
What is “Popular” About Mass Culture?: Santiago en 100 Palabras and Chilean National Literature

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On April 23, 2009, one hundred thousand copies of the book, *Santiago in 100 Words. The Best 100 Stories IV (2007-2008)*¹, were freely distributed to subway riders throughout Santiago de Chile in celebration of World Book and Copyright Day.¹ The pocket-sized book contains the best one hundred stories submitted to the writing contest, Santiago en 100 Palabras (Santiago in 100 Words) over the past two years. Since it began in 2001, Chilean citizens have collectively written over 150,000 original short stories for this contest, each of which can contain no more than 100 words and should, ideally, take Chile’s capital city of Santiago as its theme. Of the tens of thousands of stories Chilean citizens submit to this contest every year, the three chosen winners, and any honorable mentions, are printed on postcards and freely distributed to subway riders, with the best one hundred stories appearing in the pocket-sized book that is distributed for free every other April 23. Each year’s winning stories are also printed as billboards and posted next to commercial advertisements in subway tunnels and on trains. The contest is organized and administered by the state-owned public transportation corporation Metro de Santiago, the foreign-owned copper conglomerate Minera Escondida, and the independent cultural magazine *Plagio*.² For seven consecutive years, these three unconventional and unexpectedly partnered literary producers have organized what they claim to be “the country’s most *massive* literary convocation” (*Plagio*, emphasis is mine). Through this contest, hundreds of Chilean citizens, most of whom have no previous writing experience, become published authors whose work is distributed to the more than 2,200,000 people who ride the Santiago subway everyday (Metro de Santiago).

Santiago en 100 Palabras is at once a unique literary phenomenon within Chile’s contemporary cultural landscape and, at the same time, an exemplary model of the challenges and tensions that have plagued Chilean literary culture since the military coup of 1973. It is widely agreed that Chile’s dictatorial

and post-dictatorial periods have been defined by the hegemony of neoliberal economic policies implemented by the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. Recently, the Chilean state, in partnership with civil society, has increased its attempt to combat neoliberal hegemony, specifically in the area of cultural production. The 2006 creation of the National Counsel for Culture and the Arts (*Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes*, or CNCA) is an excellent example of this effort. A state agency that works closely with cultural professionals in the private sector, the CNCA has written and implemented many public policies meant to ensure the democratization of Chilean culture. Four dominant opinions emerge from this official discourse, all of which depend on a conceived opposition between the “local” (represented by the national) and the “global” (represented by neoliberalism). The first of these notions is that the political project of re-democratization depends on a distinct and uniquely *Chilean identity* as expressed through culture; the second is that this identity is currently threatened by the hegemony of foreign-owned multinational corporations who control the local production and consumption of cultural products in Chile (especially literature); the third is that mass culture is most often the material form through which foreign culture industries exercise their hegemony over local cultural production and consumption; and the fourth is that, in order to protect Chilean identity from the homogenizing effects of global mass culture, Chile must cultivate an autonomous and economically competitive national culture industry to compete with foreign capital.³ This means the increased commercialization of books written, published, and printed by local industry professionals and made accessible to readers through local bookstores.

Like the CNCA’s institutional policy, *Santiago en 100 Palabras* is committed to strengthening national literature in order to challenge the hegemony of the global literary industry. However, the contest’s method of doing so differs greatly from, and at times directly contradicts, Chile’s official cultural discourse. The first difference is that *Santiago en 100 Palabras* does not patronize any aspect of Chile’s book industry: it does not sell its published stories in bookstores nor use local printing companies to manufacture the hundreds of thousands of books and post-cards it has produced over the past seven years.⁴ This is because the contest avoids traditional, i.e. commercial, forms of literary production and circulation altogether, choosing instead to publish its stories through modes of mass communication—namely on billboards throughout Santiago’s subway system. It is the *massive* nature of this contest that forces us to rethink what has become an accepted tension between the “local” and the “global” in Chile’s post-dictatorial cultural economy. For *Santiago en 100 Palabras*, the question is not how to overcome mass culture as a means of challenging neoliberal hegemony, but rather, how to *use* mass

culture as a means of producing a local, national literature that will challenge the hegemony of global culture industries.

Any project to strengthen a national literature, including that of the CNCA as well as that of *Santiago en 100 Palabras*, is ultimately concerned with “popular” culture, or what is referred to throughout Latin America as *lo popular*. As Chilean cultural critic and theorist Luis Cárcamo-Huechante succinctly states, “It is impossible to become national without first being popular” (125). Popular culture plays a crucial role in the local/global debate because of its ambiguous relationship to mass culture—an ambiguity that *Santiago en 100 Palabras* exploits in its unique creation of national literature. While I explore the relationship between popular and mass culture in detail below, what is most important is that within Chile’s post-dictatorship cultural discourse, *lo popular* comes to represent the local, the national, and, within the current global context, the marginal, whereas mass culture is symbolic of the foreign, the neoliberal, and the hegemonic. *Santiago en 100 Palabras* forces us to rethink these accepted definitions. The contest re-imagines these two cultural forms as cooperative, rather than antagonistic, modes of cultural production, circulation, and consumption. It uses the hegemonic power inherent in mass culture to increase Chilean citizens’ control over the production and consumption of national culture, demonstrating that *lo popular* can be mass-produced without losing its local meaning and significance.

