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LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND MASS MEDIA

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Beyond the Lettered City

Edmundo Paz-Soldán and Debra A. Castillo

Eighteen ninety-five has gone down in history as the year that the Lumière brothers invented the cinematograph. In *Signatures of the Visible* Fredric Jameson marks the symbolic importance of this invention and asks: "Did human nature change about December 28, 1895? Or was some cinematographic dimension of human reality always there somewhere in prehistoric life, waiting to find its actualization in a certain high-technical civilization?" (5). There is, of course, no way to offer any definitive answer to these questions. At any rate, shortly after its invention, the marvelous new machine reached the major capital cities in Latin America and was received with enormous enthusiasm. In Mexico, articles Luis Urbina, Juan José Tablada, Amado Nervo, and other chroniclers of the Mexican scene registered the excitement caused by this new technology for storing and processing information by way of light, images, and sound. These writers's visceral reactions to the cinematograph's arrival highlight their intuition that this technological advance would catalyze profound changes in the way in which we understand culture, humanity, even reality itself.

For these observers of fin-de-siècle life, the spectacle was located not primarily in the surprise of unfolding images on the screen but, rather, in the implications of its technical form. Urbina wrote over and over of the cinematograph's ability to capture reality: "Life itself is

inside the wood box: quick, electric, that shines and fades in an instant, that moves before our eyes like a shooting star in the heavens" ("Dentro de la caja de madera sí está la vida, rápida, eléctrica, que brilla y se apaga en el instante, que pasa ante la mirada como un bólido por el cielo") (Miquel 33). The camera obscura rips an instant from space and time, does with it what the naturalist does with highly valued butterflies: "hunts them down, stabs them with a pin, and mounts them with open wings on the cardboards in his collection" ("las caza, las atraviesa con un alfiler, y con las alas abiertas las prende en los cartones de su colección") (33).

The poet Amado Nervo felt some anxiety about the potential effects of this invention on literary culture. In 1898, he suggested that the combination of the phonograph (invented a few years earlier in 1889) and the cinematograph would produce a nefarious outcome: "no more books; the phonograph will preserve the old extinguished voices in its dark urn; the cinematograph will reproduce prestigious lives" ("no más libros; el fonógrafo guardará en su urna oscura las viejas voces extinguidas; el cinematógrafo reproducirá las vidas prestigiosas . . .") (Duffey 13). He seemed to accept with a resigned pragmatism a projected future without books, one in which audiovisual data no longer have to be codified symbolically through recourse to the alphabet—the written code—but rather are preserved in artifacts more adequate for protecting their light and sound waves.

In contrast, Tablada demonstrated a contagious enthusiasm about the possibilities for both usefulness and entertainment that the cinematograph offers the ordinary viewer as well as the artist. In an 1896 article he mentioned that thanks to the cinematographer, painters and sculptors have finally come to understand "the movement of bodies, so difficult to master in real-life observation" ("el movimiento de figuras, difícil de dominarse en la observación de la vida real") (Miquel 44). Tablada also dreamed of a day in which film will replace the photo album and will serve as a "consolation" ("consuelo") for ordinary people, by showing them the lost loved one as "returned to the world . . . resuscitated, torn from oblivion and death, and living again with the energetic and eloquent life of movement and expression" ("vuelto al mundo . . . resucitado, arrancado al olvido y a la muerte y viviendo con la enérgica y elocuente vida del movimiento y de la expresión") (Miquel 33). In 1906, Tablada was able to state baldly that he was a man of his times ("de [su] época") and, as such, naturally preferred the marvelously entertaining films that were sweeping all of Mexico to old-fashioned theater or the opera (Miquel 45-47). To his list of rejected options that unsuccessfully compete with film for his attention, Tablada might well have added reading.

These Mexican writers, in their initial astonishment at the capacity of film to achieve transformations in the perception of reality, already

suggested a utopian project that would become clearer as years passed, especially during the decades of the 1920s and 1930s—a vision of a Latin America rushing impetuously into modernity. This new Latin America abandons the territory of what Uruguayan critic Angel Rama famously called "the lettered city" ("la ciudad letrada"). According to Rama, in the eponymously named study, from colonial times to the turn of the century, each Latin American city had at its heart a "lettered city" that protected power and obeyed its directives, that governed and structured the way in which the real city was imagined and understood. Late-nineteenth-century Latin America privileged this metaphor of the lettered city because "its action completed itself in the prioritizing order of signs and because its implicit sacerdotal quality contributed toward gifting them with a sacred aspect, freeing them from any servitude with circumstances" ("su acción se cumplió en el prioritario orden de los signos y porque su implícita calidad sacerdotal, contribuyó a dotarlos de un aspecto sagrado, liberándolos de cualquier servidumbre con las circumstancias") (25). The nineteenth-century scholar possessed control over the social and political order because he also controlled, among other powers, the authority of scriptographic technology in a mostly illiterate society. He, thus, had few competitors—certainly no female ones—in his ambitious effort to organize the new republics according to the power of the word.

