

Producing Good Neighbors: Carmen Miranda's Body as Spectacular Pan-Americanism

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Cet article examine quelques aspects des fondements culturels et symboliques de la Politique de Bon Voisinage, la doctrine politique régissant les Amériques dans les années 1930-1940, dans le sillage de la Grande Dépression et de la Première Guerre mondiale. Les questions du regard, de la représentation, du corps et surtout un projet pédagogique spécifique pour le public américain seront examinées par le biais d'une référence aussi bien aux travaux de Guy Debord sur la société du spectacle qu'à ceux de Robyn Wiegman sur les régimes de connaissance visuelle. L'objet d'étude est Carmen Miranda, la baiana stylisée, une image qui a largement circulé à travers les technologies visuelles de la Politique de Bon Voisinage. Le but de cet article est de démontrer comment le corps de Miranda a orchestré à la perfection les impératifs de cette politique en fournissant une nouvelle source de connaissance sur l'Amérique latine fondée sur des représentations visuelles. Enfin cet article met en évidence les stratégies déployées afin de transformer l'image de Miranda en marchandise.

"The spectacle is capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image."

(Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 34)

Introduction

This paper looks at the Good Neighbor Policy (GNP) from the perspective of a tradition of spectacle in American culture that typically stressed the exemplary role of the U.S. as a model to the world. I assume however that in the specific contexts of both the Great Depression and the

rise of the culture industries and mass culture throughout the 1940s, the elaboration of the GNP to govern foreign relations within the Americas and the central role assigned to culture in that project added a different stroke to the culture of spectacle. My purpose is to demonstrate that, under the aegis of the GNP, the culture of spectacle came extraordinarily close to a culture of *the* spectacle as developed by French critic Guy Debord in the late 1960s, in the sense of a commodification of reality that, in the case in point, I apply to the representations of Latin America and of the relations between the U.S. and Latin America.

In the context of the GNP and stirred by the need to build continental security and economic cooperation in the Americas, a particular visual knowledge regime developed, that is, a constellation of discourses sustained by particular visual practices, apparatuses, and mechanisms. This regime relied heavily on the representational capacity of the new technologies—film, photography, and the radio—and their promise to add authenticity to the images of Latin America the GNP promoted. I follow Robyn Wiegman in her assertion that each regime of knowledge resorts to different strategies to introduce and make legible the representations of its time, creating particular economies of visibility that produce, reproduce, and establish a distinct a set of meanings as true. I single out the case of Brazilian¹ singer and actress Carmen Miranda, analyzing the technologies of visibility that turned her body into an image of Latin America generative of new meanings and discourses about the region. I take the State as the ultimate provider of the spectacle through its apparatuses for the control and production of culture, especially the State Department's Office for the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA), created in 1940 and headed by Nelson Rockefeller, and also because of the State's close connections with the culture industries. With this in mind, I will begin by introducing the GNP in general, stressing the particular contribution it made to the construction of the visual knowledge regime of its time. The following sections will look closely into the strategies used by the culture industries to turn Miranda's body into a commodity, an analysis rooted in Guy Debord's critique of the society of the spectacle.

I. The Good Neighbor Policy

Even though the term 'good neighbor' is originally attributed to President-elect Herbert Hoover in his first good-will tour to Central and South America in 1928, the articulation of the idea as a concerted political, economic and cultural program of foreign policy is owed to F.D. Roosevelt. At the outset of the New Deal, in his 1933 Inaugural Address, the President reinvented the typically interventionist role of the U.S. in the Americas as that of a good neighbor committed to a relationship of mutual respect: "In the field of world policy I

would dedicate this Nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the rights of others—the neighbor who respects his obligations and respects the sanctity of his agreements in and with a world of neighbors” (Polenberg 42). Only two months later, Roosevelt clarified the idea by establishing a direct link between “good neighbor” and “Pan-American,” in his speech on Pan American Day. But, besides economic concerns, it was the war that largely came to define the course of what became the GNP. While it was particularly strong after 1935, its demise practically followed the end of the war.