However, the contest also shows that this strategy alone is insufficient in solving the current local/global conflict in post-dictatorial Chile. The contest’s financial dependence on *Minera Escondida* (owned by BHP Billiton, the world’s largest mining monopoly), demonstrates that the problem of global homogenization is not strictly a *cultural* problem and cannot be solved through cultural projects alone. While *Santiago en 100 Palabras* may present a viable challenge to *cultural* globalization, it does so at the expense of reinforcing foreign capital’s domination of Chile’s non-cultural economies—namely metal mining, which is a far more lucrative national industry than literature and therefore has a greater ability to strengthen the nation’s economic (and consequently political) autonomy. This, according to anthropologist Balmurli Natrajan, is the problem with thinking about globalization as a conflict between cultural homogenization versus heterogenization (177). He claims that such views make “*cultural* globalization appear only linked to identity, not interests and power. [...] The sense of culture here has been emptied of economics and power, and meaning becomes only about noneconomic and nonpolitical existential narratives of life” (184, emphasis in original). In the case of *Santiago en 100 Palabras*, we see that national identity, difference, and autonomy are all tools used by foreign capital to strengthen its global hegemony and marginalize the local in non-cultural industries. The problem is

not only in thinking about the local/global divide in squarely cultural terms, but also in conceiving of this divide as a binary relation in which the national and the global are seen as mutually exclusive opposites. In contrast to the philosophy of the contest organizers, as well as that of the CNCA, my analysis of Santiago en 100 Palabras suggests that the nation is not the antidote to global neoliberal hegemony but often times a product of it.

Canvassing the Cultural Sphere: Mass Culture and Popular Culture

The differences and similarities between “mass culture” and “popular culture” in Latin America are at once both vast and minute, considered by some as synonymous terms and by others as opposites. An example of the former is found in Ana María Amar Sánchez who uses the terms “popular” and “mass” culture interchangeably, allying them in their opposition to “high” culture (*la “alta” cultura*) (“Canon y traición” 51-2). On the other hand, the Cuban populist film maker and cultural theorist Julio García Espinosa sees the two terms as mutually exclusive, stating in his now classic article, “For An Imperfect Cinema,” that “[p]opular art has absolutely nothing to do with what is called mass art. Popular art needs and consequently tends to develop the personal, individual taste of a people. On the other hand, mass art (or art for the masses), requires the people to have no taste” (76).⁵ One reason for the confusion is because both “mass culture” and “popular culture” rely on the concept of “the people” or “the masses,” without whom neither cultural form would exist. It is this intimate connection with “the people,” that historically classifies both mass and popular culture as “low” or “illegitimate” in comparison with “high” culture, such as that produced by elites (Bielsa 2; Amar Sánchez 52; Aman 15).

Other than this common similarity as a “low culture of the people,” mass and popular culture in Latin America are quite distinct entities. The first difference we see is bound up in the term “popular” itself, which in Latin America typically signifies either one of two, or sometimes both, popular sectors within the extensive and complex category of the Latin American “masses”—namely indigenous peoples and/or the poor. An example of the former is found in Néstor García Canclini’s formative work on Latin American popular culture, *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo*. While García Canclini does not explicitly define Latin American popular culture as synonymous with indigenous populations, the logic of his research leads us to this conclusion since the only examples of “popular culture” he analyzes come from Mexico’s indigenous populations. We find a different definition of “popular culture” in Kenneth Aman and Cristián Parker’s edited volume, *Popular Culture in Chile*, in which the editors equate *lo popular* with working

class and unemployed people or, as they say, with “poor” people broadly (2, 3). It is true that indigenous peoples and the poor do make up a large portion of the Latin American “masses,” however, it would be wrong to use these terms interchangeably with “mass culture” since throughout the twentieth century non-indigenous and middle-class sectors have become increasingly incorporated into the Latin American “masses.” This has happened almost directly as a result of mass culture’s common form as audiovisual media, specifically film, radio, and television—all of which are marketed to the middle class as much as to the poor.

Indeed, its form as audiovisual media marks another important difference between mass culture and *lo popular*. Because of its historical relation to indigenous peoples and the poor, Latin American popular culture is often associated with hand-made artisanal objects that serve both aesthetic and practical purposes (e.g. ceramics, textiles, etc.). Artisanal methods of artistic production are inherently anti-industrial, which seriously limits the scale on which popular cultural objects can circulate throughout a given political economy. Mass culture, on the other hand, is by definition a product of industrialized technology and is therefore not at all limited in the size and scope of its circulation. The most commonly cited forms of mass culture—radio, television, and film—are cultural forms that have been invented for the very purpose of reaching as large an audience as possible. It is the huge size of mass culture that makes it so powerful and establishes its hegemony within the cultural sphere. Popular culture, on the other hand, is “marginal” to the extent that the non-industrial nature of its production limits its ability to become dominant in the cultural sphere.⁶

