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ROMÁN DE LA CAMPA

On Latin Americanism and the Postcolonial Turn

Neoliberalism finds in the market the only possibility of totalization and trusts that a just society will be the by-product of market swings. Neopopulism, devoid of a people or a nation, sees public opinion constructed by surveys as a globalization whose *Diktats* are not only beyond appeal, but invariably correct. (Beatriz Sarlo, *Escenas de la vida posmoderna*; my translation)

I.

It is not often observed that the current status of Latin American literary studies closely corresponds to the arrival of new theoretical paradigms in humanistic research. Today, after thirty years or so, the widening scope of Latin Americanism claims the attention of a growing body of English-writing critics and scholars, including a considerable number of diasporic Latin Americans. More than a field of studies, or the literary articulation of a hybrid culture, Latin American literature and criticism is perhaps best understood as a transnational discursive community with a significant market for research and sales in the industrial capitals of the world. Current critical debates about gender representations, theoretical shifts, modes of periodization and new comparative frameworks — indeed all the paradigms brought to bear on canonical literatures within the Euro-American academy — now incorporate Latin American literature with particular intensity. U.S. research universities continue to invest in Latin American Studies, often in concert with a developing interest in related areas such as Hispanic and Latino Studies, and with a greater emphasis on literature and culture. New anthologies of multicultural and global literature generally feature Latin American samples. Indeed, if there is a postmodern canon, Borges and García Márquez are thought to constitute its very center.

Recent theoretical insights have brought into question national and regional boundaries as well as ethnic and linguistic points of origination, but the "coming

of age" of Latin Americanism through the medium of English' — the *lingua franca* of globalization — also has significant ramifications. Clear examples can be found in the processes of scholarly legitimization. Many of the most forceful texts of Latin American criticism in the past ten to fifteen years have been written in English; conversely, major Latin American contemporary works of fiction and criticism in Spanish as well as Portuguese often achieve worldwide reception largely through English translations,² and new theoretical constructs informed or inspired by Latin American literature — like John Barth's discovery of a postmodern literary style (*The Friday Book*), Hans Robert Jauss's revision of German reception theory ("A Retrospective"), and Fredric Jameson's notion of a Third World national allegory — have evolved from a somewhat limited exposure to masters such as Borges or García Márquez, often without accounting for differences between them or their relation to Latin American culture as a whole ("Third World Literature").

For Latin Americanists, it is becoming increasingly pertinent to ask what sort of academic object we construct and, in the process, how our self-inscriptions may situate us. Considerable attention has been given to Benedict Anderson's critique of the "nation" by literary critics in the United States and England (*Imagined Communities*), but "Latin Americanism," as well as other objective correlatives for less-than-modern societies, can also draw from Said's reflections on the production of disciplinary objects (*Orientalism*). If the nation is an imagined community we conjure into existence, how do we describe those "other" nations or regions we construct in the process of teaching and writing about them from discursive communities anchored in Europe or North-American societies? "This seemingly natural and spontaneous availability of Latin America as a subject for discourse is no doubt partly a holdover from the colonial past," writes Neil Larsen in *Reading North By South* (1). And Nelly Richard, author *La estratificación de los márgenes*, of one of the most incisive texts on postmodernism in Latin America, warns that the growing academicist archive of decentering theories may turn Latin American and feminist "difference" into "predictable supplements" (74).

Of course, even a cursory attempt to conceptualize Latin America in a comprehensive way is bound to challenge any critical approach. Latin American

textuality is a repository that involves a serious engagement with work done in at least three major sites — Latin America, the United States and Europe. To find such a range of critical and theoretical sources in any given critic is difficult, and perhaps even more so if Latin America remains central in that pursuit. In recent times, one thinks of Angel Rama's work as an exceptional effort, particularly when it comes to combining Euro-American theory with a close reading of the major Latin American cultural traditions: Andean, Caribbean, Meso-American, Southern Cone, and Brazilian. Nonetheless, with so many potential authors, countries and cultural traditions, the richness of Latin America's textual production belies the notion of an all-encompassing entity often portrayed by critical works, anthologies and editions, including those committed to a discourse of difference. The market totalizes in its own way. Moreover, unlike the Caribbean discourse of Franz Fanon, C.L.R. James, and Édouard Glissant that is often cited in postcolonial criticism, Latin American literature in translation was brought into the canon at an earlier turn in theoretical debates. It reached center stage during the sixties and seventies particularly with the translations of the so-called narrative boom exemplified by Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Julio Cortázar, among others. Thus by virtue of its proximity, if not correspondence, to the advent of new critical paradigms in humanistic scholarship since the sixties, the study of Latin American literature became quite invested in structuralist, semiotic and deconstructive modes of reading by and large removed from the extra-literary entanglements of epochal constructs such as postmodernism or postcolonialism. In addition, the field has been further mainstreamed by the marketing of Latin American magic realism that now includes women writers such as Isabel Allende and Laura Esquivel.

It is not surprising, therefore, that postcolonialism has been met with some early skepticism by the more or less established schools of Latin American criticism in the United States. In addition, one must bear in mind that this initial response comes just about the time when the full implications of postmodernism as a sociopolitical reality are being felt in Latin America through the neoliberal political regimes that came about in the eighties. A very recent book like Beatriz Sarlo's *Escenas de la vida posmoderna* dramatizes just how different this postmodernism is from the celebration of its literary embodiment. By and large, literary critics have ignored or eschewed the work of social scientists and philosophers living in Latin America, for whom postmodernism constitutes an ongoing debate of multidisciplinary nature and considerable political ramifications, as is evident in works like *Cultura política y democratización* (Lechner).

There are, to be sure, some notable exceptions. The marketing of boom writing and criticism, for example, has come under review in the work of Doris Sommer and George Yúdice; and the need to approach Latin American postmodernity as a cultural political project that must step beyond the traditional practice of post-structural literary studies has been observed by John Beverley,

1 The influential work of scholars such as Jean Franco, Gerald Martin, John Beverley, Djelal Kadir and Roberto González Echevarría, among other Latin Americanists working in the United States, is mainly written in English. British Hispanists who have turned their attention to Latin American literature, in English, now include Paul Julian Smith and Malcolm Read. The work of Sylvia Molloy and Beatriz Sarlo, generally written in Spanish, has been increasingly translated into English in the past few years.

2 Angel Rama has argued convincingly that the Latin American literary boom ought to be studied, at least in part, as an international publishing event largely affected by U.S. academic readers and publishing presses ("El boom en perspectiva").

Neil Larsen, and Jean Franco, among a few others. But the postmodern gaze on Latin American literary topics remains much closer to a utopian post-structuralist critical practice whose link with the lifeworld and other forms of culture remains quite distant, if not wholly unreconciled. Postmodern topics of interest have developed, such as post-boom forms of narrative, which are often associated with *testimonio* writing (such as Rigoberta Menchú's memoirs), but can encompass much of what has been written since the middle seventies, including newer work from boom writers like Vargas Llosa himself, or re-readings of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Severo Sarduy (Moreiras 227-34; González Echevarría, *La ruta de Severo Sarduy*). As a critical practice, post-boom writing remains caught in preferences that reinsert traditional binaries such as realist/fantastic, symbolic/post-symbolic, and referential/literary — a debate that generally avoids asking how postmodernity compounds such a polarity. As a marketing practice, post-boom criticism reveals a certain jockeying for position in sales and promotions of discourse on Latin America in the U.S. academy. In that sense the post-boom enterprise comes near the postmodern.

