

POSTMODERNITY AND TRANSNATIONAL CAPITALISM IN LATIN AMERICA

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HETEROGENEITY AND POSTMODERNISM *AVANT LA LETTRE?*

There is a curious—and thoroughly understandable—argument that Latin America sets the precedent of postmodernity long before the notion appears in the Euro-North American context.¹ This argument is analogous to others that attempt to endow heterogeneous formations with the *cachet* of mainstream postmodern rhetoric. Thus, *la raison baroque*, according to Christine Buci-Glucksmann, anticipates a postmodern reluctance to integrate numerous visual spaces into a coherent representation.² This idea, in fact, has long had currency in what critics call the Latin American *neobaroque*.³ Minority writers and intellectuals in the United States have also made similar claims for Black and Latino cultures.⁴ As regards Latin America, the argument is as follows: the heterogeneous character of Latin American social and cultural formations made it possible for discontinuous, alternative, and hybrid forms to emerge that challenged the hegemony of the *grand récit* of modernity. Even history fragments into a series of discontinuous formations that undermine the synchronicity of the space of the nation:⁵ indigenous tribal cultures mix

1. Cf. BRUNNER, José Joaquín. Notas sobre la modernidad y lo postmoderno en la cultura latinoamericana. *David y Goliath*, 17, 52, Sept. 1987; RICHARD, Nelly. Postmodernism and Periphery. *Third Text*, 2 Winter 1987/88; WISNIK, José Miguel. The Interpretation of Postmodernism in the Aesthetics of Brazilian Cultural Productions, conference paper delivered at The Debate on Postmodernism in Latin America: Brazil, México and Peru. University of Texas, Austin, April 29-30, 1988; ES-

with traditional peasantry, the descendants of slaves, the lumpen of the shanties, and a cosmopolitan elite that would be at home in Paris or New York.

Before we evaluate this contention of Latin America's postmodernity *avant la lettre*, we should explore the question of heterogeneity. The heterogeneity of Latin American cultural formations is not the result of some postmodern simulational sleight of hand; rather, it is produced by the uneven implementation of modernization, leading, on the one hand, to contestatory projects for political, economic, and cultural decolonization, and on the other, to strategies for survival such as informal economies, the legal and illegal activities that elude government recording and control. Hernando de Soto, basing himself on the situation in Peru, argues that it is a top-heavy state—inclined to patronage and other forms of inefficiency and corruption—that causes informality.⁶ Samuel Doria Medina, however, attributes the phenomenon to a complex of conditions—unequal distribution of income, tertiarization of the economy, hyperinflation—which are in great measure the result of a state's economic vulnerability within a world economy controlled by nation of the "center."

The fundamental cause for the formation of an informal economy is the deformation of the economic structure once economic activity has been directed towards extractive industry for export. This creates a sector of the economy that in fact is related to the State, where both are dependent on the center. Consequently, the rest of the economy, which is marginal to the government, develops independently. In other words, having assigned to the country the production of raw materials in order to satisfy the requirements of the central economies, it becomes unnecessary to develop all of society. Since this pattern or structure of accumulation is marginal to society and the rest of the economy, it does not require internal demand or equitable income distribution to generate widespread growth.⁷

Informality, moreover, has grown to enormous proportions since the mid-seventies due not only to a weak productive sector and large concentration of unequally distributed income, which capital flight makes unavailable, but also to extreme vulnerability to the global economic crisis of 1981-82, the external debt crisis, and the increasing importance of coca production.⁸ Narcotraffic, the largest sector of the informal economy, in its current transnational cartel form (another recent development that owes something to C.I.A.

COBAR, Ticio. *Posmodernismo/precapitalismo*. Casa de las Américas (...).

2. BUCI-GLUCKSMANN, Christine, *La raison baroque: de Baudelaire à Benjamin*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1984, and *La Folie du voir: de l'esthétique baroque*. Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1986.

3. See, for example, SARDUY, Severo. *El barroco y el neobarroco*. In: *América Latina en su literatura*. Ed. César Fernández Moreno. México: Siglo XXI, 1972, *Barroco*. Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 1974, and *La simulación*. Caracas: Monte Avila, 1982.

4. GATES, Henry Louis Jr. *The signifying monkey. A theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Documented/Undocumented*, In: *Multi-cultural literacy*, eds. Rick Simonson & Scott Walker. Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 1988; CORNEL, *West. Postmodernism and black America*, *Zeta Magazine*, 1988.

5. Cf. CORNEJO-POLLAR, Antonio. *Indigenist and heterogeneous literatures. Their dual sociocultural status*. Trans. Susan Casal-Sánchez. *Latin American Perspectives*, 16, 2, Spring 1989, p. 12-28.

6. DE SOTO, Hernando. *The other path: the invisible revolution in the Third World*. London: Tauris, 1989.

7. MEDINA, Samuel Doria. *La economía informal*

en Bolivia. La Paz: 1986. I quote from the English translation: Naomi Robbins, *Bolivia's Informal Economy*, M.A. Diss, CUNY, 1990, p. 28.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 48-72.

dealings in the region) is a grotesque (and fitting) parody of capitalist corporate culture. The narratives constructed to account for informality and narcotraffic might seem hardly consistent with the *grand récit* of modernity. And yet they are, in an obverse (if not perverse) relation that deconstructs modernity's collusion with capitalism. This parodic deconstruction is not, of course, restricted to so-called "third world" countries: junk bonds and savings and loans fiascos in the U.S. have had very much the same affect. "Irrationality" is born of the guiding (market) "rationality" of modernity.

Recognition of this "irrationality" is important in devising strategies for overcoming the economic plight of these countries. In contrast to de Soto, who advocates transforming the pathology of "informality" into its own solution by liberating the entrepreneurial spirit of its practitioners from the shackles of state regulation, Doria Medina analyzes its root causes and cautions against entrenching a state of affairs founded on (internal and international) inequality. The institutionalization of informality does nothing to counter the vast accumulation by elites, who elude a more equitable distribution of wealth by resorting to contraband and speculation while the under—and informally—employed barely survive. Contraband is particularly pernicious because it induces loss of economic protection, an exaggerated degree of tertiary activities, a loss of income for the National Treasury, and the occupation of active commercial actors in operations (e.g., speculation) that do not generate significant value added.⁹ This state of affairs relegates "informals" to the recycling of commodities normally discarded in the "formal" sphere. A "strategy for survival" is thus transformed into a permanent "strategy of life."¹⁰

9. *Ibid.*, p. 83-85.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Having lost control of the economy, many Latin American countries oscillate between hyperinflation and recession, further strengthening the informal economy and producing a highly stressful way of life for the under and middle classes.¹¹

11. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

It is important to re-emphasize the role of public expectation in the inflationary process, and the importance of its effect on the informal economy. As the public loses confidence in the economic authorities responsible for inflation, their lack of confidence fans inflationary expectations, converting the latter into an engine that drives inflation up even further. Under these circumstances, financial transactions accelerate at a dizzying pace, but they do not involve the formal sector because of the concomitant accelerated depreciation of domestic currency. In short, the national currency no longer serves as a *store of value*, but is replaced

by a strong currency such as, in the case of Bolivia, the U.S. dollar.¹²

12. *Ibid.*, p. 40; emphasis added.