There is, however, a way in which mass culture does “marginalize” the masses of people who consume it in the sense that it excludes them from the capitalist modes of production through which mass culture is created and distributed. This, in fact, marks what for our purposes here is the most important difference between mass and popular cultures: mass culture creates what seems to be an irreconcilable division between the acts of cultural production and consumption, whereas popular culture conceives of the two processes as inseparable due to their equal dependence on “the people.” Within mass culture it is not the masses who control the means of cultural production, but rather a small group of elite producers. This leads cultural sociologist Esperança Bielsa to claim that “mass culture tend[s] to reflect more a view of culture as determined from above” (2). This is because it is produced and controlled by a small group of cultural elites typically associated with the “culture industry.” This view of mass culture is most often associated with the Frankfurt School, and specifically Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, whose Marxist perspective argues that mass media is a tool

of ideological oppression through which the masses subordinate their political and economic positions to the hegemony of elite sectors. Julio García Espinosa shares this perspective, arguing that one of the most dangerous characteristics of mass culture is its ability to interpellate the masses as passive consumers and spectators; “[M]ass art,” García Espinosa writes, “is art produced by a minority in order to satisfy the demand of a public reduced to the sole role of spectator and consumer” (76). Here, García Espinosa articulates what is still, in the late 1960s, the dominant belief of Latin American cultural producers and theorists in the 21st century: that mass culture marginalizes the masses by inscribing them as passive consumers of culture rather than its active producers. What is particularly dangerous about the masses’ role as spectator and consumer is that it inhibits their intellectual capacities of reflection and critique (Amar Sánchez, “Deserted Cities” 216).⁷

In contrast, popular culture grants greater cultural agency to “the people” (the non-elite) by inscribing them as the authors and creators of culture as well as its consumers. García Espinosa confirms that this is “one of the most profoundly cultured characteristics” of what he calls “popular art,” “that the creators are at the same time the spectators and vice versa. Between those who produce and those who consume, no sharp line of demarcation exists” (76). This is important for García Espinosa because only in this way can the masses engage in the struggle for hegemony and become “the real masters of the means of artistic production” (79). Likewise, Kenneth Aman and Cristián Parker agree, stating that their primary thesis on popular culture in Chile is that “poor people are not simply manipulated by forces beyond their control but are themselves actors in history and, indeed, are shapers of their own values and objectives” (8). Therefore, if Bielsa sees mass culture as “determined from above,” we might rightfully conceive of *lo popular* as culture determined *from below*.

¡Production : Consumption :: Global : Local!

The division that mass culture creates between production and consumption is often conceived of according to another division that dominates the cultural sphere in our age of globalization—that between the local and the global. The analogy between cultural production and the global is convincing because local peoples, not only in Latin America but in peripheral countries around the world, are ever more likely to consume cultural products made in foreign lands rather than created by their fellow countrymen and women (which is especially the case with regards to television and films that are predominantly produced in the United States).⁸ Even in cases where local production manages to persist and compete with foreign-made cultural commodities, it often still

serves the economic interests of global capital, since foreign-owned multinational corporations continue buying up local culture industries. This is precisely the situation in post-dictatorial Chile, in which the neoliberal economic policies implemented by the military dictatorship of general Augusto Pinochet not only solidified the hegemony of foreign-made mass culture on the local level but also created the possibility for global corporations to take over and control the production and distribution of locally-made cultural products—including, and perhaps most importantly, books.⁹

For example, in his most recent memoir, *Informe final, Memorias de un editor*, Chilean book publisher Carlos Orellana provides a detailed account of how the Spanish publishing market, specifically Editorial Planeta, came to dominate Chile's local book industry in the post-dictatorial period. As an editor in Planeta's Santiago office for ten years, Orellana explains how the Spanish press strategically produced a line of "national" literature, not as a project of national community-building, but rather as a marketing ploy. Orellana suggests that the now famous category of post-dictatorial literature known as "*La Nueva Narrativa Chilena*" was more a marketing invention of Spanish publishers than it was a truly coherent movement of aesthetic literary and intellectual production. Orellana shows us how this "global" production of "national" literature excluded local writers *and* editors from the modes of literary production: it censored writers in the sense that Planeta was only interested in publishing the very select group of "bestselling" authors whose work suited the needs of the global market (213); and it censored local editors in the sense that almost all of the power to negotiate the business aspect of book publication was exported out of Santiago to Madrid (249-50). This shift, claims Luis Cárcamo-Huechante, produced a paradox in which the nation becomes a market brand rather than a shared identity, history, or community:

The paradox is that this process no is no longer produced via a national editorial industry [...] but rather as the effect of a multinational editorial policy directed towards the production of a 'national market.' [...] Chile is then an image-sign subsumed within the language of marketing and within the transnational and global imaginary of corporate culture. (47, 114)

According to this view, local Chilean literary producers are excluded from the means of cultural production and relegated to the ranks of passive spectators and consumers of their own culture. The "nation" in this scenario is no longer, as Benedict Anderson has claimed, an "imagined community" produced by the people but rather a brand name produced by global capital.