One would expect, therefore, Latin Americanist critiques of postcolonialism to be as varied and contradictory as the field itself, if not more so. For scholars invested in the study of Latin American colonial discourses, for example, resistance to postcolonial theory has generated an important historiographical debate on whether the first two centuries after the Spanish conquest classify as colonialism (Klor de Alva, Adorno),³ though it remains somewhat removed from considering its theoretical implications (Coronil, "Can Postcoloniality..."). For critics closer to structuralist and Marxist methods, postcolonial writing constitutes no more than an extension of the already established postmodern paradigm (Vidal). Conversely, scholars operating from the firmness of post-structural or postmodern perspectives have seen postcolonialism as having little to add to deconstructive Latin American criticism (Kadir, *The Other Writing*; Colás, "Of Creole Symptoms"). Others yet have seized the opportunity to suggest a closer dialogue between Latin American studies and the newer field of Anglo-American culturalism that is often implicit in postcolonialism (Seed, Mignolo).

These are welcome and valuable entanglements. After all, they speak to the central question of whether postcolonialism constitutes a challenge to postmodern critical thought (Giroux, Lazarus, Radhakrishnan), or whether it is merely a derivative by-product of a new and still Western mastercode (Dirlik, Ahmad). Latin American cultural and literary studies may well comprise a fertile testing

ground for these questions, given the areas' extraordinary plurality of nations, traditions, languages and diasporas, on one level, its century-and-a-half history of neocolonial struggles and modernizing revolutions on another, and its proximity to Western literary indexing of postmodern textuality on yet another. In any event the field is ripe for comparative study of more global historical and theoretical range, for Latin American comparativism remains largely committed to a narrow canon of authors and a strict literary intertextuality (Pérez Firmat, *Do the Americas*; Smith). It seems ironic, and perhaps emblematic, that excepting new studies such as Neil Larsen's *Reading North by South*, the debate between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad — distinguished non-specialists — appears to have brought greater attention to the position Latin American literature holds on the contemporary global scale than the work of specialized scholars.

Many questions remain unasked or insufficiently explored. Does the Latin American literary boom of the sixties and seventies constitute a form of early postmodern textuality, or is it a lingering form of high modernism? Has the Western Canon replenished itself through the translation and the intertextual influences of a few, mostly male, Latin American novelists? Is there a contradictory process of double-coding that allows Latin America to read itself differently than Europe or North America read themselves through the same texts? Do post-boom forms of writing such as *testimonio* literature constitute postmodern engagements or a return to realist fiction of earlier epochs? What is the role of critical diasporas of Latin American origin trained in the United States that are now administering and codifying Latin America's literary values? Is there a difference between a postmodern and a postcolonial reader? Do they approach literature from neocolonial or peripherally modern societies with different expectations? Can the literature and criticism of the postcolonial world as well as feminism instantiate, or challenge, entrenched historical or political voids in postmodern theories of reading? If so, can this happen within the Latin American field?

This essay explores some of these questions by examining the conditions of possibilities for postcolonial criticism within the existing constellation of Latin American postmodernism and deconstruction. My focus should be seen as part of a broad and increasingly fertile terrain within Latin American literary studies in which many scholars are involved, as exemplified by a wealth of publications within the past three years. English language sources include various anthologies of cultural criticism, *On Edge: The Crisis in Latin American Culture* (Franco, Yúdice, and Flores), *The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America* (Beverley and Oviedo), *Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference* (Chanady), as well as a debate sponsored by the *Latin American Research Review* (Adorno, Mignolo, Vidal, Seed) and the two most recent issues of *Poetics Today* (Mignolo). Spanish sources include, since 1992, various special issues of *Nueva Revista de Crítica Literaria*, as well as *Nuevo Texto Crítico*, and critical

3 Klor de Alva argues that the postcolonial concept cannot be applied in a Latin American context, but his argument has more to do with questioning Latin American colonialism as a historical period. Of greater pertinence to the postcolonial debate and Latin America is Fernando Coronil's "Can Postcoloniality be Decolonized?..." (99-110). A clarifying discussion of de Alva's premises is found in Rolena Adorno ("Positioning").

anthologies such as *Teoría y política de la construcción de identidades y diferencias en América Latina y el Caribe* (Matos), as well as *Posmodernidad en la periferia* (Herlinghaus and Walter).

The list does not aim to be exhaustive nor to ignore the Portuguese and Caribbean aspects of this postmodern/postcolonial gaze on Latin American criticism. Indeed, the work of the Brazilian critic Roberto Schwarz is of growing importance in this regard, and various new bilingual journals from Puerto Rico (*Postdata*, *Nómada*, *Bordes*), as well as the border zones of El Paso (*Puente Libre*) and Miami (*Apuntes Postmodernos/Postmodern Notes*) merit particular attention. Such a flurry of new scholarship goes beyond the study of postmodernism as a literary style that continues to inform a somewhat established scholarly tradition in contemporary Latin American literature. These pages are meant as explorations in the context of such ongoing research.

II.

In "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," Edward Said reminds us that First World appropriation of as yet unconquered spaces belies First World claims to ideological neutrality, in the very technical expertise and epistemological refinement with which its contemporary academic discourses textualize, and in their disregard for political and historical specificity (224). Said thus appears to challenge postcolonial thinking into a recognition of elements that postmodernity finds problematic or simply outdated: imperialism, peripheral modernity, neocolonialism and other structures of inequality give way to a focus on complicitous participation of all subjects in the construction of power, on identity as an obstacle to a freer and more fluid postmodern ontology, and on writing as a place where otherness can be explored and even experienced from within regardless of position, gender or even class. Said's own attempt to theorize the subaltern calls for acknowledging a realm of otherness that is "constitutively different," and for recognizing the still unmet anti-imperialist challenges implicit in the work of Third World writers like Fanon and Césaire, whose "models or representations of human effort in the contemporary world" still carry relevance. One could question whether Said wants to contain Fanon and Césaire to the times invoked in their colonial discourses, or whether Said's Orientalist model requires an either/or epistemological structure than no longer obtains. But his critique still raises important questions, such as whether postcolonial readings of Fanon and Césaire are all-too-willing to forget the specific nature of not-so-distant colonial struggles, or whether a strictly rhetorical account of otherness is tantamount to a new form of benign neglect. This has become a key question for other critics as well, most notably Henry Louis Gates, whose essay "Critical Fanonism" vividly depicts the ahistorical tendencies of postcolonial theorizing.