Hyperinflation is, thus, not only an economic phenomenon; it also cuts deeply into the individual and collective psyche, producing uncertainty, skepticism, criminality, and psychological disorders. Whether economic or social, "national currency" loses its value; under such circumstances there can be no self-determination. At best, narcotraffic replaces prior national currencies.

It is precisely in the attempt to modernize by "developing" extractive industries for export, under the aegis of "central economies," that modernity takes such ghoulish forms in countries like Bolivia. The *grand récit* of modernity, of course, attributes this ghoulishness to other factors, such as the "backwardness" of peripheral societies, the corruption of their governments, the immaturity of their elites, and so on. Its "rational" self-construal blinds it to its own role as source of pathology. The critique of modernity-as-development-and-progress put forth by Latin American social scientists, theologians, writers and artists, and grass roots organizations should be considered an important ingredient of postmodernity, understood as the set of challenges to modernity's self-understanding. These challenges stem from the different ways in which local formations engage the colonizing tentacles of transnational capitalism,¹³ which should not be confused with *one* mode production. It is, rather, a *series of conditions* under which various modes of production and symbolization hold in differing localities.

My argument as regards Latin America is not that informal economies or narcotraffic *are* postmodern phenomena but, rather, that they are alternative responses/propositions to the *grand récit* of postmodernity as it has been constructed by Lyotard, Jameson, and their predecessors. These conditions require alternative narratives with different configurations of features constitutive of modernity and different trajectories and dénouements. Functional state apparatuses, viable political structures, effective democratic civil societies must be conceived in relation to the specific circumstances of given Latin American countries and not patterned after the reigning paradigm of western modernity. For example, to understand why these desiderata are curtailed in narcotrafficking countries, we must look at the intersection of several modes of production, various cultures, different administrative apparatuses, the struggle for survival and for hegemony on the part of diverse social strata (peasants, workers, narcotraffickers, military, national bourgeoisie, middle classes, national and international organized crime networks, U.S. military-industrial complex, etc.). Whatever the possibilities for

13. Hugo Achugar has written an excellent study of Uruguayan *modernismo* precisely by taking into account the "aesthetico-ideological responses and propositions" by different classes and class sectors to late nineteenth and early twentieth century modernization. Achugar explains that his usage of "response/proposition" bears a "distant relation to the notion of 'semantic gesture' put forth by the Prague School.... It attempts to capture the interaction of literary product and society, how the latter conditions signic structure. Thus, a book of poems, a novel or a painting [is] considered in its historical concreteness, both ideologically and as the double movement of response to a given historical situation and proposition of a (utopian) future. All of this, of course, is realized

or conveyed aesthetically.”

ACHUGAR, Hugo, *Poesía y sociedad* (Uruguay 1980-1911) Montevideo: Arca, 1985. p. 22, note 2.

14. Cf. also PAZ, Octavio. El romanticismo y la poesía contemporánea, *Vuelta*, 11, 127 (June 1987). In the same issue of *Vuelta*, Paz introduces a special section entitled Postmodernidad? which includes essays by Jean Clair and Cornelius Castoriadis.

15. PAZ, Octavio. *The labyrinth of solitude*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959, p. 152.

16. PAZ, Octavio. El caso de las vanguardias, In: *Los hijos del limo*. Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1974, p. 201.

17. HEIDEGGER, Martin. The age of the world picture, In: *The question concerning technology and other essays*, trans. William Lovitt New York: Garland Publishing, 1977, p. 135-154.

18. HEIDEGGER, Martin. ...Poetically man dwells.... In: *Poetry, language, thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper and Row, 1975, p. 222.

19. See HABERMAS, Jürgen. *The philosophical discourse of modernity*. Cambridge: MIT, 1987.

democratization they must be studied as particular responses/propositions to this set of conditions that comprises the *heterogeneous formation*.

Octavio Paz is, perhaps, the first artist/intellectual to claim that finally Latin America had become contemporaneous with the postmodern west—even before the term had been coined. As early as *The labyrinth of solitude* (1950), he argues that the contradictory logic of modernity—which he labels a *tradicón de ruptura*—came to a grinding halt¹⁴ when the leading nations of imperialist capitalism found themselves decentered and as “marginal” as the periphery:

...we have lived on the periphery of history. Today the center, the nucleus of world society has come apart and we have all become peripheral beings, even the Europeans and the North Americans. We are all on the margin because there is no longer any center.¹⁵

Third World revolts and ethnic and national rebellions in industrialized societies are the insurrection of particularisms oppressed by another particularism that wears the mask of universality: western capitalism.¹⁶

It should be made clear, however, that Paz homogenizes all those “particularisms” in a *generalized marginality*, whose aesthetic he claims to be rooted in the immediacy of a timeless present. Paz’s sense of heterogeneity, however, casts these particularisms only as symptoms of a more unfathomable otherness, which like Heidegger’s notion of Being, has nothing to do with specific others. For Heidegger, it is to be *unconcealed*, rather, in the “invisible shadow” or “space withdrawn from representation.”¹⁷ Taking his cue from Heidegger, who identifies the *poetic* as the dwelling place of Being,¹⁸ Paz reconciles the aporias of modernity—particularism vs. universalism, experience vs. history, existence vs. representation—in the “transhistorical virtuality” of poetry.

Latin America, savagely torn by the contradictions of capitalism, provides for Paz’s thought and poetics a paradigmatic source for a secular “fundamentalist” reconciliation. And Paz is its high priest. As such, it is open to Habermas’s critique of neoconservative responses to rationality.¹⁹ It is, essentially, an aesthetic moralism, not unlike religious fundamentalism, which seeks to counteract the excesses and “moral decadence” of historical life.

I think a new star is rising—it is not yet on the horizon but it is announced in many indirect ways; it is the poetics of the *now*. Soon men will have to erect a Morals, a Politics,

an Erotics and a Poetics of the present. The road to the present passes through the body but it should not be confused with the mechanical and promiscuous hedonism of modern western societies. The present is the fruit issued forth by the fusion of life and death.²⁰

20. PAZ, Octavio. *El romanticismo y la poesía contemporánea*, p. 27.

Paz's apocalyptic, messianic proposition not only purges the political dimension from the practices of the new social movements (women, gays and lesbians, ecology, ethnic and racial minorities) by assimilating their projects to a transhistorical aesthetic; it also aims to transcend the conditions set by modernity in one fell swoop, as if those conditions were nothing but the expression of a single logic. Furthermore, as Nelly Richard observes about "postmodernism in the periphery," the sublation of center and margin that is celebrated in the aesthetic practices of certain elites, Paz among them, actually abolishes the value and significance, the *difference*, of the practices of subaltern and colonized peoples.²¹