Another problem of mass-producing local culture is what Guillermo

Sunkel refers to as “the mediatization of the popular” (*la mediatización de lo popular*), in which the meaning and form of local popular culture are distorted when produced and distributed in the form of mass culture. Because popular culture is, as Sunkel suggests, “sometimes considered to be the expression of the ‘authentic’ Latin American,” mass-producing it has the potential of not only redirecting the intended audience of popular culture (which often become foreign markets rather than domestic), but of also changing the way in which a local audience interprets the content and meaning of its own culture (*Cultural Consumption in Latin America* xxiii). Sunkel states that “the mediatization of the popular also implies a re-adaptation, and as such, a transformation that [...] is produced in terms of the rules of the modes of mass media, which provoke changes in form and content” (xxiii). This means that the very process of mass-producing *lo popular* changes its meaning and content for local and foreign, popular and elite, audiences.

There is an alternative to these more critical views of mass culture that grants greater agency to the masses in their role as consumers and spectators. For instance, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michele de Certeau claims that the masses have the power to produce meaning through their everyday use of mass-produced cultural commodities. Likewise, the authors of *Cultural Consumption in Latin America* share de Certeau’s view that mass consumption is an active form of cultural production in which marginal sectors deconstruct and re-codify dominant images and messages according to their own symbolic lexicon and political interests. Jesús Martín-Barbero, for example, argues that the act of productive consumption is especially present within the Latin American context where low literacy rates and a strong oral tradition commonly produce what he terms “collective readings,” in which marginalized groups communally consume and reinterpret mainstream cultural products, appropriating them into their own unique symbolic order (2-25).

According to this model, there are two different moments of cultural production: the first is what I term “primary production” and is determined by elites, most often of the culture industry; the second I refer to as “secondary production” and is mobilized by the masses through their consumption of cultural commodities created during the process of primary production. This secondary production differs from the first by the fact that it is made by a different group of producers (the masses rather than cultural elites), but also by the fact that it is “silent” and “hidden” within the product’s *use* by consumers. De Certeau writes, “We must first analyze [the cultural product’s] manipulation by users *who are not its makers*. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production *hidden* in the process of its utilization” (xiii, emphasis mine). Martín-Barbero agrees, writing, “Very well, if the product or standard of

consumption are the end point of the production process, they are also the point of departure, and the primary material, of another production process, silent and disperse, *bidden* in its uses” (3-4, emphasis mine). The value of this “hidden” meaning is that it can never be determined or controlled by the cultural elites responsible for primary production.

Although these theories grant the masses greater cultural agency in their role as productive consumers, they also reproduce, rather than deconstruct, the hierarchical binary separating the elites from the masses. The fact that secondary production is “hidden” suggests either that secondary producers themselves are not cognizant of the new meanings they produce through cultural consumption, in which case they would rely on intellectual elites for their enlightenment, or that they are cognizant of the new meanings they produce, in which case the new meaning would only be “hidden” to intellectuals and the act of “revealing” it would only benefit cultural elites. In either case, the binary between “high” and “low” remains intact. Jesús Martín-Barbero himself seems to recognize this problem. He writes that “[w]hat is still yet to be seen is the *social history of reading* (*la historia social de la lectura*) that would allow us to break this dualism, remove ourselves from the theoretical-political place in which it originated, and thus be able to unravel the distinguishing traits of popular reading” (4, emphasis in the original). Martín-Barbero is correct to say that this formulation remains on the horizon since his own definition of consumption as secondary production cannot define the masses as primary producers of culture and therefore initiates no semiotic change within the original hierarchy. There is a present need for a cultural practice that will allow the masses to exercise their abilities as both cultural producers *and* consumers—a material form that will bridge the gap between mass and popular culture.

Santiago en 100 Palabras: Mass-Producing the Popular

The literary contest Santiago en 100 Palabras presents such a possibility by conflating the activities of cultural production and consumption into a simultaneous act, performed in the same place, at the same time, and by the same agents: the Chilean masses. In giving average citizens access to modes of mass media as a vehicle for their own cultural production and consumption, the contest suggests that it might be possible to mass produce and distribute popular culture in a way that does not appropriate its meaning for global capitalist gain but that, on the contrary, allows the local masses to more actively engage in the struggle for representational hegemony within the global cultural economy. The potential outcome is that local citizens might exercise their power to author the nation *from below*, as a history of

collective memory and identity, rather than as a marketable brand name that increases the profits of multinational corporations.

In many of the contest's winning stories, we see that citizen-writers do in fact use the contest to construct their national community through the representation of *lo popular*. One example of this is the story, "El Negrito" by María Isabel Toro, selected as one of the best 100 stories of 2005-6. The story is structured around a protagonist that we can rightfully recognize as "popular" in that he is poor and his name, translated very roughly as "blacky," carries heavy racial connotations. The entire story reads:

Every morning he wakes up at the feet of Pedro de Valdivia's horse, feeling that he is a citizen, a Chilean. He can't go to the bathroom in the plaza because one hundred *pesos* this early in the morning is a fortune for *el Negrito*, as people who know him call him. His face is covered by a sheet of dirt, as are his hands. Everyone says that it must be a hundred years since he's bathed. One day an artist in the plaza painted a portrait of him. In two more days, he finished the oil painting. He sold it immediately to a tourist for one hundred dollars.

