enables the emergence of a new and distinctive cultural formation. In other words, just as the historicity and situatedness of Gadamer's interpreter are no longer a barrier to the process of understanding, García Canclini's hybridity is no longer a sign of the previously assumed impossibility of the subaltern world of creating an "authentic" or "original" cultural product. Consequently, I want to argue that García Canclini's notion of hybridity deepens and expands the historicity and situatedness of Gadamer's "metropolitan" subject to the peripheral subject. In so doing, the Latin American critic succeeds in establishing hybridity as the very site of "difference," within and by means of which we are in a better condition to theorize the specificity of subaltern cultures like those of Latin American societies.¹³

V. "Border Subjects"

Border theory attempts at transgressing the borders sealed by those views that understand cultures as enclosed within fixed, static boundaries. Thus, acknowledging the possibility of border crossings, this theory, like Laclau's and most obviously García Canclini's, entails an unavoidable process of hybridization. Indeed hybridization emerges as a shared response given by the three theorizations discussed here, to the problem of defining Latin American culture(s) along non-essentialist lines.¹⁴

Perhaps one of the best-known elaborations of border theory is Anzaldúa's autobiography, Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza (1987). Like Laclau and García Canclini, Anzaldúa challenges the notion of a unitary, homogeneous identity and poses, instead, the possibility of diverse identities created within the intersection of multiple discourses that many times conflict with one another. However, one of these discourses has been strongly criticized. Anzaldúa attempts at appropriating a pre-Aztec mythology, with which, as Benjamin Alire Sáenz asserts, not many Chicanos and Chicanas who live in urban settings can actually identify (1997: 85). Furthermore, because of her rejection of a European culture that has destroyed the indigenous world with which she identifies, she refuses to call herself "Hispanic" and chooses "The New Mestiza" as the subtitle of her book. In connection to the subtitle, Sáenz argues: "Her impulse is to defy that her 'Indianness' has been destroyed. But her 'Indianness' has been destroyed.... I do not find it productive to build a politics and an identity centered on a 'loss'" (1997: 85).

Although absolutely sympathetic to her "cause," Sáenz questions the efficacy of resuscitating a pre-Aztec culture as a "weapon" to struggle against capitalism, towards which Anzaldúa shows deep hostility because of its devastating effects on Chicano workers as well as landowners (1997: 86-7). Indeed Sáenz makes here a point that has been repeatedly made against those who, trapped between an uneven social modernization and a situation of "foreign" domination, end up articulating their indigenous resources (myths, heroes, gods) into a politics of identity.¹⁵ Yet the polemical indigenous subject-position is not the only position that Anzaldúa

articulates in her politics of identity. Regarding these subject-positions, Renato Rosaldo asserts:

In rejecting the classic "authenticity" of cultural purity, she seeks out the many-stranded possibilities of the borderlands. By sorting through and weaving together its overlapping strands, Anzaldúa's identity becomes even stronger, not diffused. She argues that because Chicanos have so long practiced the art of cultural blending, "we" now stand in a position to become leaders in developing new forms of polyglot cultural creativity. In her view, the rear guard will become the vanguard. (Rosaldo 1993: 216; qtd by Johnson and Michaelsen 1997: 3)

Whatever one thinks about the necessity of the reappropriation and rearticulation of an indigenous subject-position into a populist culture of identity, there is little doubt that Anzaldúa's "new mestiza" provides a "third" space for thinking identity. Her use of the notion of "mestizaje" goes beyond a simple mixing of blood or cultures and points to an articulation of diverse subject-positions. From this standpoint, there is no doubt that Anzaldúa's "mestiza" is not an essentializing theorization of identity. Anzaldúa presents herself not only as a Mexican, she is also an Indian, she acknowledges her Anglo component, and she is also a woman who rejects homophobia and patriarchy. Indeed her way of thinking identity fulfills Laclau's requirement of an identity that is not defined by belongingness to only one particular constituency. By providing various subject positions that one might take up or deny, Anzaldúa allows--in Laclau's (or Mouffe's) vocabulary--the articulation of a solidaristic "chain of radical democratic equivalences."