21. Elsewhere I have offered a critique of the adoption by elites of a rhetoric of marginality. Cf. *Marginality and the ethics of survival*. In: *Universal Abandon? The politics of postmodernism*, ed. Andrew Ross. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

...just as it appears that for once the Latin American periphery might have achieved the distinction of being postmodernist *avant la lettre*, no sooner does it attain a synchronicity of forms with the international cultural discourses, than that very same postmodernism abolishes any privilege which such a position might offer. Postmodernism dismantles the distinction between centre and periphery, and in so doing nullifies its significance. There are many instances in postmodernist discourse aimed at convincing one of the obsolescence of the opposition centre/periphery, and of the inappropriateness of continuing to see ourselves as the victims of colonisation.²²

22. RICHARD, Nelly, p. 10.

Ticio Escobar, moreover, cautions us to distinguish between the surface effects of a "postmodern" style—fragmentation, recycling, pastiche, etc.—and the significance of conditioning circumstances.²³ Consequently, a theory of postmodern culture cannot rely on the formal techniques and properties of particular works. That is why the myriad primers that attempt to register the features of postmodern phenomena, though they provide easily identifiable markers of style, are so unsatisfying. Linda Hutcheon, for example, under the pretext of identifying postmodernism with a "denaturalizing" politics of representation, lumps together Salman Rushdie, Angela Carter and Manuel Puig as practitioners of a subversive "postmodern parody."²⁴ It is not, of course, as if this kind of

23. ESCOBAR, p. 15.

24. HUTCHEON, Linda. *The politics of Postmo-*

dernism. New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 3-8. See also *A Poetics of Postmodernism: history, theory, fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.

25. I do not agree with Fredric Jameson's characterization of postmodern culture as those local tactics and practices of "first world" elites that, he contends, come to embody symbolically the global logic of the system. According to Jameson, the cultural production of a particular class fraction (call it "new petty bourgeoisie," "professional-managerial" "baby boon" or "yuppy") of "first world" elites "articulate[s] the world in the most useful way functionally, or in ways that can be functionally reappropriated." Jameson seems to be making a category error here. Transnational capital may or may not have a global logic but it does not translate *tout court* into the cultural practices of a group of the chosen people of the transcendent Being (whether God or Capital). If, on the other hand, diverse social formations, and the groups that comprise them, manage - by response/proposition - the forms that the conditions of postmodernity take in their localities, then there are as many different cultures of postmodernity as there are social formations and particular struggles for hegemony within them.
Cf. JAMESON, Fredric. *Marxism and postmodernism*. *New Left Review*, 176, July-August 1989, p. 41.

parody had not existed previously; doesn't Cervantes's intertextuality have a similar effect? It is easy enough to identify stylistic markers; it is more difficult to pay close attention to how conjectural circumstances condition how those markers are to be interpreted. Hutcheon shows indifference or ignorance in this latter respect.

Rather than speak of a postmodernism, then, which runs the risk of identifying the style of one group as emblematic of a condition (Lyotard) or a "cultural dominant" (Jameson),²⁵ it is preferable to theorize postmodernity as series of conditions variously holding in different social formations that elicit diverse responses/propositions to the multiple ways in which modernization has been attempted in them. It is not a matter, then, of a different order of things following or replacing modernity, as it has been suggested from Weber to Habermas. If postmodernity has any specificity, it is in the rethinking of how modernity has been represented, how alternative sciences, morals and aesthetics, as well as different sociocultural formations, have all contributed to constitute modern life.

How we (re)think modernity and postmodernity has consequences for how we construe the ethico-political goals of theory. Paz's poetics of reconciling opposites in the transhistory of the present leads to an antimodern irrationality with little room for accommodating the democratic demands of diverse social movements. Rethinking democracy outside of the terms set by the *grand récit* of modernity is an enterprise which many Latin American social movements see as necessary. Up to now the formal apparatuses of representative democracy have failed miserably. This is not to say that they have succeeded in Europe and the U.S.; their "dysfunctionality" in the Latin American context only makes more patent what is wrong with them in the "democratic west" where their pathologies are partly screened by "viable" consumer economies.

According to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, new ways of constructing democracy have been made possible by the new social movements, whose practices have "weakened" the rationality that undergirds modernity:

The discourse of radical democracy is no longer the discourse of the universal; the epistemological niche from which "universal" classes and subjects spoke has been eradicated and replaced by a polyphony of voices, each of which constructs its own irreducible discursive identity. The conclusion is decisive: there can be no radical, plural democracy without renouncing the discourse of the universal and the implied premise that it provides a privileged access to

the "truth," attainable only by a limited number of subjects.²⁶

Laclau and Mouffe's diagnostic also conceives of politics as a *creative articulation process*. With the pluralization and legitimation of manifold social projects, it is increasingly difficult to establish common meanings across the entire social terrain. How to strike a balance "between a logic of complete identity and another of pure difference" is the goal of "radical democracy." It consists of the

recognition of the multiplicity of social logics and of the necessity to articulate them. This articulation, however, must constantly be recreated and renegotiated, for there is no final point where a definitive balance will be reached.²⁷

According to Bernardo Subercaseaux, this creative articulation is the means by which "one's own," always provisional identity is achieved.²⁸ He sees this a process of *appropriation* quite different from the mimetism decried by *ninguneístas* who berate their cultures for being a pale reflection of metropolitan society. The flavor of these self-negating breast-beatings, so typical of elite Latin American intellectuals, is captured in *El arte de la palabra*, Enrique Lihn's self-deconstructive pastiche of poststructuralist erasures of the subject:

we are nothing: imitations, copies, phantoms; repeaters of what we understand badly, that is, hardly at all; deaf organ grinders; the animated fossils of a prehistory that we have lived neither here nor, consequently, anywhere, for we are aboriginal foreigners, transplanted from birth in our respective countries of origin.²⁹

For Subercaseaux, as for Richard, Escobar, and Wisnik, the formation of a national identity is not a matter of authenticity versus mimetism but rather of articulation:

The model of appropriation contrasts with a dual vision [i.e., native vs alien, G.Y.] of Latin American culture. By definition, a theory of appropriation rejects the existence of an uncontaminated, endogenous cultural core. It also rejects the myth of cultural pluralism and any essentialism whatsoever, for Latin America identity is not something already constituted and fixed but something always in the process of becoming. Consequently, it cannot be understood by

26. LACLAU, Ernesto and MOUFFE, Chantal. *Hegemony and socialist strategy. Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso, 1985. p. 191-92. See also Ernesto Laclau, *The politics and limits of Modernity*. Trans. George Yúdice, in *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*, ed. Andrew Ross. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 188. Laclau and Mouffe have been criticized for their endorsement of an "infinite" deconstruction, such as that suggested in this quote. Recognition of ongoing struggles for hegemony need not, however, resort to such a relativist position.