A different look at contemporary critical approaches toward the Third World is found in Gayatri C. Spivak's emphasis on combining a concern for decolonization with deconstructive work as such. In her most explicit and perhaps controversial attempt to distinguish postcolonial writing from the new wave of interest in Latin American literary canonization, she writes:

The radicals of the industrial nations want to be the Third World. Why is "magical realism" paradigmatic of Third World literary production? In a bit, and in the hands of the less gifted teacher, only that literary style will begin to count as ethnically authentic. There is, after all, a reason why Latin America qualifies as the norm of "the Third World" for the United States, even as India used to be the authentic margin for the British. It is interesting that "magical realism," a style of Latin American provenance, has been used to great effect by some expatriate or diasporic subcontinentals writing in English. Yet, as the Ariel-Caliban debates dramatize, *Latin America has not participated in decolonization*. Certainly this formal conduct of magical realism can be said to allegorize, in the strictest possible sense, a socius and a political configuration where "decolonization" cannot be narrativized.... In the greater part of the Third World, the problem is that the declared rupture of "decolonization" boringly repeats the rhythms of colonization with the consolidation of recognizable styles. (223; emphasis added)

Spivak clearly points to the reductionist practice of a critical process whereby Latin American literature becomes a monumentalized style that claims to account for the voice of the native, a generalized Third Worldness marketed for literary and critical reproduction by the "radicals" of industrialized nations. Leftist and liberal critics become particularly complicitous in constructing Third World identities: a) through First World academic appropriation of the Other's fixed place as producer of "national allegories" which are presumably no longer available in Western postmodernism; b) by looking upon foundationalist traditions that inform Third World texts as models of authenticity for subaltern stories whose representational meaning can be guarded from the distance. The decolonizing or postcolonial intellectual that Spivak calls for would be more conscious and critical of how this transaction with the "voice of the native" takes place, though not necessarily free of contradictory entanglements. He or she would be a different "radical," though clearly one who still speaks for the other, or at least someone who is able to transfer that other to the space of writing itself, without claiming to speak for anyone in particular.

But what to make of Spivak's extraordinary claim that "Latin America has not participated in decolonization." It would seem to make sense only if we read that region strictly along the lines of the "magic realist" ideology she aims to deconstruct. In her attempt to critique this rather facile form of referentiality, Spivak somehow fails to acknowledge the existence of a Latin America that speaks through differing voices, most particularly from within, but also through First World diasporic articulations like her own. She makes no effort to document, or imagine, a vast region with a rich, though far from successful, history of attempts

to decolonize that inform more than a century and a half of culture and literature. Her Latin America gets locked into the mirror of its own reception through tropes that flow uncritically, particularly in the U.S. academy. After all, terms like "magic realism" ("carnavalesque," "neo-baroque," and "hybridity" may also deserve further scrutiny) have lost much of their initial explanatory value (Slomon, "Magic Realism"). They have become buzzwords loosely associated with an exotic and undifferentiated multiculturalist flavor.

To be fair, Spivak's aim does not seem to be Latin American literary history as such, but rather a critique of Fredric Jameson's Third World construct, as well as his failure to deconstruct how some Marxist critics working in the First World position themselves in the process of producing literary criticism. Under scrutiny are Jameson's attempt to theorize "national allegory" as the Third World's literary correlative to the First World's postmodern cultural logic, as well as his subsequent work on Third World film and narrative representation based on Latin American magic realism ("On Magic Realism"). Theorizing the entire Third World with one totalizing stroke, as Aijaz Ahmad's often-quoted response makes clear, fails to account for a historically and culturally more complex Third World, or even to question the accuracy of the term. Most importantly, by over-emphasizing the need for realism and use value in the literature of "developing countries," Jameson appears to have neglected the Third World's different relationship with modernity, which has also produced a literature informed by hybrid modern and even postmodern inscriptions.

In contrast to Jameson, Spivak proposes a postcolonial mode of critique and textuality, in which "you take positions in terms not of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" (228). This she defines as a form of "founding catachresis," a "claim for which no adequate referent exists." Rather than an assertion of "spurious identity," it involves an epistemological vigilance, "an incessant recoding of diversified fields of value" which becomes the "deconstructive predicament of the postcolonial": the need for such an intellectual to "say 'no' to the luck 'of having access to the culture of imperialism,'" while still recognizing that "she must inhabit it, indeed invest it, to criticize it" (228).

Spivak's image of a postcolonial critic places the danger of assuming a fixed identity, as woman or subaltern, under the regimen of incessant critique and constant self-questioning, but yet it also seems to suggest a somewhat more political edge to postmodern notions of ambiguity and dispersal. Spivak's postcoloniality, a de-signifying construct accented by feminism and traces of Third World culture, attempts to make a claim for the elusive, if not wholly absent, referent of postmodernism. The embodiment of this claim is found in the diasporic intellectual armed with deconstructive competence, a would-be commuter between First and Third World subject positions, a self-conscious native speaker of English as a second language, indeed, a scandalous intruder upon Western metaphysics. One assumes that Spivak does not intend this claim to be identified

with an origin, even though the specific "in-betweenness" of having come from the Third World (but being no longer bound to it), or that of being a woman under a contested Western patriarchal order manifestly (though not prescriptively) informs it. A sense of referentiality for this critical position is thus suggested, albeit a deconstructive one which is at odds with its own sense of origins.

This sense of discursive referentiality solicits questions about critics whose work remains anchored in their Eurocentric native space and intellectual male tradition. Could they perform postcolonial criticism? Indeed Spivak has herself raised these questions about Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault in her often cited essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" How would they willfully construct such liminality except through deconstruction, if neither birth nor accident has produced access to a hybrid state? Then again, if deconstruction proper is the only medium through which "doubleness" is obtained in general, regardless of cultural or national bearings, is it always already postcolonial, or does postcolonialism make claims on deconstruction that are distinctive? This unresolved ambiguity in her work is also evident in Homi Bhabha's own attempt to articulate a postcolonial sense of "politics" and cultural "Third Worldness" that could claim a bit more specificity than First World Derridian deconstruction, though it remains readily in concert with a mainstreamed postmodern rhetoric of writing and troping ("Remembering Fanon" 120-23).