The historical successors of this archetypal man of letters—the modernist writers from the turn of the nineteenth century, the intellectuals, and the pedagogues—while maintaining their place of social privilege and benefiting from the symbolic prestige that had emanated from writing since colonial times, found themselves confronted by a different Latin America, one in the midst of a profound modernization, whose most visible markers were urbanization, technological progress, and the changing customs of urban masses in the great cities. The basic facts of this process of urbanization offer eloquent testimony to this process of rapid change. Around 1890 only two Latin American cities—Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro—were included among the twenty largest cities in the world; and at the turn of the twentieth century in Latin America there were only thirteen cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, and only 82 with more than 20,000. By 1914, the enormous shift of peoples to the growing urban centers was already evident and businesses had increased by twenty-five times over their 1850 base, and by 1930, 17 percent of the population lived in cities of more than 20,000 (Baer and Pineo 3). The advancing technologies of modern urban development—trains, steamboats, mills, and the telegraph—played an important role in the commercial growth of the region.

Recent critics such as Beatriz Sarlo, J. Martín-Barbero, and Carlos Monsiváis agree that the first half of the twentieth century could be

read as the history of the conquest of modernity (a marginal, belated modernity, but still unmistakably an advance into the modern) in which movies and the radio were the principal means for interpellating the great masses of people and forming what Benedict Anderson has famously called the "imagined community." Martín-Barbero believes that the projects for national and state organization promoted by the Creole elites during the previous century essentially failed in their structuring mission because they were unable to incorporate the majority of the people into their visions. Interestingly enough, large-scale efforts to rearticulate the nation-state revived forcefully between the 1930s and the 1950s, and although they took as their point of departure the national myths adumbrated in the previous century, during these decades their efforts met with considerably greater success, partly because of their ability to transcend cultural, regional, and ethnic fragmentation through the deployment—among other things—of modern methods of communication and transportation (153). The consciousness of a nationalist and sentimentalized mass culture that emerged in different sites throughout the continent owes its shape in great degree to film and radio, both of which recognized the force of popular culture in order to achieve national unity: "Film in many countries and radio in virtually all countries gave the people of different regions and provinces their first taste of nation" (164).[1]

Monsiváis agrees with Martín-Barbero and he reiterates and insists upon the democratizing capacity of film, its ability to reach spaces untouched by traditional politics:

> En la primera mitad del siglo XX, las estrellas son el relevo simultáneo de los santos y los héroes, y son la confirmación de la potencia de los mundos ajenos a la política. . . . ¿Qué presidente de la República en México induce como Mario Moreno Cantinflas al desbordamiento del afecto nacional? El cine es un ordenamiento paralelo a la política, y su inmediatez produce modelos que, reconociéndolo o no, casi todos acatan. Y el proceso de identificaciones se robustece con las industrias filmicas nacionales, en especial las de Argentina, Brasil y México, que encauzan o reencauzan la vida cotidiana. (18)

> In the first half of the twentieth century, movie stars become the replacements simultaneously for both saints and heroes, and serve as the confirmation of the power of worlds distant from politics. . . . What Mexican president inspires the overflowing of national feeling like Mario Moreno "Cantinflas"? Film is a parallel ordering to politics, and its immediacy produces models that, whether they recognize them or not, almost everyone treats with respect. The process of identification is strengthened by national film industries, especially those of Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, that channel or redirect daily life.

Of course, not all writers and thinkers of the time reacted to this inexorable advance of new communication media and the concomitant consolidation of the new technological landscape with the optimism shown by Urbina and Tablada. Most Latin American writers of the early part of the century responded with a confused mixture of admiration and fear. A classic novel like Mariano Azuela's *Los de abajo* (1916) describes a typewriter discovered by the revolutionary forces as if it were a magic talisman: "it attracted all of them with its astonishing chrome reflections" ("a todos atrajo con los deslumbrantes reflejos de niquelado") (65). Nevertheless, the revolutionary soldiers later abandoned this useless (to them) machine at the side of the road because "it weighed too much and no one could stand to carry it for more than half an hour" ("pesaba demasiado y nadie podía soportarla más de media hora") (65). Essentially, they are confronted with a question about how to appropriate and assimilate the tools of modern technology. In their case, it comes down to a question of whether or not to keep the strange object as a pretty toy or throw it away as dead weight. The ambivalence of the revolutionary soldiers when confronted with this icon of technology and progress is parallel to the ambivalence of the Latin American writers of the time, who all too often found themselves trapped between the modernizing impulse and the wish to hold onto tradition.