28. SUBERCASEAUX, Bernardo. *La apropiación cultural en el pensamiento latinoamericano*, *Mundo*. 1, 3, Summer 1987.

29. LINCH, Enrique, *El arte de la palabra*. Barcelona: Pomaire, 1980. p. 82. I translated into English and published an excerpt of this novel in *Review*: 29, May/August 1981, p. 55-61. WISNIK, *op. cit.*, also alludes to the self-erasure of Latin American postmodernists who "consume imported stereotypes," especially current stereotypes concerning simulation. Cf. also RICHARD, p. 7.

recourse to preconceptual or precategorical approaches.... The theory of appropriation offers a model of an ecumenical culture, always open and never endogamous.³⁰

30. SUBERCASEAUX, op. cit., p. 34-35.

Roberto Schwarz has also rejected the Manichean dichotomy between imitation and original "because it does not permit detecting the alien within the proper, the mimetic component within the original, and also the original component within the imitation."³¹ Schwarz rethinks this aporia in terms of articulation, with the proviso that subaltern groups should have the opportunity to "refashion [prevalent forms] in accordance with their own interests, which ... is a way of defining democracy." This statement is very important for my own argument since, as I noted above, the debates on postmodernity are often about the possibilities for establishing a democratic culture.

31. SCHWARZ, Roberto. Nacional por substracción. *Punto de vista*, 9, 28, November 1986, p. 22. This essay was published in English translation in *New Left Review*, (...).

In what follows, I give a précis of what Euro-North American theorists understand by postmodernity, not with the intention of applying their terms to Latin American phenomena. On the contrary, it seems to me that such theories need to be deconstructed and reconstructed in relation to Latin American contexts.

REDEMPTION THROUGH CULTURE?

One criterion which holds for advocates of modernity (Habermas) and postmodernity (Jameson) alike is the *emancipatory potential* of cultural works. In Latin America, few are the artists who are not judged in terms of the social effectivity of their work. The 60s and 70s were rife with recriminations shot back and forth between writers who advocated art in the service of social justice and those who held that formal innovations were in and of themselves revolutionary.

The debates around the effectivity of José María Arguedas's work, in fact, hinged on this criterion. One influential study, *El mito de la salvación por la cultura*, critiques the idea that the pathologies wrought by a savage capitalism can be healed by recourse to the moninstrumental cultural practices of indigenous Andean peoples.³² How to tap this source of personal and collective integration in the face of imminent cultural destruction by modernization was the aporia thematized in Arguedas's fiction and anthropological research. In his last novel, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* Arguedas's attempts to work out this aporia reaches its most poignant test. In it he portrays both the ravages wrought by capitalism in a Peruvian factory town as well as the attempts to overcome them by

32. MUÑOZ, Silverio, El mito de la salvación por la cultura.

recourse to a rapidly vanishing highland indigenous culture but whose values continue to be disseminated “transculturally” by mestizos settled in the coastal region.³³ Arguedas alternates this fictional text with diary entries in which he criticizes the professionalization of writers and vents his despair at ever recuperating the kind of unalienated life he experienced as a child among the Andean Indians. The very existence of a Peruvian national culture as well as his own life are in the balance. Culture seems to be the only hope, modern politics and leftist revolution having failed. Ultimately, however, culture does not rise to the task and Arguedas commits suicide, the epilogue to the novel serving as his suicide note.

Arguedas’s suicide, his second and successful attempt, may have been the result of a particularly dark moment in his life, a life in which, on the contrary, he held the highest hopes for a cultural working through of the contradictions of modernity in Peru. Given his circumstances—economy, politics, and a very reduced public sphere controlled by oligarchic elites —, such possibilities remained symbolic. Angel Rama explains that the social redemption to which he aspired was effected by proxy in his literature:

...literature was for him a *reduced model of transculturation* which made it possible to portray it and test it out. If it was possible in literature it should also be possible in the culture at large. However, not in charge of a government or a revolution, that is, without power, Arguedas was not free to take the best route to that larger transculturation. Nevertheless, he did what he could with all his resources: portray transculturation by means of literary narrative, make it come to life artistically.³⁴

Such a notion of culture, in the Latin American context, shares with modern bourgeois aesthetics the will to (re)construct hegemony. The greater reliance on indigenous and other popular (as opposed to mass mediated) cultures is, perhaps, a notable distinction between the two traditions. The greatest difference, however, is the ever-present lament over the difficulty of establishing an unalienated modern culture in Latin America. There have been many different projects for cultural hegemony in the twenty-odd Latin American nations, but they all have one feature in common: its yet-unattained status. In the sixties, the writers of the so-called “Boom” thought they could achieve not only national cultures but, more importantly, a global continental culture on a par with that of Europe or the United States. However, rather than taking indigenous and popular traditions as its

33. Angel Rama elaborates on the phenomenon of “transculturation”. In: *Transculturation narrativa en América Latina*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1982.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 202-203.

base, "Boom" writers sought to forge a new aesthetic language and, consequently, a new hegemonic consciousness. As in Arguedas's case, however, culture was a *proxy* for revolution or political power. According to Carlos Fuentes:

...if we Hispano-Americans are capable of creating our own model of progress [as compared to western technocratic models], then our language is the only vehicle that can give form, propose goals, establish priorities, elaborate critiques of a given way of life: of saying everything that cannot be said in any other way. I believe that in Spanish America there are novels being written and to be written which, when such a consciousness is attained, will provide the necessary instruments to drink the water and the fruits of our true identity.³⁵

35. FUENTES, Carlos. *La nueva novela hispanoamericana*. Mexico: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969, p. 98.

Fuentes is, of course, on the right track in seeking alternative models of progress but by adopting an autotelic aesthetic he is ultimately endorsing the option of elites in their bid for hegemony. The autotelic here is a symbolic expression of the self-determination that such writers sought vis-à-vis the international cultural market. Notwithstanding their protestations to the contrary, Fuentes and his colleagues (Cortázar, Vargas Llosa, etc.) ironically espoused technological development in the realm of the aesthetic—not only in terms of narrative technique but also as regards the growth of an international and promotion industry —, falling in step, then, with the global reach of capitalist rationality into all spheres of life. It seems that the aesthetic fulfills the same function in this context as it had in its inception in England and Germany: it serves as a *proxy for power* enabling a particular group to seek consensus on cultural terrain in order to maintain hegemony. Not only did professionalized, superstar novelists like Fuentes sideline "vocational" writers like Arguedas, they also sought to integrate with the growing consumer culture among elites (the beautiful people of "*la onda*") that made popular and indigenous cultures irrelevant unless they too integrated or "transcultured" into consumer society.³⁶

36 Cf. FRANCO, Jean. Narrator, author, superstar: Latin American narrative in the age of mass culture. *Revista Iberoamericana*, 47, p. 114-115, 1981.

Today, with poor prospects for military-revolutionary triumph, with the popular appeal of revolutionary heroism partly displaced toward narcotraffickers, and with the transformation of politics into struggles for interpretive power, the cultural sphere has opened up to all kinds of challenges. Its function as a "proxy for power"—it seems preferable to speak of a mediation of power relations—is openly recognized by groups throughout the political spectrum. At stake is an idea that the cultural or the aesthetic can provide a terrain for

establishing consensus; everyone recognizes that consensus works in the interest of the hegemony of some groups. The premise that the aesthetic realm is intrinsically free and disinterested has become difficult to accept.