As noted by historian Randall B. Woods, “[i]nitially Washington launched the Good Neighbor Policy in order to safeguard American lives and property south of the Rio Grande and to promote trade between the United States and the rest of the hemisphere” (7), a point that stresses Franklin D. Roosevelt’s intention to restore production and prosperity to the U.S. However, the program soon came to incorporate “a second phase [...] in which the Roosevelt Administration expected that in return for the renunciation of intervention, the American republics would join with the United States to transform the Pan-American system into a collective-security organization” (Woods 7). The GNP therefore signaled a moment in which the U.S. attempted to break its traditional isolationist hemispheric position and began dealing with the Southern hemispheric nations as foreign nations, rather than its dependencies, which created expectations for reciprocal relations on fairer grounds.

Indeed, the GNP followed previous U.S. elaborations of continental foreign policy, since the times of the Manifest Destiny and the Monroe Doctrine, therefore holding an indisputable place in the genealogy of Pan-Americanism. But the premises in the 1930s were quite specific and, throughout the decade, many instances of military occupation ended and direct U.S. intervention was avoided. This practice seemed to confirm that Latin America had succeeded in the process of progressive reform and had reached the desired state of development and political maturity to finally be dealt with as an equal to the big (good) neighbor of the North. But what the new doctrine actually made evident was the effort to justify two fundamental political enterprises in time of war: new political alliances and trade with new markets, since the GNP also came largely as an answer to Japan’s grip on China and Germany’s rise in Europe, which had deprived the U.S. of a sizeable fraction of its markets (Gellman 47).

Economic reciprocity and non-intervention were therefore the hallmark of the GNP in the Americas. But what truly distinguished the new doctrine was the goal of cultural reciprocity added to that of economic and military solidarity. That is, its championing of the benefits of culture as a complement to economic and political principles was based on the awareness that political stability in the Americas depended on a more positive image of each national

identity and that this was at risk as long as the stereotypes of the Yankee imperialist and the Latin American gangster prevailed. To a great extent, the GNP committed itself to an enterprise of knowledge production that attempted to represent difference as mutually nonthreatening, promoting a general atmosphere of joy and friendliness through vehicles with a mass appeal. The creation of a specific movie section in the OCIAA, the Motion Picture Division, in 1940, provides a clear statement about these intentions:

The Motion Picture Division of the CIAA was organized to employ motion pictures as one of the three main media in its information program. In all probability, motion pictures, particularly those originating in the United States, provided the most direct approach to the widest audiences in the hemisphere, with this being particularly true in the other American republics because of the high rate of illiteracy.²

The ideological argument was also significant: a sense of friendship and loyalty for neighboring countries was invaluable in promoting resistance against the infiltration of Nazi ideology. Roosevelt's political discourse itself voiced the close association of these economic and spiritual imperatives in his famous 1941 speech, the "Four Freedoms": freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Despite the threat to national security and the general climate of fear, the U.S., like the whole of the Americas, was a region at peace and, from the first years of his leadership, FDR had taken peaceful coexistence as a banner and the GNP as his best tool towards peace. As he had reminded his audience at Chautauqua, New York, in 1936: "Peace, like charity, begins at home, and that is why we have begun at home." By 'home,' Roosevelt meant the whole of the Americas, which held friendly and balanced relations both among themselves and with the U.S.

With the development of the consumer society, a context of expanding mass-media technologies and culture industries allowed for new strategies and techniques to build imaginary geographies, making distances shorter and allowing the average citizen to consume visually places and realities to which s/he had never been physically. The 1930s were the golden age of film and radio, and the decade also witnessed the first television broadcasts and regular airline connections between North and South America. New links between communication, entertainment, politics, and trade were also developed. New visual technologies became particularly useful in conferring credibility on the GNP programs, stamping their representations of Latin America with the seal of truthfulness and authenticity in products as diverse as "radio tours, film production and exhibition, art exhibits, musical and theatrical performances; as well as diplomatic 'visits' by journalists and artists" (Benamou 36). This eventually allowed the GNP to move one step further into the culture of the spectacle and present us with different cultural forms than those traditionally connected with the foundational values of U.S.-American culture.