The period between 1880 and 1920 is notable throughout Latin America for the professionalization of newspapers and growing distribution of journals and magazines in which language occupied a peripheral role when compared to the growing centrality of the image. Inevitably, the writers who contributed to these papers and magazines experienced a change in their prose styles as well.[2] The modernists were at one and the same time the great founders of contemporary literature on the continent and the most acute critics of the processes of modernization upon which their Latin American homelands had already embarked. We might even say that the extremely elaborate wordplays of modernist language can be understood in some sense as a consequence of and reaction to the incipient professionalization they already have observed in the literary system. In an environment in which writing comes to be seen as a type of merchandise, the luxuriousness of the modernist vocabulary—the preciousness of Rubén Darío or Gutiérrez Najera's ostentatious lyrics—all seem an emblematic squandering of words, a response to a need to demonstrate "literariness" as that which resists the utilitarian logic of modernization. Paradoxically, this modernist resistance only underscores the fact that writing, too, is a technique, a technology.

In any event, those early-twentieth-century close-minded and acrimonious defenses of "artistic merit" against what was often considered the tyranny of low culture can be seen as inaugural gestures in the evolving dialogue between literature and mass media, and results of these debates were both stimulating and fruitful. Such discussions inevitably had an impact on the form and thematics of literature, which gradually began to open themselves out to the potential richness of the new media. Many writers, without leaving behind their commitment to the more exclusive zones of high culture, incorporated into their writing procedures derived from film, photography, the typewriter, commercial art, and the like. Both literary form and thematics slowly began to open themselves out upon these new modes of representing reality. The typographical games of avant-garde poetry—Huidobro's calligrammes, for example—are clearly related to the popularization of the typewriter in the first decades of the century. Narrative, for its part, could reinvent itself metaphorically as the textualization of movies that the writers projected in their mental cinematographs. In 1909, the Brazilian writer Joao do Rio said as much directly: "every man has a cinematograph in his skull, operated by imagination" (Süssekind 27).

While writers from the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth more typically found themselves content to register this new media ecology through their descriptions of the technological artifacts that already were beginning to populate their urban landscapes, avant-garde writers from the 1920s and 1930s began to incorporate these new media, in an ironic manner, in the heart of their literary works, reaching for a cinematic style of perceiving modern life (see Süssekind 1-30). This critical and literary reelaboration of the filmic experience derived at least in part from the realization—as Walter Benjamin suggests in his seminal 1936 article, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"—that film brought with it a more profound optical and acoustic understanding: "With the close-up, space expands, with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible though unclear; it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject" (236). Cinema, by developing the scientific and artistic potential of the photographic image, became the "dynamite" that expanded the field of action for the modern subject. Sarlo (1992) suggests something similar with respect to the role of radio upon its arrival in Argentina in 1920:

> . . . la radio es una invención cultural por lo que directamente representa como medio de comunicación y como espacio de una cultura industrial massmediática que florecerá en los años treinta, pero también, y diría más profundamente, como milagro técnico: el recurso material que hace posible lo imposible. Incorporado su sonido al espacio urbano, hacia finales de la década del veinte es parte del paisaje cultural de Buenos Aires y contribuye a modificar el sistema perceptivo con una rapidez, penetración y presistencia que antes no había tenido ninguna otra innovación de la tecnología comunicativa. (1992: 17)

> Radio is a cultural revolution for what it directly represents as a means of communication and as a mass mediated industrial-cultural space which flourishes in the 1930s, but also, and I would say more profoundly, it is a technical miracle: the material resource that makes possible the impossible. The incorporation of sound to the urban space around the end of the decade of the 1920s is part of the cultural landscape of Buenos Aires and contributes to modifying the system of perception with a speed, penetration, and persistence that no other innovation in communications technology had ever achieved.

Reading media-conscious Latin American literature and theory from and about the beginning of the century leads us inevitably to an awareness of how conflicting cultural expectations play off against each other in a time, like our own, of enormous paradigm shifts.