It could therefore be argued that Spivak's concern to provide a clear antithesis to Jameson's construct produces a blindness of sorts, for she fails to register another conceptualization of Third World literature which today is arguably more prevalent in the United States than Jameson's: Latin America as the quintessence of postmodern textuality — a discursive community bound by an allegory of pure difference, which translates all forms of referential specificity into writing, errancy and rhetorical liminality. Works utilizing this model are often imbued by references to Borges's masterful writerly stories and deconstructive moves, or by an ongoing appraisal of writerly experimentation in more contemporary Latin American writers which is then seen as the essence of postmodernity.⁴ The

4 Of the recent critical anthologies, *Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference* (Chanady) provides a telling example of this particular view. An introduction and an epilogue serve as metropolitan (U.S. and Canada) bookends to nine essay chapters of Latin American Third Worldness. The latter are mostly attempts to theorize Latin American identity and difference from within the area's cultural/literary experience; their authors are grounded in the rich array of Latin American heterogeneous discourses and yet, also informed by new theoretical insights. On the other hand, the bookend supplements, written by Amaryll Chanady and Alberto Moreiras, respectively, seem like a corrective counterpoint of Euro-American theoretical use value for a U.S. university audience, for which this important volume is obviously intended. Accordingly, one finds Derridian and Borgeesian lessons offered in the supplements, as unqualified bold new horizons for Latin America's future understanding of itself.

generally unsuspected relationship between this reading and Jameson's construct has been succinctly outlined by Jean Franco:

The juxtaposition of disparate discourses, the use of pastiche, perhaps helps explain why U.S. critics so eagerly embrace Latin American novels as postmodern. But incorporation into postmodernism is no more satisfactory than Jameson's Third World national allegory. Indeed, the two recuperative gestures seem to be motivated by the same operation of extrapolation. Extrapolation reduces the complexity of intertextual allusions and deprives texts of their own historical relations to prior texts. It implies a view of Latin American literature either in opposition to the metropolis or as part of the metropolis's postmodern repertoire. Yet novels such as Augusto Roa Bastos's *Yo el Supremo* and Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá's *La noche oscura del Niño Avilés* which defy facile recuperation as national allegory or as the postmodern, demand readings informed by cultural and political history. (210)

Would Spivak's notion of a postcolonial critic, owing largely to deconstructive insights, differ from such postmodern readings as clearly as it does from the referentially-bound notion of magic realism? How would she or he keep from extrapolating cultural and political history, or sustain the complexity of historical relations to prior texts? It may well be, as Spivak contends, that multiculturalism, ethnic discourses, and magic realism deserve greater scrutiny because they foster "the production of a neo-colonial discourse" by allowing "disciplinary support for the convictions of authentic marginality by the (aspiring) elite" ("Postructuralism" 222). It is not clear, however, that postmodern deconstructive criticism has been any less productive in constructing marginality — for itself, if not for others — from the act of reading and writing, in its search for an internal sense of "otherness" that somehow supplants what Said would call the "constitutive other."

These questions carry considerable promise precisely because they rehearse many of the contradictions inherent in the notion of postcoloniality. Arif Dirlik, in perhaps the most biting critique of the "postcolonial aura" to date, pinpoints many of its ambiguities and imprecisions, even while underscoring the relevance of the global framework that informs it:

One might go so far as to suggest that, if a crisis in historical consciousness, with all its implications for national and individual identity, is a basic theme of postcoloniality, then the First World itself is postcolonial. To the extent that the Euro-American self-image was shaped by the experience of colonizing the world (since the constitution of the Other is at once also the constitution of the Self), the end of colonialism presents the colonizer as much as the colonized with a problem of identity. (337)

Dirlik begins with the consideration that postcolonialism, as informed by the post-structuralist/postmodernist paradigm, may well correspond to the growing genre of academic First World theoreticism — another empowering discourse for

well-paid intellectuals working in the West, in this case claimed by those with Third World credentials. On the other hand, Dirlik does acknowledge the material and conceptual need for the rise of such a field during the last decade. Postcolonialism arose not just in the immediate context of British postcolonial history, but as a "response to a genuine need, the need to overcome a crisis of understanding produced by the inability of old categories to account for the world," which makes it "possible to conceive of the future in ways other than those of Euro-American political and social models" (350). But postcolonialism, he argues, has not taken up this opportunity. Its self-referential program of subject theory, discursive historicity, and close readings has rendered critics incapable of grasping contemporary Third World problems in broader conceptual terms. At best, Dirlik concludes, postcolonialism "resonates" — from a distance and at the level of the individual subject — with the cultural transformations brought about by the advent of global capitalism. In general, postcolonialism systematically shuns any notion of the structure that continues to link the Third and First Worlds and require that we theorize them together. At worst, it responds more to First World intellectual careerism than to the needs, social or conceptual, of those parts of the world implied by the term "postcolonial."

Dirlik's powerful review of postcolonial theory insists on the latter's deepest aporia: a continuous critique of the Eurocentric epistemological tradition that fails to account for capitalism as structure, particularly in its present global form, or for the roles that "modernization" and "the nation" may still play in developmental strategies that are very much wanted, and perhaps needed, in the so-called postcolonial world.⁵ What discourses can critiques of Western master narratives provide that address those needs? What is truly striking about Dirlik's critique, however, is how indistinguishable it becomes from a critique of postmodernism proper. Indeed, toward the end of his essay, Dirlik affirms that postcolonialists have merely rephrased postmodern precepts. At this point, however, one wonders why he did not focus on the latter more directly or draw them into his set of conclusions more sharply. Why not engage Euro-American postmodernism at the source, through the work of First World theorists? In its immediate attempt to expose how derivative and opportunistic a handful of postcolonialists appear to him, Dirlik's critique disavows its own promise of transferability towards the source of the problem he seeks to define.

The value of postcolonial theory, as well as that of its critics, may ultimately rest in how it intensifies and mediates the contradictions it shares with the more generalized and prestigious body of critical methods and theories: post-structuralist deconstruction and postmodernist critique of master narratives. On

5 On the question of modernizations in the age of postmodernism, Arturo Escobar provides a suggestive, though perhaps utopian, preview of alternative models ("Imagining a Post-Development Era" 20-56).

a different plane, however, it is unclear how notions of postcoloniality informing the current critique of the British colonial legacy in India, parts of Africa and the Caribbean, can be transferred to regions like Latin America or African America, whose experiences with colonialism and neocolonialism are markedly different and which have a history of decolonization that long antedates current theoretical globalizations. Postcoloniality has, however, a wider frame of reference beyond the "strict chronologies of history tout court" implicit in this construct, as Ella Shohat has argued (103). Its other referential emphasis corresponds to "the disciplinary advances characteristic of intellectual history" at a time in which Third World thinking is being challenged and redefined by global economies. "The unarticulated tension between the philosophical and the historical teleologies in the 'post-colonial,'" she adds, "underlies some of the conceptual ambiguities of the term" (102).

III.

The ambiguities of postcolonial criticism are open to debate, but they obviously accentuate the uncertain interplay between history and theory inherent to all postmodern discourses. That ambiguity, often rendered as the very site of ludic or transgressive potential for rhetorical performance, unearths new challenges when applied to residues of colonialism in fields of study such as Latin American literature and cultural studies. As stated earlier, this field has been primarily influenced by post-structural readings in the United States during the past couple of decades. In the influential work of Djelal Kadir and Roberto González Echevarría, for example, the force of Paul de Man's method of close readings has been brought to bear on major authors like Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz, and Jorge Luis Borges. Such a critical program has also inspired new and often innovative readings of nineteenth century and colonial times, indeed, the entire field of Latin American literature. By now it stands as an important, if not dominant, alternative to earlier structuralist, nationalist and dependency-theory approaches to Latin American literature, particularly in the United States. Yet, this strand of deconstructive Latin Americanism remains closely bound to a literary form of epistemology that is far removed even from the cultural politics implicit in its own epistemological challenges to modernity. An engagement with Latin America's debate on postmodern culture, as well as more recent postcolonial discourses, cultural studies and feminism, is likely to bring greater depth to this field, and perhaps bridge the boundaries between a Latin America constructed from U.S. universities and critical discourse that draws closer to the Latin American cultural lifeworld. The recent history of the disciplinary divide in various Latin Americanisms has been outlined by John Beverley and José Oviedo ("Introduction"):