II. Visual Technologies: Updating Spectacle for Hemispheric Consumption

Irene Ramalho Santos has remarked that the U.S. used the original fiction of the City upon a Hill as the beacon to the world in order to refashion itself continually, both inwards and outwards, as a world spectacle—a stage where images of good citizenship were exposed and dramatized, as pedagogical tools used both for nation building and to provide a leading example to the whole world (6). The GNP was no exception to this cultural practice: President F. D. Roosevelt himself applied this traditional rhetorical equipment to promote the U.S. leadership towards peace in the world, in his Address at Chautauqua: referring back to the declaration of the GNP at his Inauguration, he stressed both the solid values of the Good Neighbor doctrine and the success of its application: “Throughout the Americas the spirit of the good neighbor is a practical and living fact. The twenty-one American Republics are not only living together in friendship and in peace; they are united in the determination so to remain.”³ It followed that hemispheric peace based on equal and respectful relations, as well as good trade, could not but be an example to the world, as Roosevelt’s conclusion makes clear:

*This declaration [the definition of the GNP] represents my purpose; but it represents more than a purpose, for it stands for a practice. To a measurable degree it has succeeded; the whole world now knows that the United States cherishes no predatory ambitions. We are strong; but less powerful nations know that they need not fear our strength. We seek no conquest; we stand for peace.*⁴

I would like to suggest, however, that the artists and intellectuals involved in GNP projects and the technologies of visual knowledge they promoted (and Carmen Miranda most notably) did not carry on that model message of the GNP without resorting to the spectacle. It is at this stage that I believe the case in point provides evidence of a particular twist in the traditional values of spectacle that provided a solid foundation for American culture since John Winthrop’s metaphor of the City upon a Hill. The new technologies of visibility added a consumable dimension to the culture of spectacle examined by Santos, turning it into the culture of *the* spectacle, in anticipation of Guy Debord’s theory, as I will explain shortly. It would not be far fetching to state that the GNP was the spectacular version of Pan-Americanism, following Brazilian historian Ana Maria Mauad’s effective elaboration of the GNP as “the media update of Manifest Destiny.” (341)

Debord’s theory is predicated upon a Marxist critique of capitalism and what he perceives as a new stage in the development of this economic system, namely in the context of mass consumption. Debord’s critique builds on what Marx called commodity fetishism, a concept he ultimately develops into the notion of the spectacle. As the successor of commodity fetishism, the

spectacle is the fetishism of social relations; that is, social relations come to be mediated by objects and, in Debord's theory, the object becomes the image: "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (4), and all reality becomes a huge screen, as it were, from which reality itself has been dismissed, being absorbed into its own representations. The concept of the spectacle therefore applies to the systematic combination of reality and its representations, and also includes the strategies and apparatuses of power that produce the spectacle.

This mediation through the representations provided by the spectacle entails that there is no direct experience between the individual and reality. Individuals however remain alien to the production of the spectacle, as they remain alien to the appearance of reality. Their role is to obey the rules of the spectacle, satisfied as they are with the consumption of commodities, as with the spectacle on the whole. Consumption is in effect a central concept in Debord's critique, for it replaces production and the social organization of labor in traditional Marxist theory: "The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the *total occupation* of social life. Not only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees: the world one sees is its world" (42). A yet closer influence on the French critic is obviously the Frankfurt School. In line with Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer, Debord focuses on the overwhelming presence and influence of the culture industries on leisure and everyday life, instead of labor. As economic abundance created the conditions for the emergence of a new subject who replaced the producer, the consumer; this new type of individual learnt to fulfill himself through consumption, even though he shared no true agency in the process: "The alienation of the spectator to the profit of the contemplated object [...] is expressed in the following way: the more he contemplates the less he lives; the more he accepts recognizing himself in the dominant images of need, the less he understands his own existence and his own desires." (30) He adheres to the spectacle automatically and the role of vision in the process is not downplayed by Debord either: "The spectacle as a tendency *to make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations [...] naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs" (18). The dynamics of the spectacle is therefore profoundly individualistic, promoting no social connection and depriving the individual of the control over the forms of representation of his life. He simply identifies with the misrepresentations aimed at disguising his/her privations and needs. The spectacle therefore reinforces the status quo and Debord certainly aims at exposing the deep connection between the spectacle and the ruling ideologies.