In an interview from the early 1980s, Angel Rama returned to his seminal earlier formulation and suggested the need to go beyond the lettered city: "both the writer and the critic belong to the street and not to the university cloisters. Their real world is the world of society, it is the world of communication . . ." ("tanto el escritor como el crítico pertenecen a la calle y no pertenecen al claustro universitario. Su real mundo es el mundo de la sociedad, es el mundo de la comunicación . . .") (Roffé 211). There is practically no Latin American writer who has not registered in his or her work, at least to some extent, the impact of the mass mediated universe of the twentieth century. The list of well-known authors who have consistently and profoundly explored the implications of these media ecologies is extensive enough to remind us that behind such concerns there is a long and prestigious tradition: Vicente Huidobro, Roberto Arlt, "los Contemporáneos" (Villarrutia, Torres Bodet, and Novo), and Adolfo Bioy Casares (whose 1940 *La invención de Morel* testifies to his fascination with and terror at the possibility of technology and the photographic image to create a simulacrum of reality). All the Boom writers enter this list. There is, for example, Julio Cortázar and his stories related to photography ("Las babas del diablo" and "Apocalipsis en Solentiname"). Likewise, Guillermo Cabrera Infante has always been a fascinated witness to mass media culture, from his film reviews of the 1950s signed with the pseudonym "Caín" to his

novel *Vista de amanecer en el trópico* (1977), in which the representation of the image—print, photograph—shows itself capable of influencing the form by which national history itself is constructed and narrated. Mario Vargas Llosa experimented formally with narrative montage in his early novels, and in his 1977 *La tía Julia y el escribidor* thematizes the impact of radio in 1950s Peru. Carlos Fuentes frequently revisits archetypes derived from film, rewriting *Citizen Kane* in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* and paying homage to *Casablanca* in *La cabeza de la hidra*.

The writers of the 1960s Mexican movement called "La Onda" (José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz), defined their young, urban restlessness through the popular culture representations that surrounded them: film, radio, rock music—a disaffection with the establishment that is repeated and brought up to date in more recent novels by writers such as Mexican Luis Zapata (*El vampiro de la colonia Roma* and *Melodrama* among fictions), Puerto Ricans Luis Rafael Sánchez and Ana Lydia Vega, and Chileans Alberto Fuguet and, in a very different register, Diamela Eltit. Elena Poniatowska, the noted Mexican author, has also thematized the life of photographer Tina Modotti in *Tinísima*.

To this distinguished list we must also add the names of extremely well-known writers who may at first glance seem less directly invested in this topic. One such writer would be Horacio Quiroga, most famous for his stories set in the jungles of South America, but also a frequent film reviewer and the author of short stories like "El puritano" in which the depiction of "reality" intersects with and traverses the "fantasma cinematográfico" ("cinematographic ghost") or the "espectro fotográfico" ("photographic specter") (764). Likewise, the highly cultured and baroque Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier in his newspaper articles reveals himself as a great lover of Chaplin and a fan of the photographer Man Ray. Argentine writer Angélica Gorodischer is perhaps best known as one of Latin America's few contributors to the internationally popular science fiction genre, but she is also the author of sharply conceived and technically dazzling contemporary novels and stories. The "magical realist" Gabriel García Márquez lucidly describes in *El otoño del patriarca* (1975) the capacity of mass media such as newspapers and television to manipulate information, and his highly romantic *El amor en tiempos de cólera*, detailing the love affair between the telegraph operator Florentino Ariza and his beloved Fermina Daza, could not have taken place without modern means of communication. Even Jorge Luis Borges wrote in *Sur* sophisticated (if sometimes endearingly wrongheaded) movie reviews; he said of *Citizen Kane*, for example, that it "suffers from gigantism, pedantry, tedium" ("adolece de gigantismo, de pedantería, de tedio") (1999: 200), and he makes approving reference to von Sternberg's "cinematographic novels"

("novelas cinematográficas") in his essay "La postulación de la realidad" ("The Postulation of Reality") as notable examples of "circumstantial invention" ("invención circunstancial"), one of the three methods of "postulating" reality (1985: 217-21).

In this long tradition, Argentine Manuel Puig indubitably stands at the head of the list as the paradigmatic chronicler of literature's love affair with mass media and pop culture. Puig defines and condenses this field with such force that sometimes we forget he, too, is part of a tradition, that he is writing from within this tradition, reorganizing his material and rearticulating the relationship of literature to the mass culture of which it is part and to which it contributes. Puig's narratives cite examples from both high and low culture: but the stress is always on the codes of popular culture he so lovingly depicts. As Ana María Amar suggests, mass culture and its myths organize experience in the Puig narrative; the use of codes from film, radio, popular music, and commercials gives his novels a characteristic quality of serving as spectacles and as chronicles of this culture (48). The encounter between high and low discourses does not generate a harmonious synthesis, however; the tension of this relation produces at the same time a destabilization of traditional hierarchies and a differentiation between elements from the different cultural locations: "The seduction of the texts by the genres and discourses of popular culture . . . ; but followed by the inevitable betrayal. . . . Love and infidelity toward the forms of popular culture; the texts use them, integrate them, but they cannot avoid marking their difference, which is the difference with the other culture" ("Seducción de los textos por los géneros y los discursos de la cultura popular . . . ; pero seguida de la inevitable traición . . . . Amor e infidelidad hacia las formas de la cultura popular: los textos la usan, la integran, pero no pueden evitar marcar su diferencia, que es la diferencia con la otra cultura") (Amar 48).

