



Institut International de Sociocritique — Montpellier

International Institute for Sociocriticism — France

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SOCIOCITICISM - SOCIOCRIQUE

1992 VOLUME 7 ISSUE 2

SISAC



0000-0000(1992)7:2

Ref:FLA

26119250

Rev. 14-170

ARGUMENTS ET DEBATS II

Sociocriticism



Institut International de Sociocritique — Montpellier

International Institute for Sociocriticism — France

Editor : *Edmond CROS*

Université Paul-Valéry
B.P. 5043
34032 Montpellier — Cédex
France

Annual Subscriptions (two volumes)

Individuals : \$ 25 FF 160,00

Institutions : \$ 50 FF 350,00

ISSN : 0985-5939

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Vol. VII, 2 (N° 14) 1992

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SOCIOCRITICISM Vol. VII, 2 (n° 14) 1991
«Arguments et Débats II»

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DOSSIER

ADORNO'S AESTHETIC CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY¹

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For Adorno, nothing could be less autonomous than a concept. Still less concept of autonomy. His thought is possessed of such a dynamic rigour and such a will to grasp relations rather than simply things in themselves that one could not abstractly isolate a single element in it. Yet one could think that Adorno's very writing actually lends itself to this : almost all his sentences are material for epigraphs, due to their aphoristic character and to their teeming paradoxes. But this would be to stop at the most trivial aspect of his philosophy. The fracturing brilliance of the Adornian discourse is the very site of thought. To investigate this writing is to investigate the mode of existence of thought. This is why, when one wants to understand what the concept of autonomy represents - it is one of the concepts to which Adorno returns ceaselessly, as if to test out its solidity or its elasticity - one must let oneself be carried by the text itself, discovering one by one the concepts which rise to the surface, and the relations between them, and in turn to feel out their elasticity or their solidity. Adorno's thought does not seek to impose itself as a system, but it is thought which is nonetheless systematic. The configuration of this type of reflection is complicated to render, for far being able to stop at definitions (even should they be of relations), such stasis should be avoided. This would only seem to be possible in the context of

«micro-readings», where one can follow the text very closely. So I shall simply take the first two pages of the *Aesthetic Theory*²: Adorno's main concepts will appear here, and that which interests me will be precisely their order of appearance. It has often been argued that Adorno is obscure and hermetic, playing with contradictions and heterogeneity. This is so, but we must bear in mind the rigorous logic which both supports and underlies this sybilline construction. Even if Adorno carefully avoids logical links (cause and effect), it would be false to infer a total absence of logic or of argumentation. What then would be the logic of the argument established in the first two pages? Why this particular conceptual strategy? And could one provide a certain depth of field by going over this argument against the backdrop of the *Aesthetic Theory* as a whole? These are the questions that will guide us.

The general structure of these two pages is very clearly marked. Whoever says argument, says thesis. The very first sentence expresses it in a seeming paradox:

Zur selbstverständlichkeit wurde, daß nichts, was die Kunst betrifft, mehr selbstverständlich ist, weder in ihr noch in ihrem Verhältnis zum Ganzen, nicht einmal ihr Existenzrecht. (p. 9).

(It has become evident that nothing, insofar as art is concerned, is evident any more, as much in itself as in its relation to the whole, not even its right to exist).

And it is this thesis which Adorno will try to prove in the text which follows, on the one hand in its relation to the whole (*in ihrem Verhältnis zum Ganzen*), and on the other in its relation to itself (*in ihr*). These two parts are developed symmetrically: they both open with a reference to the question of the possible, and end (for the first) or interrupt (for the second) with a reference to the concept of autonomy. The proposition which closes the argument in its own turn reverts implicitly to the articulation of the possible: art ought to turn against its own concept. How is this possible? It will be thanks to the ambivalence of the very form of the work itself that such a turning against itself can be understood, and Adorno concludes the passage thus:

So wenig ist sie auf die generelle Formel des Trostes zu bringen wie auf die von dessen Gegenteil. (p. 11)

(As little should it (the art) be brought back to a general formula of consolation as it should be taken to the opposite).

One can of course wonder how it is that this notion of consolation can be a response to the introductory thesis about art's loss of evidence. It seems that there is here a logical leap that cannot be justified. One must follow the tangled threads of the Adornian argument with great care in order to answer this question.

Let us then re-examine in detail the course of the argument. Adorno begins with a historical observation: with the avant-garde movements, art opened up an avenue of potential for itself; but just as quickly he adds: today that which appears to be expansion is in fact contraction, that which was promised happiness (*verhießene Glück*) has not brought happiness. Why has the infinity of potential brought on so paradoxical a reduction? Two reasons are given. First, when everything is possible, the very categories which have permitted this are open to question. Thereafter, moving from the infinity of potential to the concept of freedom, one can see that the absolute freedom in art sets itself up in radical opposition to the lack of freedom in the whole (*Unfreiheit im Ganzen*). This brings Adorno to conclude the first stage of his argument (art in its relation to the whole), as he indicates the uncertainty of art's place henceforth. Indeed, one is to imagine an ensemble subsumed within a larger ensemble, and yet of which, nonetheless, it would be the living contradiction: at the very least, this should give rise to uncertainty. There is here something of Russell's famous paradox concerning classes which might or might not be members of themselves.

Having shown, then, the problematic relation of art to society, Adorno does not however pass immediately to his second point (art in its relation to itself). It is between these two points that the concept of autonomy slips in. What is it doing there? Apparently it is re-enacting the paradoxical movement already sketched out by the concept of liberty: art achieved autonomy from its cultic function in the name of the idea of humanity, and yet society becomes less and less humane. Yet the concept of autonomy serves to affirm the acquisition of this liberty: even entrapped within its contradictions,

autonomy remains impossible to revoke. And parallel to this, the radical opposition to society is all the more justified in that it is not even possible to evoke any social function of art. The contradictory mechanisms of Adorno's thought do not, however, come to a halt there. That would leave us at still too reassuring a point. Just as the loss of the non-reflective character of artistic practice has not been compensated for by the opening of potential, autonomy has had a moment of blindness wherein its non-naïveté is nothing but a naïveté to the power of two.

*Aber ihre Autonomie beginnt, ein Moment von Blindheit hervorzu-
kehren. Es eignete der Kunst von je ; im Zeitalter ihrer Emanzipation
überschattet es jedes andere, trotz, wenn nicht wegen der Unnaïvetät,
der sie schon nach Hegelss Einsicht nicht mehr sich entziehen darf.
Jene verbindet sich mit Naïvetät zweiter Potenz, der Ungewißheit
über das ästhetische Wozu (p. 9-10)*

*(But its autonomy begins to manifest a moment of blindness. Art has
always suffered from this ; it eclipses all the others during the epoch of
its emancipation, in spite of, if not by reason of, the non-naïveté
which, according to the Hegelian insight, it can no longer conceal from
itself. This non-naïveté is linked to a naïveté to the power of two, the
uncertainty as to the aesthetic «why».)*

The parallel with the uncertainty occasioned by the avant-garde movements can now be seen, but those theses which Adorno now advances do not appear to be the clearest nor the most certain. Why should art always go through a moment of blindness? What kind of blindness is this? How is this naïveté to the power of two linked to the finality of art? It cannot be comprehended, actually, until the end of the second part of the argument, at the moment when autonomy makes its reappearance. This permits Adorno to reaffirm in the meantime the logical uncertainty of the aesthetic «why». The German term is *wozu* - and not *warum* - in other words, «why» in the sense of «to what end». This reference to the finality of art should not be forgotten, since it falls within the framework of this claim to autonomy, which Adorno himself often defines in Kantian terms as «finality without end».

The second movement of the argument reintroduces the question of the possible by linking it with that which precedes it : the *uncertainty* as to the

very possibility of art appears when art turns away from the presuppositions which rendered it possible. Adorno thus refines and focuses his first historical observations on the opening of potential - or rather, he re-examines on a logical level that which he has sketched out only at a historical level to date. This allows him to enter directly into the argument of the second point where he will attack the internal *logic* of the work of art. This time, if art sets itself up in opposition to the empirical world, it is on the condition that the works themselves constitute an *other* world having its own essence. At the same time - and we are now familiar with this systematic gesture of contradiction -, works of art exist only in the empirical world and, moreover, they affirm it : an affirmation in which Adorno finds nothing positive³. The ambivalence of art thus defined, it is above all a question of seeing its irreconcilable character : the affirmation does art a disservice by positing a «conciliatory reflection» (*versöhnenden Abglanz*) which could spread from art to reality. The bourgeois conception of art as a «consoling dominical manifestation» (*trotspendenden Sonntagsveranstaltungen*) is evidence of this. Of course art has broken with the sorcery of the redemptive truth which theology offered it, but this sorcery is paradoxically reinforced in that secularized art unceasingly promises (and without hope) the possibility of a world other than the sinister empirical world. It is with regard to this point that the concept of autonomy necessarily resurfaces, for it is indeed through it that art seeks to liberate itself from the sorcery of redemption, and it is at the same time through it that art makes such a promise. That art should dare to set itself up as an other totality (a monad), that it should claim to transfer this image onto the empirical world when it is precisely this world which produces art, such is the crippling contradiction of art in its autonomous epoch. The reference to a «naïveté to the power of two» now becomes more comprehensible : art has refused the naïveté of redemptive faith, but in order to set up a new faith - also naïve - in a «secular redemption». The emancipation of the cultic function (which was naïveté to the first degree) turns against itself since its own logic causes it to give to the enchantment of the potential all its force and to reflect back onto the empirical world an image which it is not its own : such is the moment when art blinds itself. And the naïveté then shakes the foundations of art's autonomy. Faced with such an aporetic situation, we no longer know what could still stand as the finality of art.

After this reappearance - which will enlighten our progress, and yet which nonetheless retains an enigmatic aspect - of the ambivalent concept of autonomy, Adorno concludes his second point simply at the logical level. The negation of the empirical is an immanent law of the concept of art, and it is indeed this negation which sanctions its predominance. Nevertheless the affirmation of the empirical world is inevitable. Adorno upholds the necessity of this manifest aporia :

Sie <die Kunst> muß gegen das sich wenden, was ihren eigenen Begriff ausmacht, und wird dadurch ungewiß bis in die innerste Fiber hinein (p.10)

(Art ought to turn against that which constitutes its own concept, and become from there uncertain to its innermost fibres).