Furthermore, since border theory is grounded not so much on discursive analysis as on a physical, geographic element such as the border between Mexico and the United States, the presence of capitalism is much more transparent than in Laclau's or García Canclini's theorizations. From this point of view, border theory may profit more directly from Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* than any of the other previously discussed theories, for these authors' argument revolves around capitalism's "colonizing" operations, which, in fact, are always present in Anzaldúa's text. Yet another representative of border theory, D. Emily Hicks, draws, in her conceptualization of "border writing," on Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of the operations of capitalism as a "territorial writing machine," with its double movement of deterritorialization (or reduction of

everything--including production and labour--to the abstract value of money) and reterritorialization (or creation of "territorialities" such as states, nations, or families). According to Hicks, Latin American culture "articulates borders between widely disparate traditions"(1991: XXIV). As a result of this process, many contemporary Latin American writers are "border" crossers. "The border crosser 'subject,'" Hicks argues, "emerges from double strings of signifiers of two sets of referential codes, from both sides of the border" (Hicks 1991: XXVI). Hicks claims further that the border writing suggests a "perspective that is no longer dominated by nonborder regions" and here lies, according to the critic, its "subversive" quality (Hicks 1991: XXVII). Indeed Hick's theorization of the border shows affinity with Floyd Merrell's use of the category of "emptiness," an "exceedingly vague space that is at once" neither A nor B and, at the same time, both A and B (1997: 32). But let's conclude this paper with an assessment of the "subversive" potential of the hybrid identities posited by the three discussed theorizations.

VI. Metaphors of the Logic of the Limit

Perhaps one of the most important aspect that these three different approaches to cultural identity have in common is that these three theorizations, each in its own way, allow us or force us to acknowledge the logic of the limit. Thus, there is a limit that separates Laclau's identities, a limit that separates García Canclini's hybrid cultural products from the metropolitan "old" forms against which the formers can be set, and, ultimately, there is a limit or border that separates two cultures and constitutes the very possibility of transgression. All these limits are necessary to allow the emergence of identities, for a limit can only be constructed by externalizing an "other." And the theorization of this externalization leads, in the elaborations of the above discussed critics, to the recognition of difference, of an "other" (Laclau's "constitutive outside," García Canclini's hybrid culture, and Anzaldúa's and Hicks' deterritorialized border contexts) that is usually excluded in favor of an identity that is "naturalized" as the norm or standard in relationship to which the "other" is assessed. In this sense, Laclau reminds us, in his theorization of the subject, of our tendency to "naturalize" certain subject-

positions or options in situations where, in fact, there is no option guaranteed at the level of the system.

Furthermore, these three theorizations of identity discussed above reject a unilateral relationship between two identities. Thus, Laclau uses the metaphor of articulation, García Canclini that of hybridity, and Anzaldúa and Hicks that of the borders. All of them suggest thus a disruption of the one-way flow of information. I think it is important to realize the full implications of these metaphors. Against a narrative that presents the relationship between the dominant and subordinate cultures as a unilateral exercise of power, where the oppositional forces are irremediably swallowed by the dominant forces, the metaphors of articulation, hybridization, and "border crossing" open up a space involving both resistance and incorporation; what emerges is a new, heterogeneous product, which appropriates, redefines and transforms the elements which it incorporates. Against the paradigm that reduces the peripheral culture to a mere or bad copy of the metropolitan culture, there is no doubt that the categories of articulation, hybridization, and "border crossing" appear much more able to capture the intricacies of the complex periphery-core relationship. However, since these metaphors emerge inscribed in the context of our so-called era of globalization, the question arises about the possible meaning that these metaphors may acquire once they are "articulated" to this stage of capitalism and its culture of consumerism. It is very likely that in such a framework, these metaphors, far from being a sign of difference, may point to a mere consumption of sameness. And yet... there is no monopoly over the signs.

Notes

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² For identity, see Keith and Pile 1993, Hall 1996a, Hall 1997; for race, Hall 1986, Mercer 1992, Hesse 1993; for ethnicity, Hall 1986, Hall 1996c, Rattansi 1995, Palumbo-Liu 1995; for gender, Butler 1993, Haase-Dubosc 1995, Schor 1995.

³ In this sense, Laclau postulates the involvement of negativity (1990: 26), which is not to be identified with dialectical negativity, for it does not imply the absorption of an identity and its "constitutive outside" into a higher unity.