Boquitas pintadas (1969) offers an excellent example of how a novel can be used as a media-conscious technology in constant dialogue with other media, and at the same time explore its position in a mass-mediated ecology in constant flux. In Puig's novel, set in the small provincial Argentine town of Vallejo in the decades of the 1930s and 1940s, film and radio are the two media that compete for the characters' attention, and that provide them with identificatory fantasies to recompense them for their lack of opportunity, for the narrowness of vision in Vallejo.[3] Radio belongs to everyday space, to the routine of ordinary life: Mabel listens to radio theater programs that help her to decipher better her friends' feelings as well as her own (183), Raba listens to tangos, but Nené prefers the boleros that according to Mabel "tell so many truths" ("decían muchas verdades") (192). For all of these characters, the movie theater is the

space of fantasy, of luxury, of the desired modernity. The spectacle of the movies takes place as much off screen as on:

> . . . y de paso me conocí el cine Opera, que tanto me habías nombrado. Ay, tenías razón, qué lujo de no creer, al entrar me vi a los lados esos balcones de palacios a todo lujo . . . me quedé muda, cuando mi marido me codea y me señala el techo . . . ahí ya por poco grito ¡las estrellas brillando y las nubes moviéndose que es un cielo de veras! La película era buena pero lo mismo yo de vez en cuando miraba para arriba, y los movimientos de nubes seguían durante toda la función. Con razón cobraban tan caro. (134)

> . . . and by the way I saw the Opera theater, which you had told me so much about. Oh, you were right, such unbelievable luxury, upon entering I saw those palace balconies, totally luxurious . . . I was struck dumb, when my husband elbowed me and pointed to the ceiling . . . and then and there I almost screamed: the stars shining and the clouds moving in a really real sky! The movie was good, but all the same every once in a while I looked up and the clouds kept moving throughout the show. No wonder they charge so much.

Puig's narrative universe is one in which radio and the photographic image—as well as the filmic representation—have invaded private homes and have taken control of public spaces. In this world literature has not just been marginalized, it has become nearly invisible. His characters distrust rhetorical flourishes and see literary allusions as less valid than ones derived from mass media images. When Juan Carlos wants to write a letter to his girlfriend, a professor suggests that he compare the girl to Leteo. Juan Carlos "laughs mockingly and rejects the proposal as 'very novelesque'" ("ríe burlonamente y rechaza la propuesta por considerarla 'muy novelera'") (108).

Nevertheless, despite their lack of confidence in literary models, when they write anything at all, the characters in this novel prefer the epistolary mode, and Puig hints that Juan Carlos's reservations are, at the very least, well founded. When Carlos's sister pretends she is the mother and keeps up a correspondence with Nené, Puig seems to suggest that it is easy to fool people through writing, through letters. In his fantastic projection, film and radio at least do not lie; the characters of *Boquitas pintadas* would like to think that the truth of the image and the voice seems to be beyond question. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel we see that these media have in some way also tricked the characters into accepting a fantastic projection over everyday reality. Thus, the fantasies of movies and the radio do not offer any resolution to these sad lives either, even though (or perhaps

especially because) the characters at some time believed firmly in the truth of these fantasies.

Despite this persistent focus on mass-mediated codes, literature in Puig's world somehow resists abandoning the scene (it is a novel that we are reading after all, and not a video or soundtrack) and Puig uses the very social marginality he has imagined for narrative fiction as a means to explore its renewed influence. The written text functions as a kind of media-conscious technology that finally, incorporates all the other technologies, while it processes and comments upon them. The novel, in this manner, resituates itself in the new mass-mediated universe as a medium with an "extraordinary resourcefulness in the face of a recalcitrant media environment. The current media technology should at least reveal the novel for what it is: a powerful instrument for representing its own media multiplicity, and a method that can help us locate ourselves with the changing media environment" (Tabbi and Wutz 20).

These debates and dialogues about literary versus mass media forms and the accompanying stereotypes about literature and pop culture shadow each other with varying degrees of intensity in discussions of the discursive equivalent of the no-man's-land inhabited by Puig's contemporary heirs: the alienated Latin American youth whose idea of a MaCondo is probably something more like an apartment in Miami than a godforsaken town in northern Colombia. Experimental works by hyper media-conscious young writers like Alberto Fuguet, Jaime Bayly, and Cristina Civale (like that of their brat pack counterparts in the United States—people like Tama Janowitz, Bret Easton Ellis, and Jay McInerney) have been submitted to an intense scrutiny that nevertheless tends to avoid engaging with the writers except as symptoms of some other deplorable or delightful phenomenon. Even more controversial are the less easily categorized works of people like Juan Gutiérrez, whose web-based hypertext almost aggressively begs the question not only of authorship, but also of textuality itself. Thus, these writers and their innovative works have been the subjects of vitriolic condemnation, and have also enjoyed considerable uncritical praise.