Lenhardt's translation adds some elements and loses others : «True art challenges its own essence, thereby heightening the sense of uncertainty that dwells in the artist». It can be sometimes a good idea to start off from a bad translation ; one can see the important points so much more clearly. First of all, the verb «challenge» does not convey the movement of turning back upon itself. And then the obligation (*muß*) is rendered only as a simple statement in the present tense (art challenges). Moreover, we do not have «true art» but only «art» ; there is no error here - for Adorno really is speaking of authentic art -, simply a greater degree of precision : which the text could do without. In any case, it would have been better to conserve the idea of «concept» (*Begriff*) rather than to introduce that of «essence» (*Wesen*), for the reference to logic would come out more clearly. Finally, in the second part of the sentence, Lenhardt alters the meaning radically when he places the uncertainty, not in the art itself, as the original distinctly says, but in the artist. That leads to psychologizing a process which, on the contrary, stems from logic. The almost categorical imperative that Adorno allocates to art cannot be grasped except in this subtle dialectic where history allies itself with logic. That which in the beginning was given in the form of event, circumscribed and dated (1910) : «the process unleashed at this moment has begun to engulf the categories in whose names it had begun» (... *hat der damals ausgelöste Prozeß die kategorien angefressen, in deren Namen er begonnen wurde*), is now expressed in the form of a logical necessity : art ought to turn

against its own concept. There again the uncertainty that such a situation provokes seems evident.

If the threads of the argument seem quite tangled, this is not due to a lack of rigour in the reasoning, but to the complexity and the permanent contradiction of the concepts analysed. The final thesis of this passage ought to be able to take in the whole while at the same time conserving this complexity. Firstly in interrogating itself as to the very possibility of such a turning upon itself of such a radical loss of evidence. Adorno rejects, of course, the solution offered by a simple abstract negation : logic is not abstraction. If we fall thus into a logic of aporia, it is because art, historically (*die Zeiten hindurch*, literally : through the ages), has quite as much turned against Being as it has come to the aid of Being in affording a form (*Formung*) to its elements. The historical process thus pushes to the limit art's aporetic immanent logic. But can we for that matter understand the linking of art's loss of evidence to the last proposition : «As little should it be brought back to a general formula of consolation as it should be taken to the opposite» ? Certainly, once the necessity for the detour via the concept of autonomy becomes evident. It is this concept which permits the thematisation of the question of the promise in all its contradictions. The promise of happiness appeared at the same time as the historical failure of the avant-gardes. It imposes itself from that moment on as the aporetic figure *par excellence* in the logic of autonomous art. Now the notion of promise is directly linked to that of consolation. The redemption that theology offered was a consolation. The modern redemption of art, this *other* which it ceaselessly sets up in opposition to the empirical world, can also operate as a consolation. This very term appears just before the concept of autonomy intervenes again, at the moment when Adorno uncovers art's wound : the bourgeois clichés can classify art with «consoling dominal manifestations» (*unter die trospendenden Sonntagsveranstaltungen einreihen*). In the following sentence, the aporia clearly appears : in breaking with theology, with the absolute claim or ambition (*Anspruch*) to offer a redemptive truth, art condemns itself to make Being a promise (*Zuspruch*) which is nevertheless without hope of fulfillment. Lenhardt translates *trospendenden* and *Zuspruch* indiscriminately as «solace» : he has grasped the tight bond that links these terms ; however, at the same time, he has effaced entirely the dimension proper to the promise - and the fact that it does not offer consolation. If art is, in the final accounting,

neither a formula of consolation nor the contrary, it is indeed its ambivalent promissory character which forces it into such an aporia. And it is this very dimension which authorizes art's loss of evidence. We can see how the two theses are linked in the end. In fact, it is the same idea which is reworked in the different configurations and conceptualizations. We have here less a purely causal logic than an effort to reiterate within diverse universes of discourse the same statement or the same necessity.

Further on I will return to this peculiar logic of the Adornian argumentation. Beforehand, I would like to take up again, from this passage and from the rest of the *Aesthetic Theory*, two points which came up in the explication and which are particularly deserving of interest: finality on the one hand, and sublimity on the other.

The reference to the possible, as we have seen, crops up at the beginning of the two moments of the argument and, implicitly, of the conclusion. It is an intervention which is of two different orders: the possible as potential (in this case an infinite potentiality), and as existence (or legitimacy: the two are intertwined here). It is important to distinguish between these two orders and put them together for they introduce the question of the promise precisely as «potential of existence». But the mention of the possible also leads to this double paradox:

1. the infinity of possibles restricts existence;

2. it is possible for art to ruin its possibilities although that would raise doubts as to its own possibility of existing.

The conclusion shows that it is possible only because the *other* is the very site of art. In other words, it is because the impossible is always possible for art that it turns against itself. Adorno would even say that «Die Kunstwerke müssen auftreten, als wäre das Unmögliche ihnen möglich» (p. 253) (works of art ought to give the impression that the impossible is possible for them); and shortly before this he says: «Daß aber die Kunstwerke da sind, deutet darauf, daß das Nichtseiende sein könnte. Die Wirklichkeit der Kunstwerke zeugt für die Möglichkeit des Möglichen» (p. 200) (But the fact that the works of art are these shows that non-Being could be. The reality of works of art bears witness to the possibility of the possible). As we can see the ambiguity between the possible and the impossible constitutes the very matter of art for Adorno. Now this ambiguity is indeed that which we have

already seen, that of the promise. We can then understand why the theme of the possible introduces these arguments each time: it refers back simultaneously both to the curtailed opposition aesthetic world/empirical world, and to the problem of the promise which renders the principle of autonomy ambivalent.

Let us take up again this problem of the promise. It constitutes the reef upon which autonomy founders in that it is a question of a promise of happiness which cannot be fulfilled, although we cannot prevent ourselves from making it. We enter here into relation with an impossible future. We must now look at the conceptual model upon which this promise is based. In fact it is thematized from the first mention of the infinity of the possibles: in the adventure of the avant-gardes, there certainly was a promise of happiness, and a promise which was broken. We see here again all the interplay between the historical and the logical references: logically the promise has to be made and not to be able to be kept, but it has already been made and already been broken. In other words, the promise of happiness is thought as a memory, and a nostalgic memory at that. It really is the past which obliterates the future. Adorno takes up again in the following quotation:

Die ästhetische Erfahrung ist die von etwas, was der Geist weder von der Welt noch von sich selbst schon hätte, Möglichkeit, verheißen von ihrer Unmöglichkeit. Kunst ist das Versprechen des Glücks, das gebrochen wird. (pp. 204-205)

(The aesthetic experience is that of something which the spirit obtains neither from the world, nor from itself, the possibility promised by its impossibility. Art is the promise of a happiness which is broken.)

The promise of happiness is logically impossible to keep, but historically it has been seen not to have been kept. The future obliterates the past just as much then. All the more in that the passive in German, because of the use of *-werden*, retains a future aspect, and that it could just as well be the promise as the happiness which is thus broken (both are neuter). The dialectic of the possible and of the impossible cannot be plainly understood unless one follows its materialization by the promise. The same movement is re-enacted in the relation between the historical and the logical; it is never a question of revoking one to the profit of the other, but of grasping their necessary conjunction and disjunction. The promise permits Adorno to avoid privilege-

ging either the past (which is the tendency of every historical reading) or the future (which is the tendency of every emancipatory reading), while at the same time avoiding giving precedence to a logical present (still less an ontological one) which could not express alterity other than as a variation or an alteration of the same.. This is why he wants to think history, utopia and logic at the same time as three possible discursive articulations, three temporal modes whose interrelations must be grasped, three readings. The concept of autonomy acquires its weight by leaning on this dialectic of the promise. It is aporetic, but its aporia is one Adorno wishes to be productive.

If we can see how this aporia functions, we must now try to understand why Adorno finds himself caught in it. The aporia in which autonomy is conceived rests on a paradox, articulated for the first time by Kant, and taken up repeatedly by Adorno in the *Aesthetic Theory*. It is finality without end - and it is here that we rediscover the *wozu* of the first page. That which is refused in the empirical world is precisely the realm of «ends», whether the interest be in enjoyment or in consumption. Now, in Kant, the paradox does not lead to an aporia insofar as the aesthetic judgment prepares and somehow anticipates the teleological judgment which validates the coming of the moral law. But although Adorno maintains the legitimacy of aesthetic judgment as a finality without end, he no longer wants to allow the access to the rational Idea of liberty that was presented by the moral law. Which means that the only way to validate oneself is to turn back upon oneself, to reflect oneself and to institute as one's concept the act of ruining one's own concept. In so doing Adorno returns to the romantic project, but without a philosophy of the infinite like Schlegel. He understands quite well that the infinite of possibles has not been the realization of the promised happiness. And neither does he hold a philosophy of radical finitude like Kant. What he is trying to do, is to keep, to grasp the moment of the aporia, to let it be, to somehow give it the chance to be said and to be shown. But in what language is it possible to say such an aporia? Only the language of the sublime can save the aporia.

To pursue the parallel with Kant, the sublime is given as the representation of the unrepresentable (in this case the rational Idea). It is the same movement that one finds in Adorno. He will speak of «der Realisierung eines Unrealisierbaren» (the realisation of an unrealisable) or of «der Verein-

barung des Unverienbaren» (the conciliation of the inconciliabile) (p. 146). And in an even clearer manner :

In der verwalteten Welt ist die Adäquate Gestalt, in der Kunstwerke aufgenommen werden, die der Kommunikation des Unkommunizierbaren, die Durchbrechung des veredinglichten Bewußtseins. Werke, in denen die ästhetische Gestalt, unterm Druck des Wahrheitsgehalts, sich transzendiert, besetzen die Stelle, welche einst der Begriff des Erhabenen meinte (p. 292).

(In the administered world, the adequate form in which the works of art are received is that of the communication of the incommunicable, the breach in the reified consciousness. The works in which the aesthetic form, under the pressure of the content of truth, transcends itself, occupy the place which used to be signified by the concept of the sublime.)