In the context of the crisis of the traditional Left and the waning of the right-wing military dictatorships imposed to contain its force in the 1970s, the theme of democratization has played the same role in the Latin American discussion of postmodernism as the shift in aesthetic-epistemological paradigms did in Anglo-European postmodernism. The impulse for the latter came mainly from the humanities and art criticism; in Latin America, it has come from the social sciences, with, however, this proviso: that in assuming the problematic of postmodernism, the Latin American social sciences have also begun to assume the obligation to take on problems that were posed initially in the humanities, particularly in advanced literary and cultural theory. (15)

But the problematic of postmodernism in Latin American literary studies, as Beverley himself has shown in *Against Literature and Literature and Politics* (with Marc Zimmerman) is not prone to take on postmodernism as a cultural debate either.⁶ Indeed, a strictly humanistic (i.e., literary) understanding of postmodernism has become a Western luxury of sorts, since few developing societies seem able to fund literary criticism as such. The stability of full-time teaching positions and well-financed research opportunities dedicated to the study of Latin America in Euro-American institutions during the past fifteen years could not find a greater contrast in Latin America itself, where even countries like Venezuela, known for its support of humanistic studies, have witnessed severe contractions in the past decade. And neoliberal regimes such as Chile's, in spite of their lauded economic strides, have yet to invest in the production of critical or cultural studies. Such research has been severely limited in all of Latin America, where part-time adjunct positions are the norm. One could safely estimate that there are more professors of Latin American literature remunerated at middle-class levels in New York and California alone, than there are in all of Latin America. Needless to say, the ranks of exiles, expatriates, and other forms of diasporic "in-betweenness" have increased, but unlike those of a generation ago, today's Latin American academic migrants are younger, often trained in the United States, and fully aware of the need to engage Latin Americanism in English as much as in Spanish or Portuguese. Their academic future demands it.

As one would expect, scholarly construction of disciplinary objects rely primarily on social and academic institutions of support, although Latin Americanism cannot be simply divided in neat categories of here and there, particularly with so many diasporic Latin Americans commuting between the borders. Crossover influences are increasingly felt in the work of women writers and

6 John Beverley makes a very convincing argument that Latin America's postmodernity is not just a subject of theorization but a social and political reality that can be observed in recent revolutionary movements such as the one in Central America. His work does not include a study of how postmodern deconstructionism has deployed itself in U.S. Latin American literary criticism and how such authoritative readings have kept postmodern political culture as such beyond the bounds of mainstream studies. That, in part, is the focus of this essay.

critics, as well as in culturalist approaches to Latin America itself that are not bound to narrowing identitarian readings. Previews of this task can be found in the work of critics such as Julio Ramos, Jean Franco, Beatriz Sarlo, George Yúdice, Roberto Schwarz, John Beverley, Mary Louise Pratt, Walter Mignolo, Hugo Achugar, Sylvia Molloy, Antonio Cornejo-Polar, Juan Duchesne, Doris Sommer, and Néstor García Canelini. In the work of Jean Franco, for example, Latin American history, culture and literature, as well as feminism, are enlightened by postmodern theories without succumbing to their conflationary pressures. She writes that the history of Latin American narrative, most particularly through García Márquez, "rather than an allegory, has become the terrain of conflicting discourses" which have "made visible that absence of any signified that could correspond to the nation" ("The Nation" 210). Spivak's notion of catathesis again becomes curiously useful here, with a more specific instance of a historical bind: Latin American narrative is read within its own (postcolonial?) claim for which no fixed referent exists; it is a literature that both calls for and problematizes the construction of nation-states as the solution to Latin America's identitarian quest.

Modernizing discourses continue to inform the culture of postcolonial societies even when modernization theory no longer enjoys the explanatory power it once did. Both modernist as well as postmodernist cultural understanding are challenged by this non-synchronous sense of history, a source of doubling that calls for more than choosing between realist or textualist readings. A crucial example is found in García Márquez's now classic *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It could be argued, on the side of realism and identity formation, that the more or less linear account of imperialism and foreign hegemony that involves Macondo's passage into Latin American modernity instantiates otherness as "constitutive Others," to use Said's term. Conversely the novel allows an opposite reading, as a self-seeking "otherness" transferred to the acts of reading and writing implicit in the character of Melquiades, whereby the reader discovers the novel's own Borgesian writing of itself. But these readings are not mutually exclusive: both codes are explicitly evident in forms of emplotment that continue to invoke conquest and colonialism, neo-colonial struggles, failed revolutionary struggles, cycles of default modernity, as well as the literary transgression of those apparent historical forces. Realist enclosures have failed to produce comprehensive readings of Latin American literature by ignoring the self-referential aspects of Latin America's astounding literary originality, as well as its capacity to deny simple longings for transcendental signifieds. But the celebration of literary subversion since the boom period may also require greater scrutiny.

How, in short, have the post-structuralist allegories of reading been deployed in the study of Latin American literature? As noted earlier, this has become an influential paradigm whose epistemological underpinnings seem to challenge, in the name of difference, all forms of discourse except itself. Its cul-de-sac logic

has not gone unnoticed. In *The Voice of the Masters*, Roberto González Echevarría reluctantly acknowledges its potential limitations:

Deconstructive criticism's indiscretion, like charity, begins at home, since in practice it self-deconstructs as it deconstructs. If in this it resembles fiction — which not only narrates, but tells us how — such a resemblance is not accidental. I am not unaware that such a position implicitly reintroduces an authoritative claim; it invents a supercritical consciousness that winds up the mechanism and leaves it ticking, apparently on its own. This may well be the blind spot of deconstructive criticism, but, as we shall see, it is one that it shares with postmodern literature. (4)

Yet a mere detection of this apparent aporia may be unhelpful, since it seems content to invest itself through it by conflating deconstructive criticism with postmodern literature, leaving both in somewhat ambiguous territory. Such a festive blind spot makes urgent the need for a critique of the post-structural/postmodern slippage, particularly as this paradigm has been domesticated by literary criticism. That distinction may well define the "postcolonial difference," for it is in that space where the inscription of "others" and the world of politics are generally kept from resurfacing beyond deconstructive de-codification. How, for example, do the postmodern/post-structural categorical critiques of language, culture and history — indeed all forms of cognition known heretofore — end up sealing themselves in a hermetic domain of privileged literary/grammatological discourse? What kind of intertextuality does this paradigm demand for the broad array of cultural and social texts that articulate historical unfolding?