One of the most uncomfortable junctures occupied by much of this recent writing is one inherited from the distinguished tradition of forerunners reaching back to the beginning of the century: the collaboration between technically difficult texts, usually associated with high art, and mass media effects, generally described with respect to a low culture marker. This juxtaposition of high art/low art in itself creates edgy effects, disconcerting to the educated reader, who may be specifically excluded from these fictional worlds, while seemingly appealing to a low art audience who by definition would never read these or any other books, since their preferred culture forms are wholly audiovisual. Furthermore, since current high art qualities have

a respectable heritage derived from the Latin American Boom, and the low media effects are associated with foreign contamination (Hollywood movies, U.S.-inspired rock music, etc.), one of the underlying concerns about the new literary form is a question of whether it has a responsibility to a national political and social reality. And yet, of course, we need to recognize that the problem is not transnationalism per se—after all, many of the Boom authors, such as Fuentes, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar, Saer, and Donoso borrowed high art effects from the European and American high modernism of Joyce, Faulkner, and that ilk—but an unstated disdain for a particular sort of transnational cultural effect, derived less from the best and brightest than from the lowest common denominator of cultural schlock from that ambiguously desired and detested northern superpower, the United States. The young media-savvy writers are losing their national identities, it is feared, in favor of finding a sort of phantom commonality, and, that commonality looks ever more like a rampant Hollywoodization. From one point of view, such a critique is rather like parents' reaction to their children hanging out with the wrong kids at school.

The response to these types of concerns, however, is to ask more broadly about the importance of local, idealized manifestations of culture, specifically those most generally, and often stereotypically, associated with a country's restrictive sense of a common national identity. The question becomes: Must political and social concerns matter to all writers, and must they always matter in the same way? In a recent essay, Kwame Anthony Appiah describes one model of the role of national culture in the imaginary self-concept of the state in terms of what he calls a "tribal fantasy," that is, "there is an ideal—which is to say imaginary—type of small-scale, technologically uncomplicated, face-to-face society, in which one conducts most interactions with people one knows. . . . In such a society, all adults who are not mentally disabled speak the same language. All share a vocabulary and a grammar and an accent" (99). It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to assert that national culture supporters rally around their sense of commonality particularly when they perceive that culture to be coming under siege or imperiled by the cultural imperialism of the colossus to the North. However, this "tribal" identity responds at best to an idealized imaginary of the nation and a desire for a common national origin that is always and already fractured against a more complex and multifaceted reality. Writers attuned to transnational currents will naturally tend to disrupt this already fragile sense of a tribal identity and pose a significant challenge to this deeply desired, but shakily grounded assumption about a common culture.

One of the goals of this volume is to examine the evolution of such concerns from the works of media-conscious writers at the turn of the

twentieth century to evaluations of these transnational crossings today, at the turn of the twenty-first century. We focus on narrative fictions especially as they have been inflected by modern forms of mass media (television, cinema, comics, computerized hypertext, and electronic media) by recent Latin American writers and inquire about the status of the literary enterprise as it begins to be cognizant of an immense conceptual shift equivalent in impact to the Gutenberg Revolution five hundred years ago.

This volume opens with two overview articles that set the stage for the media revolution at the turn of the twentieth-century and its impact on the literary traditions. Fernando Unzueta focuses on the rise of the novel and the newspaper in Latin America as a result of the technological changes that occurred during the nineteenth century, as well as the connection with the market and the factors related to institutional evolution and the incipient creation of a public sphere. J. Patrick Duffey brings together a provocative analysis of the cinematic techniques in narratives of the Mexican Revolution with a carefully documented study of Revolutionary period thinkers, writers, and Revolutionary generals whose fascination with the new media sparked an early flowering in both documentaries and feature films. Edmundo Paz-Soldán's article focuses on Huidobro's largely forgotten "novel-film," *Cagliostro* (1931), in which the Chilean author proposes film as a way to refashion the novel in the modern media universe, a world in which literature as a medium no longer has the monopoly in the processing, storage, and transmission of data. Ricardo Gutiérrez-Mouat bridges the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, but focuses mostly on the Latin American novel of the '60s and later, analyzing the accommodation of the Boom authors to the influx of mass and pop culture, arguing that one strain of the modern novel reaffirms the authority of the literary intellectual while another redefines the author's role in the direction of a postmodern paradigm.