But again, if the sublime in Kant allows the passage, via the impossibility for the imagination to represent the unformed to itself, to the legitimation of the Idea of freedom, in Adorno then such a wayout should be refused. Although it would be a little difficult to say precisely what the «incommunicable» or the «unrealisable» is for Adorno, there can be no question of a reference to a supra-sensible. It is rather to the immanent and conflictual structures of society that we must direct our thoughts. This is to say that reconciliation - the agreement rediscovered in the rational Idea of Kant -, has no place in Adorno's thought. The sublime certainly offers no consolation, but it retains a consolatory potential in that it offers a place for saying the aporia⁴, as is clearly be evident in the following excerpt :

Die Aszendenz des Erhabenen ist eins mit der Nötigung der Kunst, die tragenden Widersprüche nicht zu überspielen, sondern sie in sich auszukämpfen ; Versöhnung ist ihnen nicht das Resultat des Konflikts ; einzig noch, daß er Sprache findet (p. 294).

(The ascendance of the sublime is one with the necessity for art not to surpass the contradictions upon which it rests, but to fight them in itself to the end ; reconciliation is not for them the result of the conflict, but only the fact that the latter finds a language).

The problem of the promise and of autonomy is more comprehensible within this framework : autonomy promises a Whole, a moral finality (freedom, humanity), but, for Adorno, it does not have the transcendental means to assume it, and it is therefore ceaselessly turned back to the empirical, - the work of art itself not being thought except in relation to empirical society ; of which it is at one and the same time the happy negation and the unhappy recapture.

Moreover, that which is said in the Enlightenment on the sublime tends to efface the discursive dimension⁵. But it is precisely this dimension, rather than that of agreement or reconciliation which is important to Adorno. One would have difficulty finding in his work an explicit reflection on language, and still less on the autonomy of language - unlike Heidegger or Wittgenstein. Adorno seems to escape this virus rampant in contemporary philosophy, absorbed as it is in linguistic issues. In actual fact he does take up this question of language, but from a different viewpoint : we have just witnessed his attempt to relocate the problematic of the sublime within a different dynamic, that of discourse. Let us also bear in mind his way of thinking autonomy when he evokes the claim to redemptive truth, in opposition to which autonomy is born, and when he evokes the promise of another redemption to which this same autonomy is condemned. In each case it is a reference to *sprechen*. And similarly, the final proposition on the impossibility of a formula (*Formel*) of consolation or its inverse is clearly situated in the discursive order. If the promise is this site wherein the historical and the logical can sustain simultaneously their own oppositions, it is because the promise does not depend on a single temporal mode (past or future), but is located within the time frame of its fulfilment. The promise can exist, even though of course it would be always already betrayed. It is clearly distinct from its historical possibilities of realization, for it always consists of a discursive operation. This whole conceptual configuration is based upon a theory of speech acts, a pragmatics. Art in the empirical world affords a language for the irreconcilable. There is the reason for the autonomy necessary to it. There, too, is the reason for its incessant and dynamic contradiction of the world and of itself. I am afraid I must quote at some length :

Die Dynamik, die jedes Kunstwerk in sich verschließt, ist sein Sprechendes. Eine der Paradoxien der Werke ist, daß sie, dynamisch in

sich, überhaupt fixiert sind, während sie nur durch Fixierung zu Kunstwerken objektiviert werden. Wie sie denn, je instanter man sie betrachtet, um so paradoxer werden : jedes Kunstwerk ist ein System von Unvereinbarkeit. Ihr Werden selbst vermöchte ohne Fixierung nicht sich darzustellen ; Improvisationen pflegen bloß aneinanderzureihen, treten gleichsam auf der Stelle. Wortschrift und Notenschrift, einmal von außen gesehen, befremden durch die Paradoxie eines Daseienden, das seinem Sinn nach Werden ist. Die mimetischen Impulse, die das Kunstwerk bewegen, in ihm sich integrieren und es wieder desintegrieren, sind hinfällig sprachloser Ausdruck. Sprache werden sie durch ihre Objektivation als Kunst. Rettung von Natur, begehrt sie auf gegen deren Vergänglichkeit. Sprachähnlich wird das Kunstwerk im Werden der Verbindung seiner Elemente, eine Syntax ohne Worte noch in sprachlichen Gebilden. Was diese sagen, ist nicht, was ihre Worte sagen. In der intentionlosen Sprache erben die mimetischen Impulse an das Ganze sich fort, welches sie synthetisiert. (p.274)

(The dynamic enclosed within each work of art is that which speaks through the latter. One of the paradoxes of works of art is that, dynamic in themselves, they are nonetheless fixed, static, although it is by their fixing that they become exteriorized. All the same, the more insistently one looks at them, the more paradoxical they become : every work is a system of unreconcilability. Their becoming itself could not represent itself without being fixed ; improvisations simply have the habit of ranging themselves one against another, of running on the spot, so to speak. The writing of words and the writing of notes, seen from the outside, seem strange through the paradox of a being there, which, according to its sense, is becoming. The mimetic impulses which set the work of art in motion integrate themselves and again disintegrate it ; they are an expression provisionally without speech. They become speech through their objectivation as art. The Salvation of nature, objectivation is a protest against so ephemeral a character. As speech, so becomes the work of art in the becoming of the liaison of its elements, a syntax without words even in the products of speech. That which these say is not that which their words say. In speech without intentions, the mimetic impulses transmit themselves to the totality which synthesizes them.

This quotation shows us how peculiar is, in Adorno's thought, the term *Sprache* or any of its numerous derivatives. Adorno sees language above all as springing not from an epistemology, a logic or an ontology, but rather from a theory of action. His whole conception of art is marked by this. It is why, for example, the question of art's engagement would be a non-question for him: art has not to act on society, it is already the perfect site for the act - but the act of discourse. Art moreover represents this space from which one can reflect (on) the social dynamic.

We conceive of a language which has a double movement: expression without speech, syntax without words, in short, movement, becoming (itself double since it permits integration as much as its contrary); speech is only born with the fixing which synthesizes and holds. The first instance makes the work; the second names it.

Art is, in effect, the moment when the work is objectivized; indeed, it is an «institution». Not exactly in Burger's sense, rather in the sense of a performative. We must look at Adorno's image of it: he sets improvisation (which is *par excellence* dynamic) up in opposition to writing (which is *par excellence* fixed), and, contrary to what we might think, not to the profit of the former, but to the profit of latter. Improvisation is a deceptive movement: it runs on the spot, so to speak. Writing is a fixing, its sense is that of becoming. Autonomy is here that of the written as opposed to the oral, montage as opposed to collage. Here we find one of the reasons justifying Adorno's opposition to jazz and his support of the music of composers such as Schönberg. The virtue of the written is dependent on the fact that autonomy is easier for it than it is for the oral. The latter does not seem to possess this instant of distance, of reflection when the name could appear. The oral cannot totalize, all it can do is range side by side, in a simple temporal succession, always in the same place, its series of interventions. The written upsets the conception of time: one can read from back to front, one can extract, abstract, arrange, displace. We have seen how important it is to Adorno to think time other than as linear succession of a past towards a future. The written is for him the paradigm of just such a conceptualization.

If there is a language for saying aporia, it could only be that of the written. It alone contains within it a system of contradictions adequate to

express aesthetic paradoxes. In its very fixity, says Adorno, there is its becoming: this is undoubtedly so, but a reflection on this becoming - in other words, a theory of reading - is sadly missing from the theory. This problem coincides with and confirms another: if the tensions between the historical and the logical, between past, present and future, between theory and praxis can find in the aesthetic their potential fulfilment to the point where this rebounds onto the discourse of the aesthetic, how can we conceive of art's relation to its own theory under such circumstances? If the aesthetic should be this privileged place where the tensions between different modes of discourse can be thought, what of the aesthetic (and of philosophy itself) as discourse, or even as reading? And finally, a third problem, the privilege accorded to the written generates obvious constraints: the oral is just as capable of articulating contradictory traits simultaneously while the written is fated to come back ceaselessly upon that which it has just stated in order to mark its limits and its aporias. In fact, the written contains within it in advance this paradox which seems necessary to Adorno: that its dynamic character should nonetheless be fixity, and the fixity, objectivation. Exactly like aesthetic theory, everything functions already according to the same principles as the art of which it speaks; the written already plays out the same figures as the works of art of which it is the theory.

Reification horrifies Adorno, as much in thought as in social life. This is why his own conceptual logic is dynamic to the highest degree. Even the necessary «immobilization» is marked by tension and activity, testing this system of paradoxes (the word recurs time and time again). Although the work of art is a «system of unreconcilabilities», the theory of art is brought into being by the blows from its aporias. There is here a structural exchange whose coin is contradiction. We are to understand that this is permitted him because he remains within the register of binary oppositions: affirmation\negation, form\content, subject\object, form\expression, interior\exterior, etc. Adorno does not call into question fundamentally all the classic categories (as, for example, Heidegger would do), but he attempts to dynamise them, to mediate them: the negative would have a positive side, and the positive would have a touch of the negative:

Die Vermittlung des Ausdrucks von Kunstwerken durch ihre Vergeistigung, (...) impliziert Kritik an jenem plumpen Dualismus von Form

und Ausdruck (...). Nicht daß jene Dichotomie jeglichen Grundes entriete. (...) Indessen sind die beiden Momente innig durch einander vermittelt. (p. 173-174)

(The mediation of the expression of works of art by their spiritualization (...) implies criticism of this gross dualism between the form and the expression (...). Not that this dichotomy should be denuded of all foundation (...). However, the two moments are, the one as much as the other, intimately mediated).

It is a question of maintaining the moment of contradiction by rendering the categories more supple - more porous, one could almost say.

Yet this conceptual dynamic is invested in the work of art itself to such an extent that the logic of the theoretical thought reveals itself to be identical to that which is at work in art. I shall take an example which deals with our introductory topics :

Der Glanz, den heute die alle Affirmation tabuierenden Kunstwerke ausstrahlen, ist die Erscheinung des affirmativen ineffablen, des Aufgangs eines Nichtseienden, als ob es doch wäre. Sein Anspruch zu sein erlischt im ästhetischen Schein, was nicht ist, wird jedoch dadurch, daß es erscheint, versprochen. Die Konstellation von Seien-dem und Nicht-Seiendem ist die utopische Figur von Kunst. Während sie zur absoluten Negativität gedrängt wird, ist sie kraft eben jener Negativität kein absolut Negatives. (p.347)

(The fracturing brilliance which emanates today from the works of art which make all affirmation taboo is the appearance of the ineffable affirmative, of the rise of a non-being as if it were, all the same. Its claim to be effaced, in aesthetic appearance, that which is not, but which becomes by the fact that it appears as promise ; the constellation of being and non-being is the utopic figure of art. While it is reduced to absolute negativity, it is not, by virtue of this very negativity, absolutely negative.)