⁴ In his later work, Laclau complements his theorization of antagonism with the notion of dislocation, which is previous to any antagonistic relationship. Dislocation reveals the inherent inability of any entity to constitute itself as a complete, closed entity.

Indeed Laclau distinguishes three dimensions of the entity revealed by dislocation (Laclau 1990: 41-59). First, the category of dislocation highlights the dimension of temporality inherent in any entity. Second, dislocation discloses the realm of possibility as constitutive of the entity itself, for multiple possibilities for new articulations open up within the structure once its identity is disrupted. Third, dislocation uncovers the very form of freedom inherent to any entity. This third dimension has significant consequences in regard to the subject. On Laclau's privileging the temporal over the spatial, see Massey (1993).

⁵ Nicos Mouzelis, for example, complains that Laclau (and Mouffe) "examine discursive practices and the subjects that they constitute in an institutional vacuum" (59). On this point see also Geras (97-100).

⁶ In this sense, Mouffe expresses her skepticism towards Alain Touraine's optimistic consideration of the "new social movements" as the "privileged revolutionary subject." Like the workers' struggle, the struggles of the "new social movements" are not necessarily progressive. They can be, Mouffe argues, as easily articulated into discourses of the Right as into those of the Left (1988: 98).

For an application of Laclau's conceptualization of articulation to Thatcherism, see Stuart Hall (1988). Kobena Mercer (1992) and Ali Rattansi (1995), too, use Laclau's notion of articulation in relation to the concepts of race and ethnicity.

⁷ For the ethical dimension of the subject's experience of the "undecidable," see Critchley 1996.

⁸ Laclau gives the example of the Asian and West Indian communities in Britain. According to him, "while the Asian communities have managed to constitute themselves as legitimate 'differences' within the British social space, the West Indian communities have been much less able to do so, thus expanding (radicalizing) the chains of equivalence in certain discourses of total confrontation, such as that of the Rastafarians" (1990: 235).

⁹ Moreover, in order to think of this heterogeneity characteristic of Latin American countries, García Canclini does not exclude the possibility of recurring to postmodern theories. "Its critique of the all-encompassing accounts of history can serve to detect the fundamentalist pretensions of traditionalism, ethnicism, and nationalism." García Canclini argues further that "the postmodern relativization of all fundamentalism and evolutionism facilitates revision of the separation between the cultured, the popular, and the mass-based, upon which modernity still attempts to base itself, and elaboration of a more open way of thinking that includes the interactions and integrations among levels, genres, and forms of collective sensibility" (1995: 9).

¹⁰ For a comparison between Bakhtin's, Bhabha's, Stuart Hall's, and Kobena Mercer's conceptualizations of hybridization, see Young (1995): 20-26.

¹¹ "It is not so much our judgments as it is our prejudices that constitute our being. This is a provocative formulation, for I am using it to restore to its rightful place a positive concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and English Enlightenment. It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and

erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the world, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something--whereby what we encounter says something to us" (Gadamer 1976: 9).

¹² As Richard Bernstein points out, Gadamer's defense of prejudice as a constitutive part of our process of understanding might have drawn support from Charles S. Peirce's semiotics. Against the Cartesian understanding of knowledge, Peirce claims: "We cannot begin with complete doubt. We must begin with all the prejudices which we actually have when we enter upon the study of philosophy. These prejudices are not to be dispelled by a maxim, for they are things which it does not occur to us can be questioned" (*Collected Papers* 5.265: 156; qtd by Bernstein 1983: 128).

¹³ Indeed what I argued about García Canclini's notion of hybridity in relationship to Gadamer's hermeneutics applies, too, to Bhabha's.

¹⁴ As Neil Larsen correctly reminds us, there were previous attempts to think of Latin American culture along non-essentialist lines, such as the Cuban poet and critic Roberto Fernández Retamar, who, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, speaks of "Latin America's 'hybrid' cultures as models for a new, postimperial order of limitless regional differences" (1995: 123). Also mentioned by Larsen is Angel Rama's category of "transculturalization" as a means of appropriation of "foreign" influences (1995: 121).

¹⁵ For a discussion of the incorporation of indigenous resources into a populist culture of identity in relationship to the "Pachuco" question, see Marcos Sanchez-Tranquilino and John Tagg.

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