Part II of this volume looks closely at the proliferation of the visual in mass culture and its impact on modern narrative and theory. Luis Ernesto Cárcamo Huechante offers a provocative reading of Nelly Richard's *Residuos y metáforas* (1998), exploring particularly the way this cultural critic uses photographs. He argues that the crisis of representation in post-Pinochet Chile creates an obvious lack in written discourse that Richard supplements with the visual image. Thus, an unsatisfied writing emerges in tension with and in internal negotiation with the realm of visual culture.

Two articles on Julio Cortázar come next. While it has often been recognized that Cortázar's fascination with the visual arts undergirds much of his fiction, Marcy Schwartz looks at the Argentine author's less discussed direct collaborations with photographers in collections such as *Buenos Aires Buenos Aires* (1968), *Territorios* (1978), and *París, ritmo de una ciudad* (1981) to reveal the relationship between

writing, visual images, and the textual configuration of urban space. Ellen McCracken analyzes *Fantomás contra los vampiros multinacionales* (1975), Cortázar's glossy adaptation of the popular *Fantomás* comic book and compares it to Ricardo Piglia's later merging of literary criticism and comic book panel adaptations of classic Argentine texts in *La Argentina en pedazos* (1993). McCracken studies the mode in which these texts seek to be merged with their semiotic others in various respects; both books celebrate the eroding borders in postmodernism between high, mass, and popular culture; between literary text and criticism; and between "reality" and representation.

Part II closes with Ana Merino's study of two comic series and Adriana Estill's discussion of the telenovela and its relation to melodramatic form. As Merino notes, comics show an interesting tension between high and low culture, and series such as *Los supermachos* by Rius and *La familia Burrón* by Vargas offer politically committed commentaries on racial, social, and political problems in the Mexican society of the 1960s and 1970s. Merino explores the place and function of these comics as part of an ideological apparatus or form of cultural agency, as well as in their relation to the literary high culture of the period. For her part, Estill looks at specific Mexican telenovelas as a narrative form that has increasingly come to occupy the space formerly held by national literatures of the sort discussed by Doris Sommer in her seminal *Foundational Fictions*. She finds the telenovela a genre whose repetitive and melodramatic structure seems to be tailor-made for nation-construction, and yet, paradoxically, the telenovela occupies an uncomfortable position, as it constructs nation and nationalism only to export it, sell it, and eventually and inevitably change it.

Part III explores the fascination of Latin American novelists with the technical and artistic possibilities of mass media such as film and, more recently, television and commercial culture. Ignacio Corona provides an interesting overview of the evolution of contemporary urban chronicles in Mexico, focusing on such well-known practitioners as Carlos Monsiváis and Elena Poniatowska This article is followed by three discussions of more contemporary appropriations of the techniques and metaphors of modernity: Ana María Amar Sánchez and Alfonsina Lorenzi both look at writers from the "McOndo" school—Fuguet, Gómez, Bayly, and Fresán.[4] These young authors reflect a mass-mediated urban culture that builds into these texts an aesthetic and political challenge to an imaginary Latin America constituted by either the regionalist novel or magic realism. Finally, Debra Castillo looks at two narratives by contemporary writers, Mexican Rosina Conde and Argentine Cristina Civale, who engage current technological transformations on a narrative level. For all these authors, the exploration of "real virtuality" offers not just

the latest thematic gimmick, but also a stylistic and theoretical challenge to traditional aesthetic verities.

Contemporary cultural studies often recur to the concept of postnationalism to describe the increasingly popular mode by which a complex network of nonterritorial allegiances come to substitute for what Appiah calls the fantasy of tribal identification. Fredric Jameson, for example, points to the deterritorialization of culture in a flexible, transnational—or at the very least—late capitalistic context, and Benedict Anderson argues that the transition from print capitalism to electronic or digital capitalism carries with it a presumption about the transnationality of systems and about the emergence of an alternative spatialization of politics in a cybernational space. Appadurai, for his part, speaks of "trojan nationalisms," suggesting that they "actually contain transnational, subnational links and, more generally, nonnational identities and aspirations" (417). For each of these writers, as for Appiah, the post-Gutenberg age also offers an opportunity for exploring with depth and analytic rigor the implications of newer technologies on the imagination of self and culture.