Even though Robyn Wiegman's cultural critique of the modern technologies of visibility draws on an earlier historical period, it complements

my reading and application of Debord's critique because of Wiegman's particular focus on the body. Taking as a starting point that meaning derives firstly from structures of vision and that "the visual [is] both an economic system and a representational economy" (4), Wiegman looks into specific contexts of knowledge production—or what she calls visual knowledge regimes—as constellations of discourses sustained by particular mechanisms. These in turn create their specific economies of visibility: "the modalities through which issues of race and gender (and their convergences and divergences) will be read" (3). Michel Foucault's study of the rise of the principle of visibility and its attendant technologies is Wiegman's theoretical reference: she notes that the ability to attribute identities to the material surface of bodies gradually provided a whole new epistemology of perception, establishing the discursive formations to read the body, of which race and gender are examples. Grounded on the principle of vision, new discourses were produced—"network[s] of meanings attached to bodies" (4)—, sustained in turn by technologies of visibility: a whole array of practices, strategies, and apparatuses relying on the visual principle and aimed to tame and control the human body, including the disciplines. Wiegman shows how the body eventually became an epistemological framework in which particular social identities were authenticated and thereby also patterns of inequality were registered, and naturalized, as well. As Wiegman also argues, although this process started with the Enlightenment, no other principle has ever challenged that vision up to the present; only the economies of visibility have changed, alongside the technologies supporting them.

By focusing on the role assigned to Carmen Miranda's image, and her body in particular, within the visual knowledge regime of the GNP, I will now show how a spectacular version of Pan-Americanism was produced.

III. The Elaboration of Miranda's body: Pan-Americanism as Spectacle

The alliance of corporate capital with the booming entertainment industry is at the root of Miranda's U.S. adventure from the start. Taken to the United States in 1939 by Broadway agent Lee Shubert to sing and dance on Broadway stages, Miranda and her *samba* were introduced as familiar symbols of an authentic South American identity, although her contract to shine in the Broadway musical *The Streets of Paris* was purely commercial, bearing no connection to any official policy. Witness to her previous success in the Americas was the fact that shortly after arrival she had an appearance in the Brazilian pavilion at the New York World Fair, took part in radio programs and starred in commercial advertisements, and roughly a year later, she was invited to attend the ceremony celebrating the President's seventh anniversary of taking office (Freire-Medeiros 56).

Her potential as both a cultural and a trade ambassador was very quickly grasped. In the booklet of *The Streets of Paris*, Lee Shubert announced the Brazilian artist as someone who was destined to do more for the consolidation of U.S.-South American relations than any diplomatic body (in Mauad 355), a promise she fulfilled in full, considering that in the early 1940s she was already referred to in the press as “The Good Neighbor Policy in person”⁵. A very similar idea seems to have occurred to Brazilian dictator Getúlio Vargas, when he asked her to take along a few packages of coffee to the U.S., conveying the idea that the true essence of the GNP depended on its orchestration of marketing, entertainment—and business. Via *samba*, Miranda would sell not only the image of Brazil, but her *samba* would help make way for the consumption of Brazilian products in the United States. Helena Solberg takes the argument even further, suggesting that Miranda was Brazil’s raw-material exported into the U.S. market⁶. To this I would add that the spectacle, in its Debordian definition, applies to the transformative process by means of which U.S. audiences turned Miranda’s image into new meanings and soon into a commodity itself, bearing in mind that the goal of the GNP was to promote both material and ideological consumption.

Back home, in Brazil, Miranda was already a part of the thriving mass culture associated with the culture industries (the radio and the music industry, for instance), but her translocation to the U.S. brought with it significant changes both in the cultural and the symbolic meanings her body and performance evoked and in the technologies of visibility that produced and disseminated her new image. For example, once she became successful on Broadway, the *samba* rhythms and the dressing style of the poor women of African descent selling fruit in the streets of Bahia (the *baianas*) were stripped of the Brazilian State ideology of Carnival:⁷ when *samba* became the “biggest dance craze of 1942,” in the U.S. no one seemed to care about the fact that it was blessed by an authoritarian regime (Gellman 170). Likewise, the identification of Brazil with its export product, coffee, was abandoned, and fruit, especially the banana, took its place.