Thus will the relation between society and art be thought : with their form, the aporia and the antinomies of the work of art will respond to the aporias and the antinomies of the whole empirical world. But Adorno's discursive

logic has brought him to radicalise the mediation of opposites and has made him invest them in art itself. And, returning to the initial thesis, precisely through this mediation, it is easy to understand how the self-evident character of art could be lost. The problem is that we can no longer differentiate between the mediation of art and that of the aesthetic theory of Adorno himself. Adorno recognizes the discursive value of the aesthetic operation very well, and it is his intention to avoid blocking its theoretical resources with a historical or a logical fiat. On the contrary, he tries to show the aesthetic to be the privileged site of the conflictual relations between history and logic. He sees the pragmatic stake in the thought ; the entire life of his thought depends upon it. If Lenhardt's translation is so bad, it is due (in part) to the fact that he systematically adds conjunctions, relative pronouns and relations of causality that are simply not in the text. Adorno's prose has been cut with a knife (though, to be sure, a knife without blade or handle). It is, in the end, a sequence of aphorisms, of statements, of paradoxical plays. The hypothesis advanced by one sentence is contradicted by the following one (yet which does not cancel the first - still less surpass it, in the sense of an *aufheben*). The analysis of the first two pages will have proved, I hope, that this is not a block to argumentative rigour. Here we have an argument whose property is to turn back upon itself. The spatial dimension of this movement extends from art to its theory and from the aesthetic to its object. The activity of this thought depends for its existence solely on its capacity to be double. This is how Adorno radicalizes the face to face opposition philosophically institutionalized in the 18th century, between art and the aesthetic (as between subject and object). This also explains how it is that he does not succeed in ridding himself of this philosophic usage, even if he does push to the limit (to a logic of aporia) the contradictions. Whatever else he might do, Adorno remains within the theoretical paradigm of representation, even if he does seek to critique it. This is why we find him returning to the topic of the sublime, precisely because it permits him to thematise the unrepresentable. Now, this opposition between the representable and the unrepresentable is never anything but the dialectization of a theory of representation which has already experienced its moment of contradiction. The concept of autonomy is the instance *par excellence* of this.

A logic of hiatus, with the aesthetic theory, Adornian thought locates itself in a privileged site of philosophical reflection. Art authorizes this turning back of the discourse upon itself in that it permits the re-examination

of the relation between the logical and the historical at another level. Hegel had already tried to reconcile the two discourses : logic «realized» itself in the figures of history. Adorno no longer proposes to reconcile. He intends simply to indicate the points where philosophical reflection is confronted with its own discursive limits. This is why that which is at stake in the aesthetic theory must be conceived of in terms of a pragmatics. Adorno does not really attempt to go beyond metaphysics, but rather stages a meticulous confrontation of metaphysical concepts with their systematic dialectization - beginning with the concept of autonomy. Here is perhaps the reason for a certain blindness with regard to the problem of reading : in articulating his reflection on a dialectical practice of traditional philosophy, Adorno cannot at the same time reflect on his reading except under the sign of activation. He sees perfectly well that the aesthetic is this place where philosophy can think its discursive modalities of thought - this is why he comes back to it again and again - but he can only do so in the form of face-to-face confrontations (quite Hegelian) between philosophy and art where art is already fixed in the concepts of philosophy (on condition that it activates them), and philosophy is fixed in the activity of art (on condition that it reflects it). Such is the measure of the philosophical style of Adorno himself : simultaneously aesthetic - but a dense, firm aesthetic, closer to Pascal's Jansenism than to the errant finesse of someone such as Montaigne - and endowed with a logician's rigour.

It is a style which obeys its own laws, at the price of appearing neither sufficiently philosophic nor sufficiently artistic, nor sufficiently critical of metaphysics, nor sufficiently close to all the artistic movements. But is it not here - in the act of obeying one's own self-imposed laws - that that which is called «auto-nomy» lies ? Once again, theory does not emulate art.

In his attempt to find another discursive relation between the logical and the historical, Adorno yet had the means to untie the knot of the aporia in the autonomy of art. We have seen that the paradox lies in the fact that a space (art) had to be thought as a part and yet a contradiction of the whole (the empirical reality, society). The representation is purely spatial here. Now if time becomes the new criterion of this relation, art can be conceived of as a part, sometimes synchronized and sometimes desynchronized, in relation to the whole. Autonomy is therefore to be situated within the old value of

nomos (order, cosmic arrangement), which is to say as rhythm, as harmony (*armonia* signifying also simply order of the universe). Autonomy would be the recognition that art should go at its own speed, finding its own rhythm. Henceforth there is to be neither impasse nor aporia ; art moves onto the auto-routes of social reality, where we know the speed limit to be drastically reduced.

NOTES

1. This text was primarily written in French, without the wonderful help of Miss Fiona Greenwood it would never have sounded as English as it does. I want to thank her very much.
2. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften, Band 7 : Ästhetische Theorie*, Frankfurt : Suhrkamp, 1970 (pp. 9-11), which is comprised under the title «Selbstverständlichkeit von Kunst verloren» (The Lost Evidence of Art). An English translation does exist ; it was made by C. Lenhardt and published by Routledge & Kegan Paul in 1984, but it is totally unusable. I shall therefore give my own translation, following as literally as possible the German text.
3. If the autonomy acquired from the cultic function of art was a reworking of Benjamin's conception of the loss of aura, the affirmative character of art originates from Marcuse's 1937 article. But these borrowings are of little import ; for my purposes, it is sufficient to show to what extent they form an integral part of Adorno's own argumentation.
4. It would be interesting to compare with this quotation Lyotard's idea in *Le Différend*, where we have the same situation : it is not a question of resolving a litigation, but of finding a language to say the differend.
5. It is perhaps much less true for Kant. A close reading of the analysis of the sublime in the third *Critique* would reveal precisely those elements which inaugurate a reflection on discourse.

POSTMODERNISM IN LATIN AMERICA : SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR CULTURAL POLITICS IN THE 90s¹

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« Can one speak of postmodernism in Latin America? », asks George Yúdice in one of the more intelligent and wide-ranging discussions of this issue.² The very question makes one think of that condition of colonial or neocolonial dependency in which goods which have become shopworn or out of fashion in the metropolis are, like the marvels of the gypsies in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (or the Baroque), exported to the periphery where they enjoy a profitable second life. For after all the articles, books, conferences and media-hype, after Lyotard and Habermas, Jameson and Spivak, Jean Baudrillard and Pee Wee Herman, after a decade of Philip Johnson buildings and Philip Glass music, of Soho-style black clothing and « new social movements » a la Mouffe and Laclau, surely the concept of postmodernism has itself begun to be devoured by habitualization, has lost the power of aesthetic *ostranenie* which recommended it to our attention in the first place. Yet it is precisely at this point that it has come in the last three or four years to the top of the agenda of Latin American literary and cultural criticism.³

The objections to the use of the concept in a Latin American context are well known. Clearly there is a problem in speaking about postmodernism in relation to social formations which in some senses have not gone through the stage of modernity yet (or, perhaps more to the point, display an « uneven modernity »). To compound the problem, *modernismo* and *postmodernismo*

designate in Latin American Spanish specific early 20th century literary movements which have no direct correspondence to what is understood as modernism and postmodernism in English (the not quite exact Spanish equivalent of modernism is of course *vanguardia*, not *modernismo*). On these grounds, Nelson Osorio, for one, has argued that postmodernism, like liberalism, is yet another imported *grand récit* that does not fit a Latin American reality which needs to produce its own forms of cultural periodization (and he has been echoed in this claim, on the other side of the political spectrum, by Octavio Paz).⁴ Clearly also, as in the familiar association of the baroque with the Counter Reformation, there is a coincidence between the appearance of postmodernism and the global hegemony of the New Right after 1979, and between cultural phenomena identified as postmodernist—US architecture, media, popular music and fashion, for example—and the present sensibility and strategies of transnational capitalism, a coincidence which gives some credence to the idea that postmodernism may be a new form of cultural imperialism (Andreas Huyssen suggests the image of postmodernism as the « American International »). There is the related danger that—as in the case of Baudrillard's book on the United States—the production of a postmodernist « sublime » in relation to Latin America may involve the aesthetic fetishization of its social, cultural and economic status quo (as abject, chaotic, « carnivalesque, » etc.), thereby attenuating the urgency for radical social change and displacing it into cultural dilettantism and quietism.⁵ Finally, there is Neil Larsen's skeptical warning—I will return to it later—that even where there is a « promise of subversion » in postmodernism, this « seems no more and no less genuine than that long-ago discredited pledge of the modernist vanguard to, as it were, seize hold of capital's cultural and psychic mechanisms without firing a shot. »⁶

But these reservations also seem somehow to miss or mistake the nature of postmodernism itself, which is bound up precisely with the dynamics of interaction between local cultures and an instantaneous and omnipresent global culture. In Fredric Jameson's influential, if much-contested, rendering⁷, postmodernism in its most general sense—the term is notoriously subject to imprecision in its uses—is a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the technological, economic and social features of a new, transnational stage of capitalism which

is now beginning to envelop even the formerly semi-autarkic space of the Communist bloc countries. In this development, so Jameson's argument goes, there is no longer an « outside »—nature, the third world, the psyche, T.S. Eliot's « great tradition, » the high modernist art work— from which to observe or resist the system. It is not that, say, *Total Recall* or *Dick Tracy* play in Havana or Buenos Aires *after* their New York-Hollywood run, as a dependency theory approach to cultural transmission I (of the sort implicit in Mattelhart and Dorfman's classic *Para leer el Pato Donald*, for example) would hold. In the mode of postmodernism, the Hollywood blockbusters open everywhere more or less simultaneously (the slight lag in the case of Havana being due not so much to « totalitarianism »—the Cubans are avid importers and consumers of US media products—as to the fact since the US-imposed blockade limits Cuba's ability to buy these products directly, they have to use pirate copies). Moreover, the notion of a differential appropriation of international mass culture which was a mainstay of anti-imperialist cultural and media studies in the past is precisely something that postmodernist theory puts into question.⁸