The act of selling this image to a foreigner (we can assume the tourist is foreign since s/he pays for the painting in "dollars") risks, as Sunkel warns, changing its form and content. If "mediatized," this image threatens to represent all of Chile, and perhaps all of Latin America, as the essentialized, brown (literally dirt on the body but figuratively racial inferiority), penniless peasant. However, the image is not mediatized because the modes of mass media through which this story passes (subway billboards) are not owned by foreign cultural elites and do not service the profits of global culture industries. Unlike the oil rendition of *El Negrito*, the story "El Negrito" is not sold to a foreigner; it is not sold at all, but produced and consumed freely by and for the same audience: Chileans. The author, María Isabel Toro, highlights this fact through her repeated use of the quantity "one hundred," which serves as a reminder that readers of this story consume *el Negrito's* representation not for one hundred *pesos* (what *el Negrito* needs to use the bathroom in the plaza), nor for one hundred dollars (the value of his image on the global market), but rather simply in one hundred *words*. "El Negrito" thus suggests that we can separate mass culture from its use by culture industries, thereby recognizing the problem of mediatization as a problem inherent in the culture industry, not in the form of mass culture itself.

Furthermore, through its use of the billboard, the contest transforms modes of mass communication so that they are no longer spaces of unidirectional communication *from* elite producers *to* mass consumers but are reconfigured into loci

of social dialogue between Chilean citizens. One telling example is “I Lost It” (“*Lo perdí*”) by María Inés Peranchiguay. The narrator of this story has lost her cell phone and all the contact information in it. Through its narration in the second person, the story constructs the reader as the narrator’s friend and equal; the protagonist uses the contest’s public space of publication—the subway billboard—as a means of personal communication between herself and her friend, who is any and all subway riders.

If you call me today, it won’t be me who answers, but another. I have no other way of telling you, since all the numbers were there, and only there. If you read this you will understand and perhaps we will find each other in front of the billboard, me, hoping that you will read it and you, laughing at the scatterbrained woman who lost her cell phone.

The narrator addresses the audience in the familiar “you” voice (*tú*), hailing every potential subway rider/reader as an intimate friend, someone whose number she had in her cell phone; the narrator’s subject-position too can be inhabited by literally any “other” (*otro*) who now possesses her phone. This story, therefore, calls upon all Chileans to equally employ the public space of mass communication, in this case billboard advertisements, as their own private space of inter-personal communication rather than as the device used by the culture industry to subjugate the masses as powerless cultural consumers. Here, citizens use mass media as the public space in which to form an “imagined” national community.

This is what makes Santiago en 100 Palabras fundamentally different from the kind of productive consumption we heard de Certeau and others discuss above. Unlike their model, in which consumers are not culture’s primary producers, this contest conflates cultural production and consumption as a simultaneous act performed by a single actor: the masses. Firstly, the subway is the intended site of literary consumption: while waiting for a train on the underground platform or sitting on a train traveling to and from work, citizens are confronted with literature’s material presence as they face billboard-size publications of stories produced originally for the contest, often within the same space of the underground tunnels and trains. Literary distribution also takes place in the subway system where stories circulate daily as billboard posters and yearly as postcards and pocket-sized books that passengers receive for free as they pass through the turnstiles. Secondly, the subway is equally intended to be the site of literary production. The contest has staged the subway to be the prime location for literary production by placing depositories at stations throughout the city where riders can easily submit as

many stories as they like to the competition. Subway riders do not have to limit themselves to the act of *imagining* that they are the narrator of “I Lost It” but can actually become the writer of their own one hundred word story in the amount of time it takes them to reach their intended stop. The contest produces and circulates mass culture in a way that does not abstract it from Chile onto the global market, but rather the opposite: it grounds every aspect of national literary culture, from production, distribution, and consumption, in the nation’s capital city—literally in the *ground* of Santiago.

In addition to serving as the simultaneous site of literary production and consumption, the subway is an essential element in the contest’s combination of popular and mass culture because of its connection to the city of Santiago as the center of the Chilean nation. According to Amar Sánchez, “the city is the ideal arena for the signs of mass culture to reign supreme” (“Deserted Cities” 211). This is why she claims that “[n]arrative linked to mass culture is by definition urban” (211). However, in a postmodern world, specifically that of Chile’s post-dictatorial period, Amar Sánchez argues that the city has become a “non-place” in which individuals “no longer look to mass culture as a system with which to decodify the signs of the city, but rather replace all contact with the outside world with mass culture” (214). This schema nullifies the possibility of “productive consumption” since according to this model citizens do not even resignify signs of mass culture for their own purposes, but rather live out their lives as “powerless spectators” (Amar Sánchez’s words) in a city that has no historical, cultural, or locational specificity. Santiago might as well be Madrid, New York, or Tokyo since what they all have in common is their aesthetic domination by the same global mass media.¹⁰