Miranda’s Brazilian nationality came to represent a range of different South-American national identities. First on Broadway, later on movie screens, and in newspaper and magazine pages all along, Miranda’s image put the region’s entire territory on display. The visual potential of her body was explored to the point of exhaustion, in an effort to exhibit and make meaningful what had always been a lure to the public gaze—difference. Her body thus became the prime site for essentializing the GNP’s own version of a Latin-American identity. It became a sort of melting-pot for diverse imagined identities—the site where all cultural and ethnic differences were inscribed one on top of the other and ultimately diluted, resulting in one homogeneous image and subjectivity: the identity of Latin America.

Hollywood grasped Miranda's visual appeal very quickly: it was vital for projecting her image onto a wider sphere, but the film medium also contributed to fixing her image and the meanings attached to it. Some film scholars have argued that dance compensated for the narrative limitations of Miranda's characters while the excess of her image created additional visual room in comparison to more important characters. The latter, however, simultaneously contributed to reinforce Miranda's role as that of a decorative, inconsequential, purely entertaining character in all the films in which she took part. Her presence was primarily marked by the physical evidence of her body alone.⁸

Her body always took center stage in her performance. It became visually meaningful; an "epistemological production," in Robyn Wiegman's elaboration (3). As I have mentioned, following the processes of commodification inherent to capitalism, the body became a privileged site for materializing meaning, and this in turn was gradually associated with value—and value, with capital. In the case in point, the relation between the market and the body is firstly explained by Miranda's easy circulation in and via the entertainment industries, which worked closely with the OCIAA to promote the GNP. Rockefeller's Office had links to both the National Security Agency (Mauad 343) and to the mass culture industry, Hollywood, via the Motion Picture Division of the OCIAA, headed by John Hay Whitney, a major movie-industry investor (Holden and Zolov 159). In turn, the Motion Picture Society for the Americas was the intermediary for circulation and production in Latin America (Tota 66). The OCIAA controlled all matters regarding contact with Latin America, from business to the production, control, and dissemination of information and knowledge. It should also be noted that the Office's local activities south of the border were supported by the largest U.S. corporations established in Latin America (Mauad 343-344).

The spectacularity of Miranda's colorful, joyful, exotic, sexy body caught the public eye, a form of seduction that not all the public figures involved in the GNP could accomplish⁹. This fixation on her body came in line with what Mauad describes as a long tradition of "folklorization in the visual representations of Latin America" in the U.S., a practice that developed what she also calls a U.S. "aesthetics of alterity" towards the South (349). But in combining the exoticization of Latin America's tropical nature with the "archaeology of the picturesque," the process resulted in pure stereotyping, in its blending of each culture's specificity (336)¹⁰. The identification of Central and South America as subaltern territories to the U.S. bearing characteristics traditionally associated with the feminine explain why a woman's body was more effective. The projection of sensuality onto the character attributed to Southern nations (also more racially mixed than the U.S., hence seen as more promiscuous) ultimately reflected in the roles impersonated in Hollywood by Latin-American artists before Miranda as well, including Mexican actresses Lupe Vélez and Dolores

del Río. Not by accident, dance had been a common feature to all of these actresses, as recently demonstrated by Priscilla Ovalle, who argues that dance, especially sexually charged rhythms, had always been the territory assigned to Latin Americans in Hollywood's representations because it was Hollywood's marker of a "racialized and sexualized difference" (9).

Miranda's success was such that the GNP's agencies could not turn a blind eye to it: the OCIAA entertained other projects regarding the promotion of a Latin-American identity, but eventually abandoned them. Rockefeller's Office conceived of "Pan-Americana" or "Virgin Liberty," described as "a noble female figure" that should bear a torch and a cross, in a fusion of the Virgin Mary and the Goddess of Liberty (Black 69), which was obviously a different image for the Latin-American woman than that which eventually came to be embodied by Miranda. The preference to support the meanings offered by the Brazilian artist's image provides evidence of the GNP cultural cabinet's option for the spectacle.