A closer look at the Latin Americanist version of this forceful construct is perhaps best done through the outlines of Kadir's *Questing Fictions* and *The Other Writing*. At the root of Kadir's work is the notion of Latin American literature as the quintessence of non-representational discourse. Kadir posits that a continuous rhetorical force is situated in the semantic abyss created by the discovery of America, from which Latin America's texts have derived. "Latin America rediscovers [in the nineteenth century] simultaneously its "true" [Colonial] fictions and the rebellious impulse to forge, to fabricate a new historical-political "truth" of liberation and democracy, which time proves, and continues to prove, as yet another fiction of linguistic extravagance and rhetorical errancy" (*Questing Fictions* 35). "Latin America has been variously a pretext and a text that for five hundred years now has been generating a panoply of fictions about and from within itself. In this protracted cohabitation, fictionality (of fictions and of theories) and Latin America could be considered as functionally synonymous" (*The Other Writing* 40).

According to this outline, broadly deployed with mild variations by Latin Americanist deconstructionism, the errors committed in the process of colonizing (taming, nominalizing, inscribing) the New World in the name of pre-established notions (nomenclature, signifieds, representational schemes), become a sort of

"original transgression" from which Latin America's texts flow through the nineteenth century down to the present. The lack of correspondence between the linguistic and conceptual frameworks of the conquering and conquered worlds turns into a ruling principle of error, aided by neocolonial attempts to modernize which are also prone to repeated error. This combination is exemplified by the constant search for identity which has historically characterized Latin American textuality (history, literature, politics). Errancy, absence, lack of a center, confusion, search for identity, desire to name the abyss — all become signifiers that govern and inform Latin American literature and writing. Hence, Latin America becomes the best example of a contradictory search for and confirmation of an epistemological absence, since it cannot help but — to quote Kadir's celebration of this condition — "founder on the slippery ground of heterogeneity, desultoriness, raving polysemia and unmitigated dissemination" (*Questing Fictions* 91).

Spivak's notion of catachresis, that "claim for which no referent exists," re-emerges once again, as Latin America's failed search for modernity. But instead of defining a struggle against an imperial tradition that encumbers the critic's own contradictory attempts to simultaneously invest and resist it, Kadir's deconstruction extols the semiological virtuosity implicit in Latin America's errant history. Hence its canonical value for a postmodern poetics that thrives precisely because of its unmitigated capacity to deny all writing — particularly that which attempts to articulate social and economic claims — any pretense of pertinence, except as literary conceit. Deconstruction slips into a celebration of a discursive performance that mimics epistemic negation as literary prowess. The oppositional promise of Spivak's catachresis is lost, perhaps owing to its strictly virtual promise as "incessant re-coding of diversified fields of value" ("Poststructuralism" 228). A new Latin American postmodern aesthetics comes to life, and a history of more than five hundred years is periodized into one epoch bound by a single wayward epistemological force. Dirlik's critique also becomes directly applicable here as well, since Kadir's discursive historicity, while attempting to avoid the pitfalls of structural periodizations, slips into its own set of diachronic idealizations.

To ground Latin America's literature, or any literature, in a foundational event would seem wholly contradictory to the post-structuralist philosophy of language that informs deconstructive criticism. However, even when defined as sheer negation, as texts that can only mirror their rhetorical nature following a key moment of epistemic dispersal, this notion still betrays a sense of origination, if not a sort of essentialism. Such a philosophy of language fails to grasp how societies, even Third World societies, continuously re-semantize history according to material and spiritual needs. Its a blindness that arises precisely when Third World texts carry meaning for First World readers, partially because of their artistic merit, but also because these texts seem to evoke a social, cultural

and ethnic hybridity that speaks to internal changes within the Western lifeworld. Moreover, if the so-called errant quest that informs Latin American writing constitutes an intransitive grand signifier, a repository of stories never capable of affirming any particular signified but always bound to equivocate, then we begin to detect a theoretical framework whose explicit textual determinism becomes a questionable substitute for historical understanding. All of Latin American textuality is thus reduced to a new periodicity, a free-floating epistemic big bang, according to which all writing since the conquest — including the texts produced by critics themselves — are rediscovered as a "raving polysemia." A sort of deconstructive master narrative begins to reveal itself.

In his *Myth and Archive*, González Echevarría presents all of Latin America's textuality as an Archive governed by a Borgesian mastercode of possible fictions, "the major figure in modern Latin American fiction, or repository of stories and myths, one of which is the story about collecting those stories and myths" (144). As a "founding negativity," the Archive is said to contain, at its core, the "heterogeneity of cultures, languages, sources, beginnings," a totalizing figure of narrative recombinations meant to stand for Latin American history as such (180-84). Mirroring the reading/writing construction of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* set forth by Melquiades, myths of beginning are conflated with those of modern history into the archive of postmodern writing as literary celebration. Thus colonial America is at one with postmodern Latin America, and history, particularly that which tells the story of independence and revolutionary wars, is integrated in this repository of literariness through deconstruction and critical performance. Writing about Latin America becomes particularly unproblematic once this pedagogy of de-signification has been mastered. The nitty-gritty nature of history is absorbed into tropes that compress, or dismiss, social specificity. Neither the virtual contestation implicit in Spivak's postcolonial predicament, nor Dirlik's call for a historical account of ongoing structural inequalities between First and Third Worlds, applies any longer.

One should also suspect a construct that conflates all of the linguistic extravagance and rhetorical errancy employed in the conquest and colonization of America into a strictly Latin American foundational precept. Would it not also inform the history and literature of North America? One can assume, for example, either that the formation of the United States was not an errant fiction, or that it was; but in either case, U.S. history is not caught up in the celebration of a discursive abyss imposed by the discovery, and reinforced thereafter. Through expansion, slavery, wars of independence, wars of consolidation, and subsequent modernizations of various sorts, the United States has managed to invest other historical moments with defining textual power, whether fictional or not. Its history may also be read as a repository of texts which is eminently subject to deconstruction, but one whose will to power is unlikely to yield a literary reification of colonial times as the prelude to postmodernism.

Analogously, Western Europe must also have learned to re-semanticize its histories of foundational conquests, epic equivocations, and epistemological clashes on the way to consolidation as nation-states through modernity.

The broad critique of logocentric premises and teleological projections of modernity as "master narrative," are obviously applicable to the history and future of the United States, Canada, and Europe as well as of Latin America. But the way in which such premises are applied to First and Third World histories provides a telling contrast. Indeed, it could be said that the critique of modernity that guides postmodernism remains bound to epistemological refinement in the First World, but obtains political specificity in its approach to the Third World. The significance of the Third World's peripherally modern histories, particularly its narratives of revolutions and insurrections are placed under erasure for having failed to enter modernity, and for generating a sense of identity that is but a symptom of such failures. On the other hand, due to their more central position in the world of capitalism, the modern histories of Europe, the United States, or even Japan — along with their concomitant identitarian bearings — would be deconstructed differently. An interesting rehearsal of this selective critique is presented by Carlos Alonso in *The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony*:

Historical misfortune is not the outcome of Latin America's cultural errancy or self-ignorance, but the condition of its possibility. In this regard, Latin America's situation can be illuminated by comparing it to that of the United States. Born of modernity as well, the United States shared from the beginning the linguistic and historical difficulties attendant on the formulation of a cultural essence that have been identified in the case of Latin America. But in contrast to the latter, the ascendancy of the United States to a position of historical hegemony has managed to invest with authority the myths of cultural identity that were generated by that country's intelligentsia. (35-36)