Is there still, then, an emancipatory potential in the aesthetic or cultural realm? In a different context, although directly addressing postmodern challenges to aesthetic disinterest, Terry Eagleton affirms that "there are meanings and values embedded in the tradition goal of achieving equal rights for self-determination."³⁷ The critical consensus is, however, that the aesthetic lost its emancipatory potential when the historical (i.e., European) avant-gardes were extinguished, on the one hand, by the double whammy of Nazism and Stalinism, and on the other, by the cooptation of consumer capitalism, which transformed "*épater le bourgeois*" into a marketing strategy. The second and subsequent avatars of the avant-garde, variously named neoavant-garde and transavant-garde, have only confirmed the exhaustion of the drive to innovate and shock humanity back from instrumental rationality into aestheticized life practices. With this exhaustion, or "twilight of the avant-gardes," we enter an era of skepticism, which Paz equates with postmodernity.³⁸

What many call postmodernity, Habermas argues, is really a political and cultural *impasse* awaiting resolution in the transformation of the emancipatory project of modernity such that a democratizing communicative rationality rather than instrumental reason becomes its driving force. Following Weber and Durkheim, Habermas sees European modernity emerging out of two interrelated diremptions: on the one hand, the separation of "system" (economy and state apparatus) and "lifeworld" (the concept of "*Lebenswelt*," taken from Husserl, refers to culture that serve as the medium of intersubjective relations), and, on the other, the emergence of modernity through the rationalization of the lifeworld into three autonomous value spheres: the cognitive, the moral and the aesthetic.³⁹ These diremptions lead to the splitting off of modern from traditional society as rationalization provides rules of validation in each sphere, thus displacing the traditional authority of myth, religion or the absolute right of monarchy. The reproduction of society depends more on human actions than on the dictates of traditional authority. From its very beginning, then, modernity is at odds with tradition as a nonsecular form of belief and transcendence.

Modernity, however, is driven by an inherent contradiction resulting from the increased autonomy and reflexivity of a rationalized society. Automatic behavioral systems driven by instrumental reason override processes of mutual understanding that operate according to communicative rationality. The economy and the state

37. EAGLETON, Terry, *The ideology of the aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990. p. 415.

38. Cf. *Los hijos del limo* and *El romanticismo y la poesía contemporánea*.

39. HABERMAS, Jürgen. *The theory of communicative action*. Vol. 2 *Lifeworld and system: a critique of functionalist reason*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987. Cf. The uncoupling of system and lifeworld. p. 153-97. The classic account of the rationalization of Western culture is Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Scribner's, 1958). It should be pointed out that Weber grounds this rationalization solely in the West. He concedes that other cultures evince dif-

ferent modes of rationalization, but they do not produce the kind of rational moral conduct (conditioned by the Protestant ethic) which leads to the development of capitalism (p. 25-26). Cf. also SCHLUCHTER, Wolfgang. *The rise of western rationalism*. Max Weber's developmental history. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. p. 19.

apparatus thus come to colonize the lifeworld. At his point the aesthetic sphere emerges as the principal source of resistances to colonization (although practically ignored by the social sciences) by projecting nonalienated modes of cognition. But according to Peter Bürger, as the bourgeoisie expands its domain even resistances to instrumental reason are increasingly institutionalized, cutting off the aesthetic from other spheres of social life. Nineteenth century Parnassianism, Symbolism, Pre-Raphaelism and Art for Art's Sake exemplify the specialization of the aesthetic. Modernity generates its own antimodernity but subjects it to the same rules of specialization, thus constituting its internal contradiction. Eagleton further elucidates this contradiction noting that the putative unalienated and disinterested cognition provided by the aesthetic is, in fact, a proxy for power, a "kind of prosthesis to reason, extending a reified Enlightenment rationality into vital regions which are otherwise beyond its reach."⁴⁰

40. EAGLETON, p. 16.

An ever increasing colonization of the lifeworld resulted in a Europe disenchanted with its own elite culture, driving its artists and intellectuals to seek ever new regions of experience to tap. The era that saw the rise of nihilism, the avant-gardes and Spengler's *Twilight of the West*, also saw a new way of appropriating the cultural products of nonwestern societies. Primitivism is not just a matter of collecting exotic objects from the outer reaches of the Empire, it is a source of "still unalienated" cultural capital that will enable aesthetics, as "prosthesis to reason," to open up heretofore untapped regions of the psyche and facilitate their colonization in the process. This era also saw Latin American literature, as the major expression of (elite) cultural life, "catch up to" or get "up to date with" metropolitan culture. In effect, (elite) aesthetics in Latin America finally went beyond a mere *costumbrismo*, tapping local indigenous cultural forms in search of its own unalienated cultural capital. Examples are Andean and Mesoamerican *indigenismo* (Icaza, Alegría, Asturias, and the Nicaraguan *Vanguardia*), Caribbean *negrismo* (Palés Matos and Guillén), Brazilian *Modernismo* (Tarsila do Amaral, Mário and Oswald de Andrade).

All of the above are expressions of the avant-garde will to abolish the institutionalized separation between autonomous art and bourgeois everyday life, seeking to establish a new practice of everyday life patterned after art.

The avant-gardistes proposed the sublation of art—sublation in the Hegelian sense of the term: art was not to be simply destroyed, but transferred to the praxis of life where it would be preserved, albeit in changed form. The avant-

gardistes thus adopted an essential element of Aestheticism [that] had made the distance from the praxis of life the content of works. The praxis of life to which Aestheticism refers and which it negates is the means-ends rationality of the bourgeois everyday. Now, it is not the aim of the avant-gardistes to integrate art into *this* praxis. On the contrary, they assent to the aestheticists' rejection of the word and its means-ends rationality. What distinguished them from the latter is the attempt to organize a new life praxis from a basis in art.⁴¹

It may be argued that the difference between metropolitan European and Latin American/peripheral avant-gardes revolves around how the aesthetic practice which serves as model for a new everyday practice is construed. In Latin America, many of the avant-gardes sought to reactualize indigenous traditions, thus projecting new imaginaries with strong ethical *contents*. If we rethink peripheral avant-gardes as the endeavor to create new life praxes by rearticulating local traditions,⁴² as in testimonial literature, it may prove too hasty to have declared the death of the avant-garde. Evidently, avant-garde would mean something else if thus construed. It would not, for example, be the sole domain of elites but would require, as in testimonial literature, the collaboration of elites and subalterns rather than the self-serving representation, incorporation or cooptation of the latter by the former.