IV. Technologies of Visuality: Hollywoodizing the Horn of Plenty

While aestheticizing Latin American differences in Miranda's spectacular body, the exuberance of both her image and performance enhanced visual pleasure and distraction far more than other complex forms of representation. Miranda's body-on-display aestheticized business as well, because it conflated forms of sensuality with exotic South-American products, thus commanding the U.S. spectator's, and consumer's, desire for both. As Guy Debord has remarked, while dressed up as entertainment and leisure, the spectacle generates passive identification: on the one hand, the U.S. spectators consumed the fruit produced and distributed by the big U.S. corporations (namely, the United Fruit Company), while, on the other hand, the public gaze consumed the image itself and thus internalized a different representation of the neighboring Latin-American countries. To retrieve the pedagogical tradition of the culture of spectacle described by Santos, the citizenship lesson carried out here aimed at creating fair-minded U.S. citizens aware that their consumption implied solidarity with their Southern neighbors for a common purpose: hemispheric peace, which, as Roosevelt also stressed, began at "home."

However, the implications of this simple citizenship lesson went deeper, ultimately developing into the version of the spectacle which, I argue, was distinctive in the GNP period. If we now take the notion of the spectacle along Debord's theoretical lines as "the total practice of a social-economic formation" (11), the refashioning of Miranda's image in the U.S. sheds light on her construction as a visual narrative of Latin America. In other words, and to retrieve Robyn Wiegman's theory, Miranda's body became

a technology of visibility, the site in which particular discursive formations about Latin America were registered, according to the visual knowledge regime of the GNP. In this manner, Miranda's image conflated two important directives of the GNP: her tutti-frutti hat updated, in glamorized fashion, the symbol of the horn of plenty, reassuring good trade among American nations and thereby fulfilling Roosevelt's imperative of freedom from want. Joy and humor, powerful ingredients in her performances, in turn neutralized fear and consolidated hemispheric solidarity, a warrant for freedom from fear.

Changes in the meanings evoked by Miranda's symbols of ethnicity, as I will explore further down, contributed to the aestheticization of the Latin American Other in the U.S., as Miranda's body ultimately assembled and put on display what Shari Roberts aptly calls "a spectacle of ethnicity" (4). The body materialized what were seen as the traces of South-American identities, creating an illusion of reality to all those artificial meanings. In her image and in her film performances, visual excess was therefore crucial to reinforce the effect of the spectacle. In this sense, I follow Debord's idea of the culture of the spectacle as one that cultivates and lives by appearance to the point when appearance materializes and, in a reverse effect, reality becomes apparent, so that everything is reduced to images, and spectacle ultimately derives into "a social relation among people, mediated by images" (4), completely alienating the individual from reality.

The spectacularization of business itself in Miranda's excessive image is even more perceptible if we recall the inspiration of her costume, the poor Black woman selling fruit in the streets of Bahia. Or if we compare her, under the same light, to the banana plantation worker, who was indeed the one who kept the GNP going on the ground: the contrasts between scarcity and plenty, beauty and harshness, artifice and simplicity, pleasure and labor, are obvious. But, as Debord's theory also suggests, the abstraction of labor, or production—in this case, the effacement of the original worker behind Miranda's image—is required and marks the culmination of the process of the spectacle itself (29). For the erasure of the memory of production is the ultimate accomplishment of the commodity culture created by the spectacle: spectators become so estranged from the original reality that they are eventually prevented from grasping what they themselves create, i. e. the real world that vanishes under the overwhelming appearance of the spectacle. In the case in point, what is left of labor, production, and trade is its spectacular wrapping: fruit is reduced to artificiality, mere colorful decoration of the commodified female body. In this instance, the reality effaced by this image of fruit as decoration is that of the safe-conduct given to U.S. corporations in Latin America in the first half of the twentieth century. One could hardly find a better capitalist embodiment of plenty in the period than the United Fruit Company, the largest agricultural enterprise in the world, which managed

plants all over Central America, from Cuba, Jamaica, Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica, to Panama and Colombia¹¹.

Although Brazilian coffee sales fared fairly well in the U.S., the association of Miranda with images of fruit and with the banana in particular, confirmed how hard it was to get rid of stereotypes. Besides sexual overtones, the humorous potential of the banana always had imperialist connections that linked the exoticism of the fruit (a symbol of the plenitude of the tropics) to colonial exploitation, as Marina Warner has demonstrated. So, articulation with the imaginary of the banana (replacing that of coffee) was the first negotiation of meaning to which Miranda's image was submitted¹². The promotional poster of the film *The Gang's All Here* (1943; Busby Berkeley) is enlightening about the complexity of the meanings her image generated: Carmen-the-*baiana* looms at the center, a small and shadowy yet upright figure, her hat gushing an endless bunch of bananas, suggesting that she herself is a magnificent colorful banana tree.