It may be that Jameson's totalizing construction of postmodernism involves, as Aijaz Ahmad has argued, « a suppression of the multiplicity of significant difference among and within both the advanced capitalist countries and the imperialised formations. »⁹ Transnationalization does not mean homogenization: if anything, it tends to aggravate the normal capitalist dynamics of combined and uneven development, producing, as in the earlier moment of Lenin's *Imperialism* (which has suddenly become a dramatically *contemporary text*), a welter of conflicting national, ethnic and regional particularisms. On the other hand, cultural phenomena which in the past might have represented the authenticity of third world national liberation struggles—for example, the decision of the Kenyan writer Ngugi to abandon the novel and write only in his tribal language; or Rigoberta Menchú's eloquent testimonio of indian resistance in Guatemala; or the pan-Caribbean cultural politics of Cuba's Casa de las Américas; or South African township jive music; or Mahasweta Devi's Bengali stories; or the contemporary Filipino film *Perfumed Nightmare*—that these may all be seen today as « postmodern » in some sense or other, even in the very heterogeneity and particularism of their aesthetic-ideological strategies. The (postcolonial) « margin is at the center » not because of any formal logic of supplementarity (nor even less because it has taken over the center) but because it is in the process of being drawn very

deeply and rapidly into global economic and cultural networks. In late capitalism, the « decentered subject » of poststructuralism is more often than not « cheap labor », both in an increasingly industrialized third world and (with corresponding deindustrialization) within the advanced capitalist democracies and the former Communist bloc. It follows that the choice for Jameson is not between postmodernism and something that is clearly other than it, but rather between the different ideological « spins » that can be given to postmodernist culture, what he calls « aesthetics of cognitive mapping »: « The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration of it is complacent and corrupt. »¹⁰

From this perspective, which I share, the importance of the postmodernism debate in Latin America has to do above all with its connection to the ongoing process of democratization in the hemisphere and, contingently, to the need for a revision (or replacement) of the discourse of the Latin American left in the wake of, on the one hand, the defeat of both the armed struggle strategy represented by guerrilla *foquismo* and the « peaceful road to socialism » represented by Allende's coalition-building electoral politics (and the problematization of Cuba as a model for an achieved socialist society), and, on the other, the general crisis of Marxism on the world stage. In a context in which the argument for postmodernism in Latin American literary and cultural criticism was—initially—being made mainly from anti (or post) marxist positions, and in which a visceral anti-postmodernism was dominant on the left¹¹, it seemed important to try to offer a vision of postmodern aesthetics which not only emphasized its affinity with the political project of the left but also saw it as an important means of renovating the exhausted or discredited political imaginary of that left in both the United States and Latin America. This was something, I began to notice, that a number of other Latin American critics, artists and writers were also groping towards in different ways.

The question of the relation of postmodernism and the left was raised for me concretely in my work over the last several years with my friend Marc Zimmerman on the role of literature in the Central American revolutionary movements—a project that sought to be at once a reflection on and an intervention in the cultural politics of those movements.¹² Something like the activities of the Salvadoran revolutionary cultural workers who, often in life or

death situations, worked in tandem with the FMLN and the « popular organizations » may seem quite distant from the concerns of the New York « performance artists » profiled in the trendy and affluent pages of Andy Warhol's *Interview* (though it is worth noting that both groups are under attack by their respective right-wing establishments); but we came up against the question of the relationship of postmodernism to the Central American material we were analyzing over and over again. This was due partly to the fact that postmodernism had become the cultural dominant of *our* own academic milieu (both of us had studied with Jameson; we *liked* the kind of painting, music, dance and writing the US postmodernists were producing). But it also had to do with the fact that the US postmodernists were the generational equivalent of the cultural fellow travellers of the Central American revolutionary movements—groups like Frente Ventana in Nicaragua and La Generación Comprometida and more recently ASTAC in El Salvador. We came to think that there were two ways of seeing this question, both of which were to some extent valid: either Central American revolutionary literary and cultural work was a response to cultural dependency generally and to the currently dominant cultural forms imposed by the latest stage of imperialism, and thus anti-postmodernist (« good » third world as opposed to « bad » first world stuff), or it was itself a form of postmodernist culture. Such an indeterminacy reflected the debate about the ideological valence of the term in US and European culture.¹³

Let me use George Yúdice's 1985 essay on « Central American Testimonio » to argue the negative view (with the understanding that he has subsequently modified his position in what I take to be a more pro-postmodernist position).¹⁴ « First world postmodernism, » Yúdice writes in the 1985 piece, « feeds off and is at the expense of an occluded third world warrant. » The inclination, which he attributes initially to Octavio Paz, to identify Latin American boom literature and culture with postmodernism, « supposedly because it is decentered, fragmented, carnivalesque, unrepresentable, marginal, (...) is a ruse which facilitates greater material-symbolic penetration and colonization by transnational logic. » Yúdice's case is rather for « the viability of the counterhegemonic projects of popular culture viz-a-viz late capitalism. » By the early 1970s Latin American literature had broken with the canon of the boom and « splintered into various trends—realist, nationalist, regionalist, historical, testimonial, feminist, ethnic, » which may be conceived as counterhegemonic projects of representation and identification,

directed against local capitalist and oligarchic domination and transnational cultural penetration. These new trends bespeak a break with the drama of the highly individualized subject of modernist culture and a turn toward a new collective subject living through the individual or multiple voices of a text (a writer, a narrator, a witness, a character, a persona). This decentering of the subject is also a feature of first world postmodernist *écriture*¹⁵—e.g. in its refusal of representation and its the cultivation of the « abject » or « hyperreal » (Kristeva; Joan Didion's book on El Salvador)—but in a way that facilitates breaking down traditional cultural patterns and values in the service of reorganization of societies and concepts of selfhood proposed by transnational capitalism.

Yúdice draws in particular on Néstor García Canclini's questioning of the teleological imperative of capitalism—the sense that it is destined to create a homogenous world system—and his concomitant revalorization of local popular cultures, which Canclini sees as constituted in a process of « unequal appropriation » of both economic and cultural capital by subaltern groups and by the transformation of their general and specific conditions of family and community life and work. The flux of late capitalist commodity culture which is seen as liberating by first world postmodernists is a new form of cultural oppression for third world peoples, Yúdice suggests. Unlike colonialism it does not extinguish, but rather restructures and resemiotizes their cultures. The popular or subaltern sectors struggle against this process, fashioning their own patterns of production and consumption. Cultural forms and traditions in Latin America are destabilized and/or overrun by centrifugal currents deriving from the metropolis and/or from the tremendous expansion of the mass media (e.g. Brazil's TV Globo, as in the film *Bye Bye Brazil*); but cultural despoliation is never complete, and new cultural forms emerge which resist, neutralize or coopt the forces of terror, abjection and deterritorialization.

In the field of literature, Yúdice maintains, these new cultural forms involve among other things the kinds of poetry and narrative that have emerged in connection with the Central American revolutionary movements. While from a metropolitan perspective postmodernism is identified with Latin American boom narrative of the 60s, Yúdice claims that this new literature, particular in its testimonial forms, draws its inspiration and forms not from a previous vanguardist literary high culture but from the spread of popular struggles themselves and, in particular, from the new forms of mobilization and discourse associated with Liberation Theology:

During the 60s social changes were taking place, such as Paolo Freire's conscientization literacy movement, the formation of Christian Base Communities and peasant and worker organizations, which were totally absent from the canonical texts of the literary « boom. » The « popular » was either essentialized in petit bourgeois recreations of peasant and indigenous speech and culture (e.g. Salarrué in El Salvador, Asturias in Guatemala), or pawned off as mass culture (Fuentes, Puig, Sarduy) (....) Like the Christian Base Communities, which are grassroots movements in which popular (i.e., exploited) sectors reread the gospel as the « good news » of the coming of the Kingdom of God here on earth, the testimonial emphasizes a rereading of culture as lived history and a profession of faith in the struggles of the oppressed.

Yúdice's argument in the 1985 article then is for a post-humanist, populist, anti-boom, but also anti-postmodernist, cultural production in Latin America. But one could turn such an argument on its head and postulate that there is an important sense in which the new forms of popular-democratic cultural resistance represented by the Central American revolutions¹⁶ also rise up on a postmodern terrain, if we understand this in the broadest sense (these forms include, besides the testimonio and the discursive practices of the Christian base communities, new kinds of biographical and narrative texts like Thomas Borge's memoirs; *rock nacional*; *poesía conversacional*; *nueva trova*; *poesía de taller*; Alan Bolt's Matagalpa based theater collective; both avant garde and primitive painting; *pintas* (graffiti); Nicaraguan women's writing; ecological or « Green » discourse; telenovelas and TV documentary video work by Sandinista and FMLN media collectives). Rejecting the applicability of Habermas' critique of postmodernism to Latin America, García Canclini himself has noted, for example : « We do not reject postmodernism in block ; its critical revision of modernism seems to us of the greatest interest in debating the future of Latin America. »¹⁷

Such a move involves shifting or redefining the concept of postmodernism in Latin America in a strategic way. For Yúdice as for most Latin American commentators, postmodernism is essentially a first world phenomenon—the crisis and mutation of the forms of ideological legitimation of advanced capitalist consumer societies: « post-Fordism »—whose Third World correlate is boom narrative with its strategies of transculturation, hybridization, etc. But, in spite of the often-noted influence of Borges and

other boom writers on the emergence of US and European postmodernist *écriture*, the identification of postmodernism and the boom is in fact asymmetrical. Since part of the aesthetic ideology of postmodernism is precisely to question, in the manner of Foucault's « What is An Author? », notions like « great author » and « great novel », the moment of postmodernism in Latin American writing is more that of what gets called the *postboom* or *los novísimos*—i.e. the new writers and literary production that emerge after the crisis year of 1973, which marks the end of the sixties and the increasing power of the right in both Latin America and the United States. In this sense, Puig, *poesia de taller* and *testimonio* are postmodern, but Cortazar, Fuentes and Vargas Llosa are not; rather, (as both Rama and Monegal argued from different political perspectives) they and their boom colleagues represent the Latin American equivalent of Anglo-European high modernism (Joyce, Kafka, Musil, Pound, Eliot, Faulkner, etc.)