From the perspective of elite metropolitan culture, and its enclaves in peripheral societies, the avant-gardes petered out:

Today we witness the twilight of the aesthetics of rupture; the art and literature of our turn of the century have gradually lost their powers of negation. For a long time now their negations have been ritualistic repetitions, their rebellions formulas, their transgressions ceremonies....⁴³

But this is because they did not really change the framework of their aesthetic rationality. For thinkers like Paz, autonomous aesthetics continues to set the tenor of cultural practice; any collaboration with the subaltern is considered populist demagoguery, and any experimentation involving elite, popular and mass culture a commodification. Consequently the entire problem of the avant-garde is left behind as the world enters a new *episteme*, according to Paz:

Critics, somewhat belatedly, have noticed that for the past quarter century we have been entered a new historical pe-

41. BÜRGER, Peter. *Theory of the avant-garde*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984. p. 49.

42. I have attempted such a rethinking in: *Repensando a vanguarda desde a periferia*, forthcoming in the working papers series (*Pápeis avulsos*) of the *Centro Interdisciplinar de Estudos Contemporâneos*. Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 1990.

43. PAZ, *El romanticismo y la poesía contemporánea*. p. 26.

riod and another form of art. Talk of the avant-garde has become popular as a new label has emerged for our time: the "postmodern era," a term just as dubious and contradictory as the idea of modernity. What comes after the modern cannot but be ultramodern: a modernity even more modern than yesterday's.⁴⁴

44. Ibid.

Paz, it seems to me, has got it wrong. His account is a willful misrecognition that the postmodern does not necessarily seek to innovate, as does the modern, but rather to rearticulate alternative traditions in order to disalienate contemporary life. Even a mainstream account, like Lyotard's, situates postmodernity "not after nor in opposition to the modern which includes it, however much it may remain concealed within it."⁴⁵ Before considering in what ways postmodernity can be construed as continuous with modernity, I should like to review briefly Lyotard's checklist of postmodern features, which Jameson extends to the entire field of culture.

45. LYOTARD, Jean-François. *La postmodernidad (explicada a los niños)* Barcelona: Gedisa, 1987, back cover.

What defines postmodernity for Lyotard is the loss of credibility in the *grand récits* that legitimize knowledge in the name of any mode of unification, whether christianity, revolution, the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, Marxism, or even the idea that "the people reign over history."⁴⁶ There is no longer faith in global or totalizing explanations. Jameson, in turn, sees postmodernity as a "cultural dominant" disseminated globally by the third or "late" stage of capitalism. Its cultural landscape is no longer the mechanical reproduction of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but rather the semiotic reproduction (a mode of symbolization of articulation of signs and not a mode of reproduction proper) that becomes dominant after World War II.⁴⁷

46. Ibid., p. 31.

47. JAMESON, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the logic of Late Capitalism.* *New Left Review*, 146, July-August 1984, p. 79.

Jameson's keenest insight is his explanation of why there has been a loss of faith in totalizing explanations. He derives his account from those works infused by the aesthetic of simulation, "whose power of authenticity is documented by [their] success (...) in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us." This evocation is powerful, according to Jameson, because it makes palpable what we can no longer understand without the prosthesis of simulation:

...our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating, not so much in its own right, but because *it seems to offer some privileged representational*

shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp—namely the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself.⁴⁸

48. *Ibid.*, p. 79-80; emphasis added.

Jameson's argument relies on an allegorical reading of the works he refers to, inasmuch as he treats them as simulacra of an unrepresentable, sublime referent. Such works no longer refer to the problem of power, "the physical incommensurability of the human organism with Nature, but also [to] the limits of figuration and the incapacity of the human mind to give representation to such enormous forces."⁴⁹ Consequently, for Jameson, the postmodern sublime can only be adequately theorized "in terms of that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of economic and social institutions."⁵⁰

49. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

Contrary to theorists of the avant-garde, Jameson does not propose how these works resist the colonization of the lifeworld. For Jameson, our everyday life is totally colonized, so much so that it is impossible to achieve any direct cognition of the world. Hence the sublime experience of failing to represent the reality to which the simulacra and the fragments might allude.⁵¹ Rather than resistance, Jameson, following Kevin Lynch in *The image of the city*, advocates an "aesthetics of cognitive mapping" so as to compensate for that unrepresentability that impedes the subject from recognizing its "Imaginary relationship to his or her *Real* conditions of existence."⁵²

51. Among the simulacra and fragments of the postmodern, Jameson lists the following: 1) the rise of aesthetic populism, tolerant of mass culture and kitsch; 2) the destruction of the expression of Being (represented by Van Gogh's "Peasant Shoes"), replaced by simulations (as in Warhol's "Diamond Dust Shoes"); 3) the waning of affect, with its corresponding reference to human depth (e.g., Freud's drives), and the emergence of *jouissance*, the euphoric experience of the death of the subject (Lacan); 4) the substitution of parody (transgression) by pastiche (conformity); 5) the replacement of History by historicism, the *mise en spectacle* of all past styles; 6) the *mode rétro* minus any feeling of nostalgia (e.g., *The Big Chill*); 7) the loss of a radical past; 8) social narcissism and schizophrenia resulting from deoedipalization (Lasch); 9) the transformation of

One of these conditions is the obsolescence of a "semi-autonomous" cultural or aesthetic sphere with a corresponding critical distance. But it isn't that culture has disappeared; it has, rather, exploded and expanded

throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself—can be said to have become "cultural" in some original and yet untheorized sense.⁵³

All of this entails that the "Left" must redefine its strategies for offense and resistance. The writing on the wall suggests that such time-honored notions as negativity, position, subversion, critical distance, and so on have been made irrelevant in the new postmodern landscape.

The short-hand language of 'cooptation' (...) offers a most inadequate theoretical basis for understanding a situation in

work and subject into *textuality* constituted by differences; 10) hysterical or camp sublime, no longer resulting from the incapacity to figure or represent incommensurability but from the terror of simulated existence; 11) the apotheosis of the machinism of the third, or cybernetic, industrial revolution; 12) the abolition of critical distance; 13) the loss of coordinates in urban space.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 90. Jameson is quoting Althusser here.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Cf. Third World Literature in the era of multinational capitalism, *Social Text*, 15, Fall 1986, n. 69, p. 79-80. See also the eloquent critique by AHMAD, Aijaz, Jameson's rhetoric of otherness and the national allegory. *Social Text*, 17, Fall 1987, p. 3-25.

which we all, in one way or another, dimly feel that not only punctual and local countercultural forms of cultural resistance and guerrilla warfare, but also even overtly political interventions like those of the *Clash*, are all somehow secretly disarmed by a system of which they themselves might well be considered a part, since they can achieve no distance from it.⁵⁴

I have quoted Jameson at length not only because his essays provide the most detailed descriptions of the kinds of works that can be considered to constitute mainstream postmodernism but also to serve as a backdrop against which we can gauge other, non-mainstream contemporary expressions. On the basis of the latter, it seems to me that Jameson's conclusions are unacceptable. He has argued that every "third world" text is necessarily a national allegory which is easily discerned.⁵⁵ How does this statement reflect on cultural texts from peripheral societies? Are they less interesting because their subtexts are not as unfathomable as those of "postmodern" texts? Is it true that the allegorized referent is more complex in "first world" contexts? If we accept Jameson's premise that late capitalism is the transcendental referent that infuses postmodern textuality and eludes cognition, and if peripheral societies are also part of the global network of transnational capital, why then are their texts not as complex? Or does he mean to imply that "third world" readers are more astute in cognitive mapping? That is hardly the case since Jameson has already argued that it is the cultural landscape of "first world" societies that makes the referent elusive. We can only infer, then, that Jameson looks either nostalgically or condescendingly at those writers and readers who go on about their interpretations as if the "Real" of late capitalism were a simple matter of national conflicts figured according to long outdated cognitive maps from a postmodern perspective.