Fruit therefore figures as a decisive element in the composition of Miranda's image. The excessive accumulation of fruit products on top of her head hollywoodized, as it were, the traditional symbol of the horn of plenty that since times immemorial equated the myth of endless fertility with the Americas. The *baiana* costume was fitting because fruit originally filled the baskets these women carried, either in the arms or on top of the head, while working. However, in Miranda's *baiana*, the basket became a fashion object when it merged with her turbans, a fusion that is fully accomplished in the tutti-frutti hat. The image was so powerful that it became a synecdoche of Miranda herself, who came to be identified in the media simply as "the lady with the tutti-frutti hat." To retrieve the marketing-spectacle alliance, it is worth mentioning that Miranda's turbans created a fashion among U.S. women throughout the 1940s that went well beyond Hollywood and re-signified the turbans as chic rather than exotic.

Thus Miranda's original image adapted gradually to the new visual regime of the GNP and became totally disconnected from the poor women selling fruit in the streets of Bahia. The excess in the image acted to obfuscate the reality and the history behind the image, as Debord noted regarding the spectacle. The same applies to the glamour American women found in the Brazilian artist's image and how it completely ignored the impoverished workers in the Caribbean banana plantations. The stylization of the *baiana* costume is another case in point: an exaggeration of visual aspects such as loud colors and heavy accessories—for instance, Miranda's high-heel shoes, the so-called footstools (which the *baianas* certainly did not wear); or the lace-trimmed skirts and sleeves, the generous low cut blouses that left her cleavage and belly exposed, inviting resemblance to another powerful gendered imaginary, orientalism and the exotic odalisque. Excess also

marked Miranda's accessories: heavy colorful necklaces and bracelets, which were an adaptation from Creole folklore and the slave women's *balangandās*; these were a collection of ornaments and amulets that the *baianas* wore either hanging from the neck or around the waist.

Another important dimension in the creation of Miranda's image was race, another close link to the original reference, the *baiana*. As mentioned earlier, it is symptomatic that *samba* was very early on cleared of its connections both to a subaltern racial culture and to a (neighborly) totalitarian regime. Like in the case of labor, this effacement favored identification with Miranda/Latin America on the part of the U.S. audiences, following the tenets of the GNP. Priscilla Ovalle works on this point, arguing that Latin-American women, or, as she says, what is generally perceived as the "brown female body" on the U.S. screen, perform a specific role in Hollywood racial politics: "[o]scillating between the normalcy of whiteness and the exoticism of blackness, Latinas function as in-between bodies to mediate and maintain the racial status quo" (7). The Latin body thus represented an exotic kind of sameness that could be desired—and consumed—by white women because it was nonthreatening, "an exotic look that could be read as ethnic yet remained familiar enough for white women to appropriate" (8). Ovalle further argues that Miranda's in-betweenness was also useful at a time when African Americans disappeared from the screen,¹³ proving that her brand of Otherness was acceptable (65). These strategies of domestication resumed difference to non-threatening visually enjoyable shades of colors and layers of textile, devoid of anything solid or essential. Difference thus became an image: entertaining—and safe—, but void of reality, as in the spectacle.

Conclusion

The pleasure derived from Miranda's image contributed therefore to the construction of feelings of proximity and desire, joy and friendliness, which were fundamental for the renewed project of North/South relations under the aegis of the GNP. In this sense, the representations—or the spectacle—of Latin America promoted by the GNP via Miranda's body illuminate Debord's articulation of the culture of the spectacle with the established economic order and his assertion that "the spectacle is [...] the sense of the total practice of a socio-economic formation" (11). Even if one must take into consideration the diversity of audiences throughout the Americas, it is my position that the U.S. viewer in particular, who shared a stereotyped imaginary of Latin America, was more prone to consume the spectacle provided by the GNP. As for the impact of the spectacle on Latin American audiences, not all of them identified easily, namely regarding the most popular products of the GNP, Hollywood's so called "Good Neighbor film series," in some of which Miranda starred¹⁴.