The two central—and interrelated—problematics which are usually taken as defining postmodernism are

- 1) the collapse of the distinction between elite and popular (or mass) cultures, sometimes expressed as the loss of aesthetic autonomy (a collapse that carries with it what Jameson calls « the prodigious expansion of culture 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 as yet untheorized sense »); and
- 2) the collapse of the « great narratives » of Western progress and enlightenment with which the specifically aesthetic projects of first realist and then modernist art were associated.
- 3) the crisis (or « death » of the subject.)¹⁸ This situation involves the paradox that while postmodernism is clearly related to the rampant commodification and reorganization of even elite culture in advanced capitalist society, at the same time the loss of aura or desublimation of the art work such a commodification portends offers the possibility of very radical forms of cultural democratization. Postmodernism is not only, as Lyotard suggests, a form of aesthetic populism (abandoning, à la Vargas Llosa or the US minimalist composers, experimentalism in favor of « pleasing the public »); it also has involved in both cultural production and consumption lower middle class, working class and minority strata of the population previously excluded in general from (and by) eurocentric, bourgeois humanist high cultural forms

(an obvious example is the enormous creative energy and labor represented by rock and rock-influenced third world musics like reggae, which both clearly derive from and address proletarian and popular milieus).

In these terms, the ideological, pedagogic and political significance of the Central American literary texts and movements we were looking at depended, we came to feel, precisely on their ability to

- 1) function in the historically constituted space which separated elite and popular cultures in the region;
- and 2) generate new postcolonial, non-eurocentric narratives of regional historical-cultural identity.
- 3) provide new forms of subject identification of the personal-in-the-collective. To the extent that these texts were involved with marxism and traditional left parties or sects, they were concerned with redefining (or in the case of Nicaragua *creating*) an inherited « marxist » (in both leninist and social democratic senses) metanarrative of progress and modernization—what Gayatri Spivak calls « the mode of production narrative »—to fit the very different modalities of Latin America's regional and national « local » histories. Sandinista ideology and the FSLN, for example, develop in the late 50s as responses to the dominant Browderism of the small Nicaraguan CP, which argued on the model of the wartime Soviet-American alliance that the working class movement should subordinate its goals those of modernizing and pro-American sectors of the bourgeoisie identified precisely with the Somoza regime.¹⁹

If postmodernism is understood not as a more or less coherent cultural movement, period, or style like Romanticism or modernism itself, but rather as « múltiples respuestas/propuestas estético-ideológicas locales ante, frente y dentro de la transnacionalización »²⁰ then the condition of new forms of cultural and political production in Latin America such as those we were looking at in the Central America revolutionary movements is coincident with first world postmodernism, rather than its other. In this sense, Martí, Mariátegui and Sandino are among the first thinkers of a Latin American postmodernity.

Yúdice's argument in the 1985 essay (which can stand for the general critique of postmodernism by the Latin American left) tends to set up a dichotomy between complex, anti-representational, value-levelling and predominantly high-culture forms (of the sort represented paradigmatically by boom narrative and vanguardist poetry) and simple, lineal, representational,

value-affirming, popular forms of the new testimonial Central American revolutionary literature. The first is seen as « imported » or imposed from above, and thus as complicit with imperialism and neocolonialism, whereas the second is a kind of spontaneous expression of the « people » in conditions of underdevelopment and exploitation, the subaltern « speaking » as such (to refer to Gayatri Spivak's important article).

Our perspective questioned this dichotomy. While something like *testimonio* implies both a challenge and an alternative to boom and other traditional Latin American literary models, it is not a completely autonomous popular cultural form. The nature of any piece of writing—for example, the perceived qualities of a *testimonio* as opposed to a boom novel—is determined intertextually by its place in an already constituted discourse system. Rather than a clear dichotomy between a purely popular culture of resistance and a purely oligarchic and/or colonial and neocolonial high culture, Latin American culture in general has involved since its origins in the colonial period a series of shifts and transformations which both polarize antagonistically and fuse elite and popular literary forms and cultures. The most central of these, of course, is the tension between writing and orality as modes of discursive construction. We found that we needed to see Central American literature as a form of the dialectic of oppressor and oppressed, negotiating between the opposing terms of its dichotomies: literature/oral narrative and song, metropolitan/ national, european/mestizo, ladino/indigenous, white/coloured, elite/popular, urban/rural, intellectual/manual work.

We by no means saw this literature as transcending these dichotomies—that would require a series of social and cultural transformations which have as their minimal prior condition the coming to power of the revolutions this literature embodies as an aesthetic-ideological practice in the first place.²¹ But we did see it as constituting new possibilities of articulating them, and in particular of defining new paradigms of the relationship between the intelligentsia and popular classes in the constitution of an American national-popular founded in heterogeneity rather than a unity imposed from without (by amount other things literary metadiscourses of the national).²² In this sense, poetry and *testimonio* have been in Central America not only a *means* of politics but also a *model* for it.

Of course, if that is the case then the defeat of the Sandinistas in the February 1990 elections (and the acknowledged difficulties currently faced by

the Salvadoran and Guatemalan revolutionary movements) might strike a cautionary note about the validity of such a politics. This I take it to be the point of Neil Larsen's important paper « Postmodernism and Imperialism: Theory and Politics in Latin America ».²³ Against the simple dismissal of postmodernism as a pernicious and reactionary metropolitan imposition, Larsen grants that there is in fact something like a Latin American « left postmodernism, » which he finds exemplified in the « ethic of survival » represented by Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio*, Enrique Dussel's *analectics* and Liberation Theology generally, and Roberto Fernández' Retamar's celebration—in *Caliban* and elsewhere—of Latin American alterity.²⁴ Despite their starting point in the historical reality of combined and unequal development, however, Larsen feels that the left postmodernists « all, to one degree or another, proceed to distort this reality into a new irrationalist and spontaneist myth. Marginality is postulated as the condition which, purely by virtue of its objective *situation*, spontaneously gives rise to the *subversive particularity* upon which postmodern politics pins its hopes. » « The strategic watchword seems to be 'hegemony' (...) <which> implies a need to substitute a form of organization based on spontaneously arising social and cultural ideologies and practices for an 'older' one of party-based, consciousness-raising agitation and recruitment. »

These « politics of spontaneism, » Larsen concludes, are « the derivative *effects* of retrograde developments within the left itself, of what amounts to the *conscious political* decision to give up the principle of revolution as a scientifically grounded activity, as a praxis with a rational foundation. » Such a decision « rests on an intellectual distrust of the masses, a view of the masses as beyond the reach of reason and hence to be guided by myth. » (9) I am putting words in his mouth, but I assume that it follows by implication for Larsen that Sandinismo, as an example of a spontaneist political articulation built around a quasi-mythic sense of the national-popular (the signifier of Sandino himself) and lacking both a coherent « line » and a firm base in a conscious, organized working class, is unable to sustain its transformative project in the face of US aggression and the burgeoning class struggle within Nicaragua itself after 1979.

As an « eloquent refutation » of this sort of left politics, Larsen offers an episode from one of the key narratives of Central American revolutionary militancy, Roque Dalton's *testimonio* of the life one of the founders of the Salvadoran Communist Party, *Miguel Marmol*. Marmol describes here how,

sent to organize a union of rural workers in 1930 in his home town of Ilopango, he overcomes their hostility and distrust, motivated in part by their suspicion that he is anti-religious. Larsen cites in particular a passage where Mármol recalls that « As the people began to talk about working conditions, it wasn't hard to hear, over and over again, concepts that sounded to me just like the 'class struggle', the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', etc. »²⁵ Mármol's task, he concludes (offering this as a model for the practice of the contemporary left), is « not that of 'enlightening' the 'backward' masses, nor is it simply to acknowledge 'what the people thought' as sovereign. Rather, it is to collect these isolated concepts, to *articulate* them, and to draw the logically necessary conclusions. »

What is striking here is not only Larsen's oversimplification of the notion of ideological interpellation in poststructuralism (compare his point about « spontaneism » with the rather more complex account of political articulation in Ernesto Laclau's famous essay on populism);²⁶ what he also misses are the textual dynamics of *Miguel Mármol* itself. For this text, like most testimonios, is founded not only on the direct discourse of the narrator, which is historical and narrative, but also on the relation between that narrator and the interlocutor—i.e. Roque Dalton himself—who stands in for the *contemporary* political subject who is being interpellated by the narrative. In Mármol's own remark about « concepts that sounded like » the point for Dalton is surely that the concepts were *not literally* « class struggle » or « dictatorship of the proletariat »—i.e. those of standard, eurocentric marxist discourse (« proletariat » is a Latin neologism: « dictatorship » is the form of government the Salvadoran people experienced for most of their history; where owners are mainly european and workers mainly indigenous or mestizo even « class struggle » could be experienced mainly as a racial-cultural matter).

But even with this very crucial revision Dalton is clearly *not* proposing the Salvadoran CP of the 1930s or the abortive uprising of 1932 led by Farabundo Martí (both products of the ultra-sectarian « Third Period » of the Comintern, which coincided with Stalin's rise to power and forced collectivization in the Soviet Union) as a model for revolutionary activism in the present. Mármol, Dalton notes in his introduction, is « the prototypical incarnation of the Latin American communist worker and peasant leader of what is usually called 'the classical period', 'the heroic era', of the parties that, as sections of the Communist International, sprang up and developed in nearly

every country on the continent. » Dalton's own perspective, by contrast, is that of a generation which comes to maturity in the wake of destalinization, the Cuban Revolution as a new model of revolutionary agency in the Americas, and the international New Left of the 1960s. During the years *Miguel Mármol* was being prepared (1966-71), the Salvadoran CP which both men belonged to itself split over the issue of armed struggle, with Dalton leaving in 1969 to throw in his lot with the Guevarist and left-Christian ERP, then in formation. The conflict between the two men—which straddles also the problem of the relation of the intelligentsia to the working class and peasantry—is played out at the level of the composition of the text itself: Dalton, who was educated to be a lawyer, notes his « natural tendency to complicate things, which bristles seriously at Marmol's tendency to simplify them. » Despite their differences, however, Dalton declares that « more than to argue with Mármol, I feel my duty as a Central American revolutionary is to assume him; just as we assume, in order to see the face of the future, our terrible national history. » At the same time, he makes explicit his own priorities with favor a different strategy than Mármol. The point of the testimonio then is not, as Larsen supposes, to provide a clear normative « model » of revolutionary activism and organization, but rather to enact in the representation of one « of the elements of democratic culture produced by the exploited strata and classes within the 'national culture' in general » (28) a dialogical confrontation and transformation of left traditions and strategic perspectives that would be crucial to the development of the Salvadoran left in the decade of the 70s and beyond.