With Part IV, this book moves into this nascent realm of the digital narrative. In a metatheoretical analysis of Latin American media theory, Shirin Shenassa looks at the work of leading scholars in the field (Walter Mignolo and Néstor García Canclini) in light of recent advances in media-oriented studies of the materialities of communication in a post-print age. Using concepts developed by Marshall McLuhan, Friedrich Kittler, and others, Shenassa enters into dialogue with the Latin American theorists in question, suggesting valuable insights such thinkers could derive from a materialities of communication approach, while also challenging some of the universalist assumptions underlying the Kittlerian, and others, model of media studies. Moving from the abstract to the particular, Susana Pajares Tosca's article studies *Condiciones extremas*, a Colombian hyperfiction that inaugurated the genre in Spanish, drawing on a long line of grim, futuristic science ficion. The novel integrates text and image, and Pajares Tosca's analysis of it takes the hypertext as a starting point to explore how new technologies and narrative strategies reinvent themselves in a Latin American context.

The volume closes with Carlos Jáuregui's study of the cultural practices that surround the production, circulation, and consumption of "literary" texts in Spanish on the Internet, showing the effects of the Internet on literature, text, author, and reader, all concepts that up to this point have been mediated by print culture and its limitations. he focuses on the online short story site, *Proyecto Sherezade*, a publication hosted on a University of Manitoba server, which has more than 3,000 monthly readers and has over the last 4 years

published more than 100 stories by authors from 27 different countries.

A comment of Gayatri Spivak's captures the iconoclastic spark of much of the work in this volume. Although her comment has an undercurrent of disapproval, she nevertheless goes to the heart of the transformation that many of the new media-conscious writers embody in their fictional works: "When we move from learning to learn ecological sanity from 'primitive communism' in the secret encounter to the computerized database, we have moved so far in degree that we have moved in kind. From infinite care and passion of learning we have bypassed knowledge (which is obsolete now) into the telematic postmodern terrain of information command" (343). The chapters in this book, all of them published for the first time, begin the task of addressing a line of inquiry such as that suggested by Spivak, by which cutting-edge writers are increasingly aware of this "move in kind" from a Gutenbergian to an electronically-based aesthetic practice. Although most of the articles focus on the second half of the twentieth century, their fresh insights into the relationship between literature and mass media give us new perspectives on nineteenth-century literature and early-twentieth-century movements such as the avant-garde. The authors critically assess the Latin American media theories of García Canclini and others, pointing out their strengths and shortcomings, and show how literary works (especially novels) have been able to sustain their visibility in a highly competitive media ecology, accommodating pop and mass culture while reaffirming the authority of the literary intellectual. They analyze how authors of fictional print narratives have continually entered into a creative dialogue with mass media and mass culture, and have used narratives as powerful aesthetic tools to represent their own media multiplicity.

This text also studies contemporary narrative and finds, in a landscape of nostalgia, uncertainty, and disenchantment, a new generation of writers engaging with the new technologies of our computer-dominated information age, as a way to challenge a Latin American narrative imaginary dominated by regionalist narratives in the first half of the century, and magical realism in the second half. Thus, this book examines Latin American literature in the context of a contemporary audiovisual culture in which mass media such as photography, film, and the Internet have threatened writing's "representational privilege" as a technology of information processing and storage.

In recent years a number of books have been published which in one way or another address the particular permutations of mass culture in Latin America. The seminal anthology, *Medianation*, edited by Eva Bueno is one such example. Almost all of these books have focused on such widely disseminated products of mass culture as

telenovelas, film, and popular music, and have placed relatively less emphasis on literary forms, even those which have become mass market phenomena. Likewise, there has been little attention paid to the interrelations of literature with this other media. This volume, by concentrating on an analysis of literary texts as a dynamic aspect of a mass media universe, offers itself in dialogue with and as a complementary volume to these other studies. It is our hope that the book's foregrounding of the impact of mass media on Latin American literature will contribute to the still emerging critical debate on an increasingly essential subject.

Notes

1. Beatriz Sarlo's work is essential for the study of the Argentine situation in the 1920s and 1930s. See particularly her *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* and *La imaginación técnica: Sueños modernos de la cultura argentina.*

2. See Flora Süssekind's excellent book, *Cinematograph of Words*, for a study of the Brazilian case.

3. In "El cine y estos pueblitos," a 1933 article, Arlt seems to anticipate Puig's Vallejo when he mentions that "the thirst for passion that cinematography, seen as a whole, provokes, awakens, and sharpens in these towns, creating at the margins of a routine life problems without any possibility of solution" ("la sed de pasiones que la cinematografía, en su conjunto, provoca, despierta y agudiza en estos pueblos, creando al margen de la vida rutinaria problemas que no tienen posibilidad de solucion. . . .") (108-9).

4. We are very sorry to report that Alfonsina Lorenzi passed away in August 1999, as she was revising her chapter for this volume. We hope that the readers will see her article's inclusion here as a testimonial to a committed scholar whose life was cut tragically short.

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