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These other spectators were able to see through the ready-made images of the spectacle and contrast them both with their own reality and with a history of U.S. hegemonic domination in the Americas. Ultimately, the differences in reception attest to the strengths but also to the weaknesses of the visual technologies used by the GNP.

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CARMEN MIRANDA'S BODY AS SPECTACULAR PAN-AMERICANISM

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NOTES

1. Carmen Miranda was actually born in Portugal and immigrated to Brazil when she was a child.

2. U.S. Office of Inter-American Affairs. *History of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs*. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1947, 67-82. Quoted in Holden and Zolov, 159.

3. Online document by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. *The American Presidency Project*. <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15097>>. (Accessed 7 February 2013).

4. *Ibid.*

5. In *The Philadelphia Record* (14.2.1940).

6. In Solberg's documentary film *Bananas Is My Business* (New York: Drift Releasing, 1994).

7. The dictatorship had already appropriated Carnival as the mythical emblem of national egalitarianism, a process which eventually de-racialized *samba*, making it a respected cultural form that was everyone's heritage. Along the 1930s, *samba* eventually became the national music both as a form of social control and of consolidation of the State ideology of an

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egalitarian society. Alison Raphael, "From Popular Culture to Microenterprise: The History of Brazilian Samba Schools." *Latin American Music Review* 11.1 (Spring-Summer 1990): 73-83.

8. Several recent studies, relying on theory of the lived body, bring in a different perspective on Miranda's body in an attempt to retrieve her own subjectivity: Ana López, "Are All Latins From Manhattan?", *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas*, Ed. John King, Ana M. López, and Manuel Alvarado (London: bfi Publishing, 1993) 67-80; José Gatti, "Carmen Miranda's white dress: ethnicity, syncretism and subaltern sexualities in *Springtime in the Rockies*." *Ilha do Desterro* 51 (Jul.-Dec. 2006): 93-108, and S. Roberts's article in the final bibliography. While I certainly do not intend to gainsay these studies, my critical focus lies on how the GNP constructed and used Miranda as an image.

9. Many writers and artists travelled around Latin America with the sponsorship of the OCIAA, including Waldo Frank, Orson Welles, and Walt Disney, among others.

10. My translation.

11. Miranda's tutti-frutti hat still figures in the logo of American fruit companies.

12. Gender certainly played heavily in Miranda's image, as noted by Ana López in "Are All Latins from Manhattan?" (See endnote 8).

13. *Flying Down to Rio* (1933; Thornton Freeland) was the first and last U.S. musical to feature African American actors. Curiously the plot was set in Rio, as noted by Freire-Medeiros (54).

14. Audiences south of the U.S. border easily grasped how GNP representations disregarded the complexity of Latin-American cultures and social reality. Those who perceived their nations as modern, like Brazilian elites, completely refused, and regretted, the picture Carmen Miranda conveyed. Miranda's estrangement in Brazil, when she was booed in Cassino da Urca, in Rio de Janeiro, at the time of her first comeback after achieving success in Hollywood, gave evidence of that uneasiness. Also Argentinean and Cuban audiences deplored the superficial and clumsy representation of aspects of their cultural identity in two of Miranda's films, *Down Argentine Way* (1940; Irving Cummings) and *Weekend in Havana* (1941; Walter Lang). In the case of the former, the careless confusion of *tangos* and *rumbas* led to the withdrawal of the film from theaters in Argentina; in the latter, Cubans complained about a mix of Hawaiian and Brazilian rhythms introduced as Cuban (See Shari Roberts, 8-9). The case with the Disney animation films *Saludos Amigos* (1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (1944), produced with support of the Movie Picture Division of the OCIAA, and which became extremely popular in Latin America, is an exception to this cold reception of GNP mass produced representations of Latin America by Latin Americans. This may be explained partly because of the type of media involved, as animation is expected to be less realistic, but also because the films were produced with Latin American spectators in mind. Actually, they premiered exceptionally in Rio and Mexico City respectively, instead of the U.S. See Julianne Burton's "Don (Juanito) Duck and the Imperial-Patriarchal Unconscious: Disney Studios, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Packaging of Latin America," in Andrew Parker et al eds. *Nationalisms and Sexualities*. (New York: Routledge, 1992) 21-41.