Why should we not see this as a version of the postmodernist penchant for what Linda Hutcheon has called « historiographic metafiction »²⁷? Does the question seem inappropriate because in a US context (Barth, DeLillo, Doctorow, Alice Walker, etc.) such fictions are « just literature » (with hazy ideological effects somewhere in the psychic distance), whereas Dalton was clearly on the front line of the ideological recomposition of the left in El Salvador in a period of tremendous crisis and repression (indeed paying for his beliefs with his life)? But to think that is to ignore the effects of the relative collapse of the autonomy of culture which postmodernist theory both diagnoses, I think correctly, posits—effects which, on the other hand, are easy to see (and lament) when it is a question of MTV commodity aesthetics. What if in fact literary and cultural creation—including criticism—has become one

of the decisive areas in which the political future is being played out on both national and international stages?

What Larsen's critique of postmodernism betrays (and what it shares with a social democratic counterpart like Habermas's) is both the discomfort of the « traditional intellectual » or aesthete in the face of the emergence of mass culture and the corresponding nostalgia for a rational politics of clearly defined class-based parties, based on the assumption of a transparency of representation between class-position, self-consciousness as a historical agent, party and strategic line. The possibility of such a transparency was what Lukács used to call the « ascribed consciousness » of a class (i.e. the consciousness that *should* be the case given its position in the relations of production rather than its actual or empirically observable consciousness). But it is surely a transparency which not only a culturalist or poststructuralist emphasis on the relative autonomy of the political, but even a modest appreciation of the reality of the unconscious in human life seriously puts into question. It is not to denigrate the enlightenment of the masses that a postmodern position emphasizes subjectivity and relativity; it is to underline that intellectuals and political organizers are themselves also constructed as subjects in the field of desire, and that a politics which does not pass the test of this field will fail.

At the risk of oversimplification, it could be said that what is at stake in the postmodernism debate is something like an inversion of Walter Benjamin's famous slogan, at the end of his essay « The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction », that while fascism seeks to aestheticize politics, communism politicizes art. From a postmodernist perspective, not only does the left need to aestheticize politics, it needs to make of aesthetic experience itself—cultural creation and consumption—one of the models of post-capitalist social life. This involves accepting the challenge of mass culture and the mass media—rather than simply dismissing these—as is the case in the dominant models of Latin American media criticism—as sites of for the production of false consciousness. It also involves critiquing the ways in which the left in its previous incarnations (social democratic, populist or leninist) was implicated with the institutions and ideology of Latin American humanism and, since the 1930s, in particular with aesthetic modernism in the English-language sense of the term in ways which may have limited its political reach and effectiveness.²⁸

Postmodernity implies that the left will no longer construct its opposition to capitalism in the name of a universal telos of modernization: the

crisis of the statist model of « actually-existing socialism » in the Communist bloc is testimony to the fact that, as Stanley Aronowitz puts it, « as a modernizing strategy, socialism fails in an international economy dominated by capitalist commodity relations. » What replaces this telos are « local » narratives, built around the desire for democratization, social justice, the defense and expansion of personal rights, the liberation of groups in positions of subalternity (feminism and anti-racism are primary discourses in postmodern politics). « The new social movements, » Aronowitz notes, « enter the national and international political arena speaking a language of localism and regionalism, a discourse that, although internationalist, does not appeal to class solidarity as its primary line of attack, but addresses power itself as an antagonist. »²⁹

Such movements need not be explicitly anti-capitalist, but it is clear that capitalism, which has a stake in maintaining conditions of subalternity and exploitation of all sorts, represents a limit-condition to their full development.³⁰ Nor is the logic of class struggle itself entirely suspended in them, since some of the most powerful of the new social movements are the kinds of union organizations and union-community coalitions which have sprung up in the wake of the effects of the globalization of capital like South Africa's COSATU, Poland's Solidarity, or the Brazilian metal workers' union, whose former leader, Lula, was the candidate of the left in the recent presidential elections in Brazil.³¹

Even in defeat (and precisely because of their commitment to implement and respect democratic process in the face of US aggression and interference), it seems to me, the Sandinistas are exemplary of the emergence of a postmodern but still explicitly socialist political agency in Latin America: I believe their political project is by no means exhausted. One could also point along these lines to Nelson Mandela's ANC in South Africa, the FMLN-FDR in El Salvador (which has evolved from being a coalition of leninist sects to a new sort of broad political movement of the left), the Workers Party and the new social movements related to it in Brazil, the Venezuelan MAS, the growth of Latin American feminism and ecological activism, Rigoberta Menchú's CUC (Committee of Campesino Unity) in Guatemala (now destroyed), the electoral coalition around Cuahtemoc Cardenas in Mexico. There is no doubt that a *certain* dogmatic, historicist, eurocentric marxism has become « post »; but certainly not the marxist impulse as such. In the lapidary formulation of Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez (reproduced, strategically, in a recent

issue of Cuba's *Casa de las Américas*), one continues to have faith in and struggle for the « project of emancipation » bequeathed by modernity; yet

Contribuir a fundar, esclarecer y guiar la realización de ese proyecto de emancipación que, en las condiciones posmodernas, sigue siendo el socialismo—un socialismo si se quiere posmoderno—solo pude hacerse en la medida en que la teoría de la realidad que hay que transformar y de las posibilidades y medios para transformarla, esté atenta a los latidos de esa realidad y se libere de las concepciones teleológicas, progresistas, productivistas y eurocentristas de la modernidad que llegaron incluso a impregnar al pensamiento de Marx y que se han prolongado en nuestro tiempo.³²

At the same time, one must recognize that, because by virtue of postmodernism's very critique of essentialism there is no *necessary* connection between it and the left, a postmodernism of the right is also flourishing in Latin America, represented *inter alia* by Vargas Llosa (as both as a novelist and politician) and Hernando de Soto's neoliberal economic manifesto *The Other Path* in Peru, Collor's populist appeal in Brazil (and the anti-poststructuralist critique of Melquior in the academy), the complex and sometimes contradictory politics of narcotraffic, or « Miami ». And simply to indicate that the left must operate on a new terrain in new ways does not of course guarantee that it can or will: witness its current impasse in the Southern Cone countries, despite its intimate and decisive participation in the process of redemocratization. Finally, if the problems of the Latin American left are seen from the perspective (which in a maoist form would be that of Sendero Luminoso in Peru, for example) that there already exists a model of party building and political struggle that simply has not been implemented effectively (because of « bad leadership, » opportunism, economism, revisionism or any number of other sins, depending on the sect one belongs to), or that the failure of this or that left strategy was mainly due to the force of US destabilization rather than problems internal to it, then the effort to relate postmodernism and the project of socialism in Latin America *should* be seen not only as « culturalist » in the worst sense but also as potentially demoralizing and divisive—something like an attempt to « yuppifie » left cultural politics.³³

The concept of postmodernism initially came into play to designate a crisis in the dominant canons of US architecture. Hegel had posited architecture as the world historical form of Romantic art, because in architecture the reconciliation of spirit and matter, public and private, reason and history, represented ultimately by the state was more completely realized than in the other arts. The problem in applying postmodernism to Latin America has been the precisely its historical « lag » behind the US and the European capitalist democracies, and the related association of the term with a reinvigorated Reagan-era US imperialism. Since this article will appear in English in a North American academic journal, I'd like to conclude by noting that the fourth largest Spanish speaking country in the world today (after Mexico, Spain, Colombia and Argentina) has become the United States itself. This fact (of postmodernity) should surely go some way towards deconstructing that binary which opposed all classes in the US as a bloc to Latin America and vice versa. If, as is often said, the question of postmodernism is ultimately linked in Latin America to the possibility of achieving a genuinely democratic culture and society then surely it is significant that by 2076, the tricentennial of the American revolution, a majority of the population of the US—assuming it still exists as a single nation-state—will be of African, Hispanic, Native American or Asian descent. As Martí anticipated, the center will then be (at) the margin.

NOTES

- 1 This article appeared initially in the journal *Siglo XX/Twentieth Century* (1991).
- 2 «¿Puede hablarse de postmodernidad en América Latina?», *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 29 (1989): 105-128.
- 3 A representative, if incomplete, bibliography of the evolution of the postmodernism debate in Latin America might include: Carlos Rincón, «De la ubicuidad global de la narrativa latinoamericana. Contradiscursos periférico y Postmodernism», *Caribe* 3 (1982), and «Antimitología del acto de escribir y transformación del discurso narrativo en el Postmodernism», *Caribe* 7 (1984); Roberto Schwarz, «Nacional por sustracción», *Punto de vista* 9/28 (1986); Silviano Santiago, «O Narrador Pós-moderno», *Revista do Brasil* 2/5 (1986); Ronaldo de Melo e Souza, «A Epigenese do Pós-Moderno», and Sergio Paulo Rouanet, «Do Pós-Moderno ao Neo-Moderno», *Tempo brasileiro* 84/5-6 (1986); Norberto Lechner, «Problemas de la democratización en una cultura postmoderna», *Mundo* 1 (1987) (a collection of Lechner's recent essays is forthcoming from Fondo de Cultura Económica); José Joaquín Brunner, «Notas sobre la modernidad y