Santiago en 100 Palabras seriously attempts to reconstruct the city as a real physical place in which citizens communicate with each other through their active consumption *and* production of national literature. The contest’s organizers are explicit in their hope that citizens will use the contest to re-write Santiago in a way that reflects their own lived realities, their past, their present, and their future histories. In the preface to the third volume of winning stories they write, “Perhaps the question of identity [...] is found within ourselves, in the day-to-day, in our quotidian experiences. [...] The third volume of the best stories of Santiago en 100 Palabras compiles thousands of Chileans’ answers to the question of who we are. The writers who write these stories] write the daily history of this country” (*Santiago en 100 Palabras*, 2007). An excellent example of how this sentiment is realized is the story “Santiago of New Extremadura” (“Santiago de nueva extremadura”) by Jorge Aguilera (Honorable Mention 2002). The story rewrites the European founding of Santiago in a way that reconstructs historical reality according to the needs

of the city's present-day inhabitants. For example, the narrator imagines constructing large streets to prevent traffic congestion, huge water tanks to collect rainwater and avoid floods, and the removal of a few foothills to avoid the accumulation of smog. The story ends by inviting readers to intervene as architects of the city of Santiago and, consequently, of Chile's national history: "What would Gamboa think, that I am exaggerating? Yes? Then forget what I have said, and let it be as you wish." The "Gamboa" to whom the narrator refers might well be Martín Ruiz de Gamboa de Berriz, Spanish conquistador and Royal Governor of Chile from 1580 to 1583. Moreover, the title of the story directly cites Pedro de Valdivia's original naming of the city of Santiago as "Santiago of New Extremadura" after the Extremadura region in Spain. The story therefore displaces the national figures of Gamboa and Pedro de Valdivia with the contemporary writer and reader, both of whom are equal in their authority to design the symbolic landscape of Santiago and of Chile.

Mobilizing the Masses: Minera Escondida

Up until this point I have been arguing that Santiago en 100 Palabras takes the best components of both mass culture (the power of its size) and popular culture (its ability to create an imagined community *from below*) and combines them to create the possibility of mobilizing a national literature produced and consumed in the interests of local peoples rather than foreign corporations. I would now like to explore the actual material conditions that put this project into action in order to determine whether or not Santiago en 100 Palabras is capable of realizing the democratic effects that its combination of mass and popular culture suggest are possible. While the contest focuses its attention on "the masses," there are "elite" forces working behind the scenes that make this project possible. These include Plagio, Metro Santiago, and Minera Escondida, all of whom take on a particular responsibility in the organization and administration of Santiago en 100 Palabras. Plagio is responsible for the overall organization of the contest, while Metro provides the physical space in which the contest takes place (the subway), and Minera Escondida finances the publication and free distribution of the winning stories. Within the context of the contest, these three entities are equal partners; however, within the context of Chile's national economy, and the world's global economy, they exercise vastly different degrees of hegemonic power. Minera Escondida is by far the most "elite" of these three organizations and is therefore the most problematic in terms of the contest's popular and democratizing spirit.

We must question whether or not the motive of Minera Escondida's participation in Santiago en 100 Palabras is to help mobilize and empower

‘the people,’ or whether the company is driven by its own political and/or economic interests. Ultimately the question is whether or not we can understand Minera Escondida as an “intellectual” in the Gramscian sense of the word. Kenneth Aman uses Gramsci’s notion of elite intellectual in his discussion of Chilean popular peoples who, he claims, are historically incapable of organizing themselves and therefore dependent on elites (most typically from the left) to do this for them. He writes that

Gramsci is not afraid to use the term *intellectuals* for this organizing group, but the word must be understood in the light of the second principle, which affirms that this elite—these intellectuals—are in the service of the *popular* project. And this ultimately signifies that ordinary people are to be the intellectuals and creators of their ongoing history. (210)

It is true that, through the contest, Minera Escondida helps ordinary Chilean citizens themselves become intellectuals by writing their own ongoing history and in this way we might see the company as democratically mobilizing the masses. The company’s financial sponsorship is also what allows Santiago en 100 Palabras to produce and distribute its literature for free on such a massive scale, thereby circumventing Chile’s traditional publishing industry and the neoliberal multinationals that dominate it. However, this does not necessarily mean that we should credit Minera Escondida as an “intellectual” elite. To a certain extent, Minera Escondida’s participation in the competition makes the contest complicit in neoliberalism’s domination of non-cultural Chilean industries, specifically metal mining.

Owned and operated by a combination of foreign investors (including Australian, British, and Japanese corporations as well as the World Bank), Minera Escondida undoubtedly proves the extent to which Chile has effectively implemented a model of neoliberalism that makes the country’s economic survival ever more dependent on and controlled by foreign capital. Not surprisingly, the company’s monopoly of Chile’s mining industry dates back to the dictatorship period. The site for the Escondida mine was discovered during the middle of the military dictatorship in 1981 and construction began in 1988 with full operation starting in 1991 under the first transitional government. Since then, Minera Escondida has continued to grow in size and wealth throughout the democratic transition (Minera Escondida, “Historia”). 57.5% of the company is owned by the Australian company BHP Billiton, the world’s largest industrial producer of natural resources that houses corporate offices on every continent (Minera Escondida, “Propiedad”). 30% of the company is currently owned by Rio Tinto, a British company that also

leads the world in the production of natural resources but that is currently being bought-out by BHP Billiton (BHP Billiton). Another 10% of Minera Escondida is owned by JECO Corporation—a consortium of Japanese companies (including Mitsubishi Corp., Mitsubishi Materials, and Nippon Mining and Metals Company); and the final 2.5% of Minera Escondida is owned by the International Finance Corporation—the section of the World Bank that, according to Minera Escondida’s website, “fosters sustainable private sector investments in developing countries in order to help reduce poverty and improve the quality of life of the local population” (Minera Escondida, “Propiedad”).¹¹