Of course, "ascendancy to historical hegemony" does not necessarily endow cultural identity with truth, nor exempt it from deconstruction, particularly by critics engaged in reading the culture of regions in which U.S. hegemony weighs uncomfortably. Moreover, if a dialectic between power and myth constitutes the contrasting variable for a historical understanding of modernity, the experience of Latin America, as well as that of other postcolonial societies, requires much more than a negative assignation within a binary logic that totalizes it as "the failed other," of value only in an undifferentiated literary history. One assumes that deconstructive thinking would disavow a story of modernity informed by such neat divisions between winners and losers. A more recent example of this approach is found in Santiago Colás's attempts to read all of Latin American modernity (beginning with the independence wars and roughly ending with the post-boom literature in the 1970s) as a series of mistakes and delusions properly diagnosed only through Lacanian psychoanalysis and the advent of postmodern

literature, whose radical rhetoric and links with mass culture will somehow conjure a new liberationist history (*Postmodernity in Latin America*).

In his *Logics of Disintegration*, Peter Dews explains that post-structuralist thought has been received in the United States and parts of Europe predominantly through literary criticism and an avant-garde consciousness. A "sense of invading unknown territory, exposing oneself to the dangers of sudden, shocking encounters, and conquering an as yet unoccupied future, has been taken at face value, with little attempt being made to enquire into possible philosophical antecedents of the positions discussed or adopted, or into their relations to other contemporary philosophical currents." It is therefore highly ironic that, upon closer readings, the notion of Latin America as a model of non-representational discursivity can be said to function as yet one more theory of chronic underdevelopment. Latin America's modern past, its history, becomes useless except for the literary merits of texts that exemplify such failures through rhetorical transgression. Only a postmodern history will liberate Latin America, though such a future remains safely ensconced within a radical critique that is already free within its postmodern writing. The masses, or even the ruling classes of Latin America, will hopefully follow a set of precepts to be derived from literary transgression. Or not. By positing the literary as the matrix of all writing and hence all historical articulation, this form of deconstructionism substitutes the logic of signifieds it seeks to undermine with an equally privileged discourse accountable only to its own process of immanent inscription. In *La estratificación de los márgenes*, Nelly Richard points to how the logic of disintegration administers difference:

Postmodernism defends itself against the destabilizing threat of the "other" by integrating it back into a framework which absorbs all differences and contradictions. The center, though claiming to be in disintegration, still operates as a center: filing away any divergences into a system of codes whose meanings, both semantically and territorially, it continues to administer by exclusive right. (101; my translation)

IV.

One must acknowledge, these criticisms notwithstanding, that post-structuralist textuality successfully scrutinized the totalizing vocation inherent in earlier forms of literary analysis and shifted the critical ground from universal schemes, fixity, and representation to an appreciation for slippages, indeterminacy, and dialogism. Both the social sciences and the humanities were profoundly influenced by the new focus on the intransitive and self-reflexive aspects of writing. Yet much deconstructive practice in literary studies has reinscribed itself into the institutionally shielded domains New Criticism left behind. Sausurrean epistemology and academic high culture predominate in a practice of conflating all texts, social and artistic, under a generalized notion of discourse; or through an

undifferentiated affinity with a loosely defined notion of postmodernism. Post-structuralist criticism may have initially challenged traditional humanism, but its search for disjunction from the Western paradigm ultimately called for internal compression rather than semiotic dispersal.⁷ Its potential to engage in dialogue with other disciplines and with society at large has been considerably foreclosed by the narrow epistemological nature of its predominant discourse.

As Dirlik reminds us, the humanist legacy is challenged, if not threatened, by the West's own economic, migratory and mass cultural needs, and not just by theories that "resonate" with such contradictory transformations. An intertextuality held within the boundaries of a new aestheticism, even when invigorated by epistemological angst and a performative pedagogy of textual interplay, is not likely to meet such a challenge. Hence the current call for cultural studies, as well as postcolonial and feminist mediations that invest and critique the powerful tools of post-structuralism, a possibility whose promise may well require both structural as well as deconstructive interpellations.

As the postcolonialist turn of theoretical paradigms continues to unfold beyond the British intellectual tradition, Latin America's study of cultural transculturations, as well as Latin American feminist articulations of the First/Third World junctures, present avenues worthy of exploration. Transculturation, a corpus somewhat analogous to India's Subaltern Studies, forms an intertextual body of cultural production and critical reflection fully imbued with the intricate relationship between textuality and historical understanding, particularly as a register of the relationship between modernization and culture in Latin America (de la Campa, "Híbridos posmodernos"; Coronil, "Challenging Colonial").⁸ Unfortunately, transculturation has been often confused with socio-historical content analysis, or structuralist attempts to account for Latin American heterogeneity as a synthesis rather than an intricate web of dialogical relations with texts and other cultural forms.⁹

Key moments of this critique since the late 1920s are to be found in various well-known authors: for example, Juan Carlos Mariátegui, particularly his attempt to bridge Crocean aesthetics and Inca imagery (*Siete ensayos*); the prolific but yet often forgotten novelist José María Arguedas who fused the worlds of creative writing, linguistics and social scientific analysis — perhaps an early

manifestation of some current anthropological methods — into a unique Andean Latin Americanism, (*El Zorro de Arriba*, for example); Fernando Ortiz, with readings of the Caribbean's sugar and tobacco industries imbued with tropes from medieval literature (*Contrapunteo*); Angel Rama's unique and life-long endeavor to bring structuralism's critique of the humanistic tradition to Latin America's notions of literary modernism and identity, along with an early critique of modernity through Adorno's negative dialectic (*Transculturación narrativa*); and more recently Néstor García Canclini's *Culturas híbridas: para entrar y salir de la modernidad*. These would be just some of the decolonizing discourses known to Latin America during the twentieth century that are unavailable to strictly First World readings of much postmodern, and even post-colonial theorizing, as our earlier discussion of Spivak showed.

García Canclini brings theorists as diverse as François Lyotard, Jürgen Habermas, and Michel Foucault to his primary interest, which is the transformation of popular culture under the postmodern reconstitution of urban spaces. In this way, he attempts to draw postmodernity and the Other into a broadened transaction between the conceptual and the performative demands of contemporary cultural analysis and a wider post-structuralist critical scope. Deconstructive and master narrative critiques are brought into the realm of social science as well as literary analysis. Canclini's subjects include artisans, tourists, and various forms of reception analysis: book consumption, museum exhibitions, and televised talk-shows with Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz that turn elite writers into popular icons for Latin American middle-class consumers.

