



# Art beyond Itself: Anthropology for a Society without a Story Line

By Néstor García Canclini

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First published in Spanish in 2010, *Art beyond Itself* is Néstor García Canclini's deft assessment of contemporary art. The renowned cultural critic suggests that, ideally, art is the place of imminence, the place where we glimpse something just about to happen. Yet, as he demonstrates, defining contemporary art and its role in society is an ever more complicated endeavor. Museums, auction houses, artists, and major actors in economics, politics, and the media are increasingly chummy and interdependent. Art is expanding into urban development and the design and tourism industries. Art practices based on objects are displaced by practices based on contexts. Aesthetic distinctions dissolve as artworks are inserted into the media, urban spaces, digital networks, and social forums. Oppositional artists are adrift in a society without a clear story line. What, after all, counts as transgression in a world of diverse and fragmentary narratives? Seeking a new analytic framework for understanding contemporary art, García Canclini is attentive to particular artworks; to artists including Francis Alÿs, León Ferrari, Teresa Margolles, Antoni Muntadas, and Gabriel Orozco; and to efforts to preserve, for art and artists, some degree of independence from religion, politics, the media, and the market.

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"No one profiled the paradoxes, the volatility and the limits of the Latin American experience of modernity with more precision and subtlety than Néstor García Canclini. Few have matched his trenchant and poignant readings of the more recent impacts of economic and political globalization. It will delight the reader that the same qualities that infuse his engagement with contemporary art. As an anthropologist of contemporary cultures, he is exact in identifying art's current structures, and in exposing the art world's prevailing mystifications concerning autonomy, relationality, and critical correctness. A passionate observer of the work of artists such as León Ferrari, Antoni Muntadas, Santiago Sierra, Carlos Amorales, and Teresa Margolles, he describes, with elegance and precision, their capacity to grasp, show, and build 'immanence' within our contemporary conditions."

(Terry Smith, coeditor of *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* 2014-01-23)

"*Art beyond Itself* offers one of the most potent accounts of art's reach into and interaction with other realms (media, fashion, social action, investment funds, urban revitalization, new technologies, security, recovery programs for at-risk youth, etc.), offering insights into that transit that neither Bourdeau's reduction notion of autonomous spheres nor Rancière's politics of dissensus and 'distribution of the sensible' adequately theorize."

(George Yudice, author of *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* 2014-01-23)

"Any book by Néstor García Canclini is a major publishing event. In *Art beyond Itself*, he takes on received wisdom about art from inside the art world and from the perspective of the social sciences, updating the sociological *nostra* of Becker and Bourdieu for the contemporary moment, invoking an array of artistic and philosophical works in the process. No one else could have written this book. It is brilliantly conceived and executed and well-translated. Absolutely superior."

(Toby Miller, author of *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism, and Television in a Neoliberal Age*)

"Néstor García Canclini's *Art beyond Itself* is an addition to the literature that believes that art and artistic movements may be understood 'only in connection with social processes' (p. xi). It examines how artistic projects become part of other logics (e.g., the market, the media, politics, social movements) and how art is modified in the process."

(Nigel Rapport *American Anthropologist* 2015-06-01)

"García Canclini's insightful study crosses disciplinary divides and hence will appeal to scholars in the social sciences and humanities from a wide range of academic backgrounds. Anthropologists, sociologists, art historians and cultural critics, particularly those focused on Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, have much to gain from reading this book. Literary critics, historians, philosophers and economists whose interests rest in contemporary aesthetics and the art market will also find value in this study."

(Resha Cardone *The Latin Americanist* 2015-11-01)

"*Art Beyond Itself...*probes art's struggles to redefine itself in a globalized world in which previously discrete categories of aesthetic and social experience are ever more blurred. With this book García Canclini, one of

Latin America's foremost intellectuals, both expands his already considerable presence for English-speaking audiences and provides a powerful new analytical approach to contemporary art."  
(Robin Adèle Greeley *Critical Inquiry* 2016-11-10)

#### About the Author

Néstor García Canclini is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City. Born in Argentina, he has lived in Mexico for many years. He is an anthropologist and cultural critic originally trained as a philosopher. Among the many books that he has written, those available in English are *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflict*, *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*, and *Imagined Globalization*, which is published by Duke University Press.

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**Jacki Warner:**

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