These objections to Jameson's diagnostic can be extended to almost all the theorists of modernity and postmodernity who privilege a Euro-North American model of cultural evolution: at some point bourgeois society attains an autonomous aesthetic sphere harboring unalienated experience which is eventually reified through institutionalized specialization; the avant-gardes recuperate the critical potential of the aesthetic but either capitulate under fascist and authoritarian regimes or are commodified in consumer societies; finally, rather than the collapse of the aesthetic, postmodernity is the implosion of the social and the political such that the aesthetic permeates all experience. The lifeworld has become simulation.

This evolutionary model relegates nonwestern societies to a perennial lag, even in those cases, as in Latin American *ningunismo*, in which subjects see themselves as copies. But they are copies—dissimulations and not simulations—of referents that have ceased to exist, much like the supernovas whose light we continue to see millions of years after they collapsed. Lihn, whose parody of the death of the subject I referred to above, sardonically casts Latin America as the mirror image of a black hole, mainstream theories of postmodernity leave little room for an alternative.

If we dispense with this evolutionary model, however, and seek other premises, it is possible to construe a positive account of Latin American cultural practices that does not lapse into knee jerk affirmations of authenticity of despairing laments over an ersatz ontology. A new generation of cultural critics has put forth such concepts as “transculturation,”⁵⁶ “cultural rearticulation,”⁵⁷ and “cultural reconversion,”⁵⁸ to account for the ways in which the diverse groups that constitute Latin America negotiate their cultural capital.

THE REARTICULATION OF TRADITION

In contrast to Paz, who understood modernity in relation to the “*tradición de ruptura y ruptura de la tradición*,” the new Latin American cultural critics emphasize how groups *recycle* their traditions in national and international markets. Theirs is no longer a nostalgic aspiration for a return to unalienated modes of life. By focusing on consumption and other means of cultural mediation, they are in a better position—vis-à-vis nationalist ideologues—to gauge how and to that extent the diverse groups of Latin America’s cultural heterogeneity interact with one another and what the prospects are for subaltern groups to gain a greater participation in the distribution of goods. Increased restructuring of economy and state administration by neoconservatives (facilitated by international capital’s imposition of austerity programs) has certainly made it more difficult to achieve an egalitarian distribution of wealth. Nevertheless, restructuring has created new possibilities for interaction and maneuver, as traditional cultures are faced with “segmented and differentiated participation in the global market (...) according to local codes of reception.”⁵⁹

The result of restructuring and the responses/propositions in relation to it is

something similar to what certain representatives of post-modernism claim: the decentering and deconstruction of

56. Cf. RAMA, *Transculturation narrativa en América Latina*.

57. BRUNNER, José Joaquín. *Notas sobre la modernidad y lo postmoderno en la cultura latinoamericana*.

58. GARCÍA CANCLINI Nestor. *La reconversión cultural: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (forthcoming).

59. BRUNNER, *Notas sobre la modernidad y lo postmoderno en la cultura latinoamericana*. p. 33.

western culture as it is depicted in primers; of its rationality, key institutions and cognitive habits and styles, which we are led to believe are imposed uniformly. [Cultural heterogeneity resembles] the implosion of consumed, produced and reproduced meanings and the concomitant destructuring of collective representations, the problems in and desire for identify, a confusion of temporal demarcations, paralysis of the creative imagination, the loss of utopias, the atomization of local memory, the obsolescence of traditions.⁶⁰

60. Ibid., p. 34.

It *resembles* these “first world” cultural phenomena but only superficially. Not only, as explained above, are the causes different, the ways in which different localities respond to the conditions imposed by transnational capitalism are also different: e.g., the hyperinflationary situation in Latin American countries is not the same as the hyperinflationary circulation of signs—the ‘obscene obesity of information’—which Baudrillard sees as the culture of to the United States.⁶¹

61. BAUDRILLARD, Jean. *Fatal strategies*. Trans. Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e)/Pluto, 1990.

Hyperinflation in Latin America, on the contrary, is not the result of consumerism but of external debt, speculation, narcotraffic and, most importantly for the point being made, the struggle for consumption that informal economies represent. Jameson is, therefore, wrong to attribute “postmodern cognitive mapping” only to “first world” cultural production. It is just that in Latin America the mappings are different; they correlate to different sets of conditions imposed by transnational capitalism.

According to García Canclini, consumption, understood as an “appropriation of products,” should not be reduced to consumerism, passive reception, useless waste and depoliticization or to habits targeted by market research. It is, rather, the terrain of struggle between classes and other group formations over the distribution of goods, and as such it also serves as the medium in which needs and other cultural categories such as identity are constituted. Consumption is a particularly apt space of cultural mediation in which hegemony can be challenged:

We know that struggle by means of cultural mediations offers neither immediate nor spectacular results. But it is the only guarantee that we are not passing from the simulacrum of hegemony to the simulacrum of democracy—a way of avoiding the resurgence of a defeated in our ways of thinking and interacting. The political uncertainties of the

cultural struggle seem preferable to a revolutionary epic that repudiates culture.⁶²

García Canclini's research on the rearticulation within transnational capital of popular or folk traditions as a means to expand possibilities of consumption in its narrow and wider senses, demonstrates that modernization does not require the elimination of economic and cultural forces that do not directly serve the growth of capitalism so long as these forces "cohere into a significant sector, which satisfies its needs or those of a balanced reproduction of the system."⁶³ Consequently, modernity does not have to be theorized in the traditional avant-gardist terms of a "*tradición de ruptura*." Rather than a *still* unfinished project, as Habermas understands it, modernity in Latin America is a series of necessarily unfinished projects. In the case of Brazil, for example, Renato Ortiz finds no break,

the *ruptura* never occurred as it did in European countries because the idea that dominated our imaginary was always connected to the need to construct a modern Brazilian nation.⁶⁴

In Latin America, in effect, the kind of institutionalization that guaranteed the autonomy of the three value spheres did not take place in any rigorous fashion. Knowledge, politics, and aesthetics above all, continually cross-fertilize each other. Thus, Brazilian avant-gardes—in contrast to the European avant-gardes which, according to Peter Bürger, sought to reintegrate art and the "praxis of life" by dismantling institutionalization—were not so much a break with the (indigenous, Afro-Brazilian and Luso-colonial) past as a rearticulation of it is their attempts to establish a national culture. Mário de Andrade, one of the leaders of *Modernismo* in the 1920s, confessed that this movement "anticipated and prepared the way for the creation of a new state of national being," alluding to Getúlio Vargas's Estado Novo, which centralized the economy and all state apparatuses under one directorate.⁶⁵

Paradoxically, modernity in Latin America is more a question of establishing new relationships with tradition than of surpassing it. Among the many ways in which this can be done, cultural critics have emphasized the role of pastiche, that *appropriative* form of stylization which neither rejects nor celebrates the past but, in the words of Silviano Santiago, "assumes it."⁶⁶ In a very insightful essay, Santiago not only explains how the Brazilian avant-garde can be rethought in relation to tradition, he even suggests that the avant-

62. GARCÍA CANCLINI, Nestor. Culture and power: the state of research, *Media, culture and society*. 10, 1988, p. 495.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 485.