Such a different, and potentially postcolonial, construction of Latin America takes us beyond hermetic or lyrical theoreticism and into the living experience of multiple cultural modernizations. Enrique Dussel, one of Latin America's leading philosophers of Liberation Theology observes that

The "realization" of modernity no longer lies in the passage from its abstract potential to its "real," European, embodiment. It lies today, rather, in a process that will transcend modernity as such, a trans-modernity, in which both modernity and its negated alterity co-realize themselves in a process of mutual creative fertilization. Trans-modernity (as a project of political, economic, ecological, erotic, pedagogical, and religious liberation) is the co-realization of that which it is impossible for modernity to accomplish by itself; that is, of an incorporative solidarity, which I have called analectic, between center/periphery, man/woman, different races, different ethnic groups, different classes, civilization/nature, Western culture/Third World cultures, et cetera. (70)

Nonetheless, this practice must also be submitted to another crucial articulation, one to which transculturation has generally turned a deaf ear: a thorough re-reading of realist, modernist, and postmodern traditions of Latin American criticism that is informed by women's readings and writings. Indeed, it is not by accident that it is in the work of Jean Franco, Beatriz Sarlo, Doris Sommer,

7 Containment of potential semiotic dispersal by aesthetic post-structuralism is particularly rehearsed in Jonathan Culler's work (de la Campa, "Mainstreaming").

8 It is important to note, however, the newly formed Latin American Subaltern Studies Group whose collective "Founding Statement" is included in the *boundary 2* collection (Beverly and Oviedo 110-21).

9 Deconstructions of transculturation have provided considerable insights, even though they often rehearse a new aesthetic triumphalism meant to deny the historical any relevance except as rhetoric (Benítez-Rojo; Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition*; Moreiras, "Transculturación").

Josephine Ludmer, Gabriela Mora, and Sylvia Molloy, among others, that new theoretical modes are both employed and challenged. Lucía Guerra Cunningham, for instance, suggests an array of discursive strategies for the "Latin American woman as subject/object of writing" that includes "the aesthetic phenomena of silence and the void," "the diglossia of the feminine," and "mimicry with a transgressive value" (143). And Debra Castillo, in *Talking Back*, speaks of a "parallel construction" that assumes the difficulty of negotiating the Other from a First World institution: "I try to build an applicable feminist strategy based on an infrastructure of evolved and evolving Latin American theory, while taking from first-world feminist theory that which seems pertinent and complementary" (36). The importance of these voices, as Jean Franco declares, lies not in the discovery of feminine writing per se, nor in its inclusion in a consumer-bound academic pluralism, but in the way that they advance a critique of power relations and preceding discourses ("Apuntes" 42).

These voices also gather force from the very theories into which they introduce unsuspected contradictions, thus their value for contemporary approaches — postcolonial or other — to Latin American cultural and literary studies. Feminist claims on history derive from the pertinence of a here and now that includes material consequences for existing world orders. Through them, the immediacy of social criticism and the distance of literary history are compressed into a contemporary political tension that post-structural theories perhaps did not expect. Yes, the basis upon which referential claims could be made have been shaken, but such crucial insights can be invoked by voices pursuing quotidian discourses whose relevance will address ongoing needs for social transformation.¹⁰ Thus their challenge to both post-structuralism and postmodernism from within its own vast claims to historical understanding.

It is often observed that the boundaries between discourses, genres and historical periodizations have been blurred, along with strict disciplinary criteria for legitimizing critical competence. The very definition of a literary critic is no longer guarded by the traditional domain of literary sedimentation. But whether post-structuralist literary critics can be drawn to deconstruct social texts remains a question. It is often women and postcolonial voices who really test these borders seeking to apply deconstructed notions of history and literature to their daily lives. This in itself is a project that will likely lay its own claim to the past as not merely an archive of critical liminality and epistemic abyss but rather as a textual repository of antecedents with the potential to sustain hope and maybe even action. The claims of deconstruction are too vast and broad for there to be any ultimate refuge in a new aestheticism. Beatriz Sarlo's analysis of "electronic

aesthetics" in recent political texts such as the Gulf War and Peruvian presidential campaigns exemplify such an approach ("Aesthetics" 181). Christopher Norris's *Uncritical Theory*, *Postmodernism*, *Intellectuals and the Gulf War* also substantiates the need to test epistemological extrapolations within the sphere of the political.

More than a decade ago Fredric Jameson argued convincingly that we should look upon postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism. But since then global or hyper-capitalism may have given postmodern culture a more specific definition with the advent of neoliberal regimes, a shift that is now clearly felt in Latin America. This predicament, one that obviously awaits all postcolonial societies, brings a new set of challenges to critical theorists. In the words of Martin Hopenhayn, a Chilean sociologist,

How can the postmodern debate be incorporated in order to reactivate the cultural base of development, without it leading to the postmodernism functionally inherent in the project of political-cultural hegemony of neoliberalism? How do we creatively confront our crisis of paradigms and projects, without this confrontation submerging us in a twilight "pathos" where the only option is the administration of entropy, the uncritical acceptance of a status quo that is critical of itself? How do we re-interpret the challenges of planning, the role of the state, and the program, or programs, of modernization in light of this inevitable cultural earthquake announced by the postmodern trumpets? (109)

Today, in the Americas, one finds the most concrete example of a cultural earthquake in NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), as well as the Chiapas rebellion, possibly its "constitutive other." The Chiapas story may itself contain a complex pastiche of both premodern, modern and postmodern presuppositions. It comprises a number of indigenous cultures and ethnic groups who still communicate in non-European languages and cultivate oral traditions. It is also an area that was largely left behind by the Mexican revolution's drive for agrarian reforms. And it is now the center of attention for transnational investors whose sense of stability has been disturbed, as the Chase Bank memo that was leaked to the Internet in April of 1995 makes clear (Silverstein and Cockburn). Is it possible that masquerading rebels invoking Zapata constitute the only available deconstruction of neoliberal developmentalism (Taibo 25)?

Deciphering such a text will require a simultaneous glance at the North and the South and perhaps a more rigorous look at the political within postcolonial theories. This will obviously entail a challenging critique that must traverse the opposing discourses of celebratory dispersal and unburdened rationality — a possible postcolonial mode of deconstruction capable of inscribing new discourses to frame still needed alternative economic and political modernizations. In "Chiapas: La otra cara de la modernidad mexicana" ("Chiapas: the other face of Mexican modernity"), Rossana Reguillo writes that "Chiapas reconfigures

10 Stephen Slemon provides an interesting discussion of a dual strategy, a "reach for a positive (post-colonial) referentiality ... alongside a counter-discursive parodic energy — one which a post-modernist methodology would at least notice if not always specify" (*Past the Last Post* 7).

Mexican modernity in two meaningful ways: that which wasn't and that which might be" (9; my translation).

But then again, relating Chiapas to other Latin American "postmodern" texts, such as those of Borges, or Puig, or Vargas Llosa, will likely call for distinctions regarding the nature of literary and political discourses. Literary criticism flirts with disciplinary shifts, but humanistic ordering ultimately prevails. On the other hand, if an overarching sense of Latin American history as errancy is to be drawn from the voice of such writers, spelling out its relevance to the present must begin by exploring the recuperative work forgotten by such a reading. That, in the long run, may be the most important task for a postcolonial approach to Latin Americanism. Otherwise we are only left with an aporetic quirk, an all too evident, though perhaps comfortable, blind spot for Latin America.

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