As a result of its economic success in Chile, Minera Escondida has become a leading financier of Chilean national culture in the post-dictatorial period, sponsoring many other cultural programs beyond Santiago en 100 Palabras. As Arturo Navarro writes in his book *Culture: Who Pays? (Cultura: ¿Quién paga?)*, “[A]ll cultural financing exists for some type of interest. Patrons donated but they expected something in return. [...] And the sponsorship of companies or individuals has two characteristics: to seek recognition and to take advantage of tax incentives. Why deny it?” (209). Minera Escondida’s sponsorship of Santiago en 100 Palabras exemplifies both these characteristics. We see the first characteristic in the company’s own admission that it uses culture in order to constitute itself as a *local*, rather than *foreign*, entity. As it states on its website, “The company is successful when it is valorized by the communities of which it forms a part. Thus, one of our objectives is to be a responsible citizen and be recognized as such” (Minera Escondida, “Objetivos estratégicos”).

The contest’s ability to produce national identity is evident in the fact that Minera Escondida uses it as a means of naturalizing itself and appropriating a native identity. If successful, the local/global divide would be nullified, since Chilean citizens would be able to recognize the company as “one of us” and therefore be less likely to protest its monopolization of Chile’s most economically valuable natural resource. More importantly, while the free distribution of texts does critique the commercialization of literature and makes it more democratically accessible to popular sectors, there is good reason to believe that these are not Minera Escondida’s primary motives for giving such huge amounts of literature away for free. In fact, the company receives a tax break for doing so. This is why on every copy of the contest’s pocket-sized book we read the words “Free Distribution/Sale of This Item Is Prohibited” and all individual postcards carry the phrase “Project accepted by the Cultural Donations Law.” Created by the CNCA in 1990, the Cultural Donations Law (No. 18.985) serves as a legal mechanism that stimulates private financial investment in cultural and artistic projects using tax incentives

(CNCA “Ley de donaciones”). The fact that the contest’s literature is produced and consumed for free helps us see the way in which globalization pits one local industry against another, “liberating” literary culture from the clutches of neoliberal control in order to strengthen the foreign imperialism of local metal mining, an industry, we should note, that is much more lucrative than Chilean literary publishing.

This law, along with Minera Escondida’s own admission of its need to befriend the Chilean people in order to be more economically successful in their country, make it more than difficult for us to read this corporation as an “intellectual elite” in the Gramscian sense of the word. It might be possible, rather, to see Minera Escondida’s relationship to the Chilean masses as another example of what Luis Cárcamo-Huechante describes as a new image of *lo popular* in Chile’s post-dictatorial era. In his book, *Tramas del mercado*, Cárcamo-Huechante argues that the Chilean masses no longer represent an anti-capitalist tension that is characteristic of their historical alliance with leftist political movements; rather, he claims that since the end of the dictatorship, Chile’s corporate market culture has co-opted the image of *lo popular* such that it now represents “the value of creativity” (130). At first glance this seems an adequate description of Santiago en 100 Palabras, through which the masses are valued for their creativity at the same time that that creativity financially benefits Chile’s corporate culture, as represented by Minera Escondida. However, as opposed to Cárcamo-Huechante’s claim that *lo popular* no longer represents “anti-capitalist tensions” (130), Santiago en 100 Palabras presents us with a great contradiction: within the sphere of cultural production and consumption, the masses still do represent an anti-capitalist project that radically frees local literary production and consumption from the neoliberal hegemony of Chile’s publishing industry; on the other hand, through their participation in the contest, the masses become complicit in global capital’s exploitation of their own natural resources and non-cultural industries.

Conclusion: A Lesson for Globalization Studies

What I hope to have shown in this essay is that Santiago en 100 Palabras teaches us two important lessons: the first is that mass culture *can* exist outside the global culture industry and *can* be used by the masses in their attempt to determine their own history, identity, and culture; the second is that nationalism is *not* the antidote to the homogenizing effects of globalization, as is commonly believed within Chile’s post-dictatorial literary culture. Minera Escondida is evidence that nationalism is not a threat to foreign capital but rather an asset. Nationalism is not the counter-face of globalization, nor does it threaten its hegemony. This is why we must, as Natrajan suggests, cease to think about the

“problem” of cultural globalization as a problem of homogenization versus difference. Instead, we need to see it as a complex organism in which local and global interests intersect across political, economic, and cultural spectrums. For it is obvious that both the Chilean people and Minera Escondida benefit from their partnership in this writing project. Minera Escondida strategically uses the contest in an attempt to divert attention away from the fact that it is *not* a Chilean citizen but rather a monopolizing foreign power. The Chilean masses use Minera Escondida’s money in an attempt to re-write their own history and identity by publishing literature independently of the market. Thus while the Marxist model of culture as a means of political and economic oppression is still alive and well in our current cultural climate, the importance of *lo popular* in Santiago en 100 Palabras shows that it is not a seamlessly imperialistic enterprise. The Chilean people benefit from the free and equal access to cultural production and consumption that the contest offers, granting them greater representational—i.e., political—power. Santiago en 100 Palabras is evidence that mass culture is not a threat to Latin American popular culture but is rather increasingly used by the local masses as a vehicle for democratic cultural agency.