64. ORTIZ, Renato. A modernidade e a tradição brasileira. *Cultura brasileira e indústria cultural*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988, p. 209.

65. ANDRADE, Mário de. O Movimento Modernista. In:—. *Aspectos da Literatura Brasileira*. São Paulo: n. d.

66. SANTIAGO, Silviano. Permanência do discurso da tradição no modernismo. In: BORNHEIM, Gerd et alii. *Cultu-*

ra Brasileira: Tradição/Contradição. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar/Funarte, 1987, p. 136.

garde may itself be rearticulated for present cultural circumstances, although it will be necessary to de-emphasize the transgressive poetics of *ruptura* that does not hold in many Latin American cases. Santiago illustrates his premise with the *Modernistas'* interest in recuperating Brazil's baroque colonial heritage.

The most interesting case... of the relationship of Modernismo to tradition, which also permits us to disengage Modernismo from any neoconservative appropriations, is the trip taken by Mário and Oswald de Andrade and Blaise Cendrars to Minas Gerais in 1924. Those poets were totally steeped in futurist principles, they had an absolute belief in the civilization of machines and progress. But suddenly they decided to travel in search of colonial Brasil. There they encountered our national history and—more important to the point we're making—the primitivism of Minas's eighteenth century baroque.⁶⁷

67. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

Santiago goes on to explain that this rearticulation and recuperation of tradition is achieved by means of *suplementation*, the process by which the excluded is reincorporated into the status quo. Santiago, however, uses Derrida's notion—as laid out in *Of Grammatology*—somewhat against the grain. Derrida invokes the term according to the rhetoric of marginality such that whatever is excluded is a *threat* to the status quo. Metaphors of violence and danger abound in his exposition of it.⁶⁸ It is because modernity continued to privilege tradition—as it did Nature —, that innovation could be construed as supplement. The radical avant-gardes exposed modernity's ideological strategies of “naturalization” and inverted the paradigm, transforming innovation—*ruptura*—into a continually self-supplementing process. By doing this, however, they obviated any role for tradition. Subsequently, poststructuralists fetishized the inversion as *écriture* (Derrida), *le sémiotique* (Kristeva), and *jouissance* (Barthes); they attempted to exorcise the straw man of modernity—and its demon, Cartesian subjectivity— and mine the foundational lack left in its place. By doing so, however, they lapsed into a negative theology that revered the signifier hovering over the abyss of absence.

68. DERRIDA, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Intro. and trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1976.

Many Latin American writers and critics—especially Paz, Sarduy, Rodríguez Monegal, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos—were seduced into thinking they could more easily occupy this privileged place, since Latin American culture had always been defined as a form of lack (by elite intellectuals). This is the point of Lihn's parody of *ninguneísmo* quoted above. But this rhetoric of marginality can

also be quite hubristic; Latin America intellectuals declare themselves superior because from their marginal place they cannibalize everything, suck all values into the black hole. In an essay in which he puts his own literary movement—*concretismo*—at the pinnacle of this “anthropophagic rationality,” Haroldo de Campos proclaims that

writers of a supposedly peripheral literature suddenly appropriated the entirety of the code, claiming it as their own patrimony, like a hollow prize awaiting a new historical subject. They thus restored a more universal and radical function to poetics. The Brazilian [concrete poetry movement] was its condition of possibility.⁶⁹

69. CAMPOS, Haroldo de. Da razão antropofágica: a Europa sob o signo da devoração. *Colóquio Letras*. 62, June 1981, p. 19.

A rethinking of the avant-garde, however, makes it possible to rearticulate tradition as a supplement that does not subordinate the other elements of the articulation. According to Santiago:

Pastiche does not reject the past in a gesture of mockery, contempt or irony. Pastiche accepts the past as it is and the work of art is nothing but a supplement. (...) The supplement is something which you add to something already complete. I would not say that pastiche is reverence towards the past, but I would say that it assumes [*endossa*] the past, contrary to parody which always ridicules it.⁷⁰

70. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

Santiago, in fact, envisions cultural articulations that can include avant-garde practices that can take their place next to elements from other traditions.

Universalizing modes of democratization have not been the most successful in Latin America. This is due not only to their encounter with economic underdevelopment or authoritarian and charismatic forms of state power. It is also due to in great part to the tendency to understand democratization in terms of modernization, that is, the eradication of traditions whose “enchanted” or “auratic” modes of life may prove inimical to coexistence with others or to the projects of elites and their allies. The problem is, of course, that modernization has severely handicapped many groups who hold to these traditions. And the problems have only gotten worse with the turn to the right under the aegis of neoconservatism. Facile proclamations of Latin America’s cannibalizing subversiveness at best mask the problem. Marginality is not willy nilly transformed into a share of the common wealth. Habermas is certainly correct when he contends that neoconservative and “anarchistic” postmoderns are not at odds but, rather, serve the same purpose. To celebrate “parasitism” (whose

Latin American correlate is the problem of informal economies) or the hyperreal (which in Latin America is wrought by the hyperinflationary effects of the external debt and narcotraffic) is like cheerleading on the sidelines as neoconservatives sell out the citizenry.

The rearticulation of the traditions of Latin America's cultural heterogeneity, on the other hand, provides one of the most significant ways for furthering democratization. Liberation theology and the Christian Base Communities, with their emphasis on *concientización* achieved through rewriting the gospels in light of everyday experiences, have paved the way for other social movements to seek recognition and enfranchisement. In the past, the representation of the interests of the array of groups that make up this cultural heterogeneity was either absent from the public sphere or projected by elites who sought to maintain their own hegemony. Pastiche, as Santiago defines it, is the literary counterpart of those rearticulatory practices that seek to assume alternative traditions within modernity. These involve the struggles for interpretive power on the part of peasants, women, ethnic, racial, and religious groups. For interpretive power enables them to justify their needs and on that basis demand satisfaction. The criteria, forms, and terms of these rearticulatory practices are both old and new. Old because they draw from their traditions; new because they no longer operate solely within the framework of class or nation. Jameson could not be more wrong with respect to the significance of Latin American cultural practices. They are not "national allegories." They are not allegories at all. They are, on the contrary, practices for or against democratization, for or against the recognition, representation, and enfranchisement of all as citizens.