NOTES

1. Unless listed as a published translation in the Work Cited, all English translations of Spanish titles and text are the work of the author.

2. When referring to the independent cultural magazine, I italicize the word *Plagio*; however, when referring to the team of producers who organize Santiago en 100 Palabras I do not.

3. For a thorough history of Chile’s “new cultural institutionalization,” including the formation of the CNCA, see Agustín Squella, *El jinete en la lluvia. La cultura en el gobierno de Lagos*. For an understanding of CNCA policies and programs, see Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, *Política nacional del libro y la lectura*. Santiago: Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, Consejo Nacional del Libro y la Lectura, 2006. *Consejonacionaldecultura.cl*. 11 July 2007. Web. 22 May 2009; and Asociación de Editores de Chile y Fundación Chile Veintiuno, *Una política de Estado para el libro y la lectura. Estrategias para el fomento de la lectura y el desarrollo de la industria editorial en Chile*. Santiago: Fundación Chile Veintiuno y la Asociación de Editores de Chile, 2005.

4. Santiago en 100 Palabras prints its books with Quebecor World, a Canadian owned company that now dominates the printing industry in Latin America and around the world.

5. García Espinosa uses the terms “mass art” and “popular art,” whereas in this essay I only use the terms “mass culture” and “popular culture” (which I also understand as *lo popular*). One can argue that the terms “art” and “culture” are different in that “art” refers to individual

objects of creative production often intended for aesthetic consumption, entertainment, or critical reflection whereas “culture” refers to a complex system of beliefs, traditions, norms, and world views shared by a common people. I use the terms interchangeably in this essay because I see them as interdependent since it is through objects of artistic production that cultural lifestyles are produced and reproduced.

6. Kenneth Aman defines Chilean popular culture as “marginal” for a different reason, arguing that the term refers to “all social categories with little or no political power [who] are excluded from the means of production” (217). My own definition of *lo popular* sees ‘the people’ as the primary producers of culture, whose modes of production are more limited in size but also more directly controlled by the people themselves. I understand mass culture, contrastingly, as that which excludes the majority of Chilean citizens from the modes of production (specifically those of mass media) that dominant Chile’s post-dictatorial cultural milieu.

7. This opinion of mass culture is very popular within Chilean literary culture and is used to describe the phenomenon of what many critics, writers, and editors refer to as “light” or “frivolous” literature that is especially characteristic of the post-dictatorial period and its neoliberal economic policies. Carlos Orellana refers to this category of literature with the term “‘libros-basura’ [...que] no le pidan al lector eventual ni mucha imaginación ni esfuerzo alguno de inteligencia” (250).

8. This is not to say that ‘the people’ in the United States have more power to produce the culture they consume than the masses of cultural consumers in peripheral countries. We must remember that the hegemony of cultural elites applies to the masses in the United States as well, where marginal groups equally struggle for access to the means of local cultural production.

9. The hegemony of foreign-made mass culture in post-dictatorial and neoliberal Chile has a well-documented history and is most typically associated with the importation of television and film media. For a general discussion of Chilean mass culture of the post-dictatorial period, see Óscar Contardo and Macarena García, *La era ochentera. Tévé, pop y under en el Chile de los ochenta*. For an explanation of how this affected Chilean literary production in particular, see Luis E. Cárcamo-Huechante, *Tramas del mercado: imaginación económica, cultura pública y literatura en el Chile de fines del siglo veinte* and Berdardo Subercaseaux, *Historia del libro en Chile. (Alma y cuerpo)*.

10. It is important to note that Amar Sánchez does not study the relationship between literature and mass culture in the same way that I do here. Indeed, her work is a common trend in the scholarship on literature and mass media that favors analyzing the narrative *representation* (what Amar Sánchez refers to as “use”) of mass media within literary texts. My own interests are

rather concerned with the way in which literature might exist as an example of mass culture itself through its use of mass modes of production, distribution, and consumption. While my research method differs from that of Amar Sánchez, our theses are similar in that we both see the use of mass culture as capable of empowering, if not mainstreaming, marginalized (i.e. popular) artists and forms of art. Others scholars who study the material relationship between literature and mass culture include Susana Rotker, Esperança Bielsa and Benedict Anderson, all of whom research the mass-production of literature via newspapers.

11. This view is, of course, starkly different from that of most critics of neoliberalism who see the World Bank, specifically its Structural Adjustment Programs, as primarily responsible for increasing economic, political, and cultural impoverishment throughout the Latin American region.

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