lo postmoderno en la cultura latinoamericana.» *David y Goliath* 17/52 (1987) (a special issue on postmodernism by the journal of CLACSO, the Latin American Council for Social Sciences), and *Un espejo trizado* (Santiago: FLACSO, 1988); Nelly Richard, «Postmodernism and Periphery», *Third Text* 2 (1987/88), and «Latinoamérica y la postmodernidad», *Revista de crítica cultural* (Santiago de Chile) 3 (1991); Octovia Paz, «¿Postmodernidad?» and «El romanticismo y la poesía contemporánea», *Vuelta* 11/127 (1987) (a special issue on postmodernism); a special issue of *Todopodrillo* 3 (1988) on Postmodernism; Ticio Escobar, «Postmodernismo / precapitalismo», *Casa de las Américas* 168 (1988); Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1988); Antonio Benítez Rojo, *La isla que se repite. El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna* (Hanover NH: Ediciones del Norte, 1989); Néstor García Calclini, «El debate posmoderno en Iberoamérica», *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos* 463 (1989); and his recent *Culturas híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (México: Grijalbo, 1990); Carlos Rincón, «Modernidad periférica y el desafío de los postmodernos: Perspectivas del arte narrativo latinoamericano», and the article by George Yúdice mentioned in note 1, both in *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 29 (1989) (which also includes a transcript of the discussions of these papers at the 1988 Dartmouth symposium on Latin American criticism); Adolfo Sánchez Vásquez, «Posmodernidad, posmodernismo y socialismo», *Casa de las Américas* 175 (1989); Neil Larsen, *Modernism and Hegemony*, introduction and chapters 3 and 4 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) and the article I discuss here, «Postmodernismo y imperialismo» in the special issue of *Nuevo Texto Crítico* mentioned below; Julio Ortega, «El postmodernismo en América Latina», in Keith Mc Duffie and Rose Minc, eds *Homenaje a Alfredo Roggiano* (Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 1990); Luis Britto García, *El imperio contracultural: Del rock a la postmodernidad* (Caracas: Nueva Sociedad, 1991). There have been a number of conferences dedicated in whole or part to the topic, notably in 1988 at the University of Texas Austin (on «The Debate on Postmodernism in Latin America: Brazil, Mexico, and Peru»), Casa de las Américas in Havana, and the Dartmouth College symposium reproduced in the issue of *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* mentioned above; in 1989 at a follow-up Dartmouth symposium transcribed in *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 34 (1990); and in 1990 at the Kellogg Institute of Notre Dame University. Jorge Ruffinelli has published two special issues of his journal *Nuevo texto Crítico* on the Latin American postmodernism debate (nos 4-5, 1991). An edited version of the Casa de las Américas conference, an University of Minnesota Press volume edited by Jean Franco, Juan Flores and George Yúdice, and a special issue of *Boundary 2* on Latin American postmodernism are forthcoming. I am aware of at least two recent dissertations on the topic: Gred Dawes, *Contemporary Nicaraguan Poetry: Aesthetic Commitment in an Age of Postmodernism* (University of Washington, 1990); and Santiago Colas, *Latin American postmodernism: Writing History and Resistance* (Duke University, 1991). The *Revista de crítica cultural*, edited in Santiago de Chile by Nelly Richard, has become the journal of record of Latin American postmodernist theory.

- 4 See Osorio's interventions in the debate of the Dartmouth symposium in *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 29 (1989), particularly pp. 146-148. Paz, «El romanticismo y la poesía contemporánea», *Vuelta* 11, 127 (1987): 26-27.

- 5 Jean Baudrillard, *Amérique* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1986). Joan Didion's *Salvador* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983) is an example of a similar North American production of a dystopian postmodern sublime in relation to Latin America. George Yúdice notes that «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 country.» «Postmodernity and Transnational Capitalism in Latin America», forthcoming in a collection on transnationalization and Latin American culture edited by Juan Flores, Jean Franco and Yúdice for University of Minnesota Press (quoted from ms.). A good bit of the literary ideologization of boom narrative via the appropriation of Bakhtin moves in the direction Yúdice suggests: for example, Emir Rodríguez Monegal, «Carnaval / Antropofagia / Parodia», *Revista Iberoamericana* 108-109 (1979); or Severo Sarduy's celebration of a nebaroque cultural transvestism.
- 6 Neil Larsen, *Modernism and Hegemony*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. xxxi.
- 7 Fredric Jameson, «Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism», *New Left Review* 146 (1984).
- 8 Cf. Baudrillard: «Thus, in the case of the media, traditional resistance consists of reinterpreting messages according to the group's own code and for its own ends. The masses, on the contrary, accept everything and redirect everything *en bloc* into the spectacular, without requiring any resistance, but making everything slide into an indeterminate sphere which is not even that of non-sense, but that of overall manipulation/fascination.» Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotexte, 1983), pp. 43-44. On postmodernist «reception» the key essay is Jane Feuer, «Reading *Dynasty*: Television and Reception Theory», *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88, 2 (Spring 1989).
- 9 Aijaz Ahmad, «Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'», *Social Text* 17 (1987), p. 3.
- 10 Jameson, «The Politics of Theory in the Postmodernism Debate», in *The Ideologies of Theory*, Vol. 2 *Syntax of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988), p. 111.
- 11 For the first see e.g. Antonio Benítez's *La isla que se repite. El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna*; for the second, the following remarks by the Argentine philosopher León Rozitchner (in an interview reproduced in *Casa de las Américas* 168 (1988): 165-166 under the title «La posmodernidad es el opio de los pueblos»):
La llamada cultura posmoderna es una guerra ganada en la subjetividad de los hombres por los grandes medios, la tecnología, la religión y las transnacionales. La dominación militar de la vida cotidiana, la disuasión, lo impregna todo... 'H'ablar entre nosotros de nuestro posmodernismo es una burla infame. El que nos introdujo en nuestro posmodernismo es el Proceso; es un hecho de terror y no de cultura, como los europeos enriquecidos lo gozan. Allí los posmodernizan con la riqueza; a nosotros con el terror y la pobreza.

- 12 John Beverley and Marc Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).
- 13 The representation of the debate is still Hal Foster, ed. *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend WA: Bay Press, 1983), with its pairing of a version of Jameson's essay with Habermas' «Modernity—An Incomplete Project.» See also Andreas Huyssen, «Mapping the Postmodern.» in his *After the Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Jonathan Arac, ed. *Postmodernism and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986); E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Postmodernism and its Discontents* (London: Verso, 1988); Andrew Ross, ed., *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1989); and John Roberts, *Postmodernism, Politics and Art*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990). In Spanish, see the essays in Josep Picó, ed. *Modernidad y postmodernidad* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1988).
- 14 I cite here from a manuscript copy. A revised version is forthcoming in a special 1990 issue of *Latin American Perspectives* on testimonio. For Yúdice's later views, see his article in *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 29 (1989) mentioned in note 1, and his «Marginality and the Ethics of Survival.» in Ross, *Universal Abandon?*
- 15 The decisive case was perhaps Foucault's use of Borges in his introduction to *Les mots et les choses*. On the relation of the Latin American boom and US postmodernist narrative, see Carlos Rincón's essay in *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* 29 (1989).
- 16 These forms might include, besides the testimonio and the discursive practices of the christian base communities Yúdice describes, new kinds of biographical and narrative texts like Tomas Borge's memoirs; *rock nacional*; *poesía conversacional*; *nueva trova*; *poesía de taller*; Alan Bolt's Matagalpa based theater collective; both avant garde and primitive painting; *pintas* (graffiti); Nicaraguan women's writing; ecological or «Green» discourse; telenovelas and TV documentary video work by Sandinista and FMLN media collectives).
- 17 «Cultura y política. Nuevos escenarios para América latina.» *Nueva Sociedad* 92 (1987), p. 122 (my translation).
- 18 The key text is of course Jean François Lyotard's *La condition postmoderne. Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Grasset, 1984). It should be noted, however, that Lyotard's account collapses together at least three different *ruptures* or «breaks»: an epistemological one, having to do with philosophical antifoundationalism, deconstruction and post-structuralism; an aesthetic one having to do with a post-sixties questioning of modernist paradigms; and a political one having to do with the displacement of traditional class or «interest group» politics by new social movements (ethnic, communalist, ecological, feminist, etc.). One might want, therefore, to distinguish postmodernism as an aesthetic ideology and practice (e.g. in the way Christopher Jencks uses the term) from a more generalized postmodern «condition.» My impulse here, however, is not to do this, because of the way the aesthetic itself becomes a central category and field of experience in postmodernity.
- 19 On Sandinism and ideological pluralism and heterogeneity, see Donald Hodges, *The Intellectual Foundations of the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

- 20 The formulation is Yúdice's, borrowing an idea of Hugo Achugar's, in «¿Puede hablarse de la postmodernidad?», p.106.
- 21 Moreover, to subsume something like the testimonio under the category of literature in the first place is perhaps to preempt a vision of emergent subaltern cultural forms that are no longer based on or adequately represented by the institutions of literature and the humanities: that is, in the final analysis, by the university. See my «Second Thoughts on testimonio.» forthcoming in *boundary 2* 18/2 (1990).
- 22 See Antonio Cornejo Polar's «Los sistemas literarios como categorías históricas.» and the transcription his subsequent discussion of this in *Revista de crítica literaria hispanoamericana* 29 (1989): 19-25 and 39-58.
- 23 I cite here from the manuscript copy presented at the 1990 MLA session on Postmodernism in Latin America. A different version has appeared in the inaugural issue in the new e-mail journal *Postmodern Culture* 1 (1990), published at North Carolina State University, Raleigh.
- 24 Larsen notes Cornel West's observation that «Americans are politically always already in a condition of postmodern fragmentation and heterogeneity in a way that Europeans have not been; and the revolt against the center by those constituted as marginals is an *oppositional* difference in a way that poststructuralist notions of difference are not.» West's reference is to *north* americans, but the point could easily be extended to cover both hemispheres. «Interview with Cornel West.» in Ross *Universal Abandon?*, p.273.
- 25 Larsen uses the translation of *Miquel Marmol* by Kathleen Ross and Richard Schaff (Willimantic CT: Curbstone, 1982).
- 26 Ernesto Laclau, «Towards a Theory of Populism.» in his *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1977). Larsen has a more extensive and telling critique of Laclau in th introduction to *Modernism and Hegemony*, pp.xxvi-xxi.
- 27 «The interaction of the historiographic and the metafictional foregrounds the rejection of the claims of both 'authentic' representation and 'inauthentic' copy alike, and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical referentiality. Postmodern fiction suggests that to re-write or to re-present the past in fiction and history is, in both cases, to open it up to the present, to prevent it from being conclusive and teleological.» Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988), p. 110.
- 28 The best-known articulation of the relation of modernism and the revolutionary left is to be found in Che Guevara's remarks on art and culture in his essay *On Man and Socialism in Cuba*.
- 29 Stanley Aronowitz, «Postmodernism and Politics.» in *Universal Abandon?*, pp.60-61. The theoretical manifesto of a «radical democratic» politics of new social movements has been Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).
- 30 The manifesto of the new social movements might be something like the «Ten Key Values» espoused by the international Green movement (itself a highly visible form of postmodernist politics): 1) ecological wisdom, 2) grassroots democracy, 3) personal and social responsibility, 4) nonviolence and demilitarization, 5) decentralization, 6) community-based economics and workplace democratization, 7) postpatriarchal values, 8) respect for diversity, 9) global responsibility, 10) future focus. US Green

leaflet, adapted from Fritjof Capra and Charlene Spretnak, *Green Politics. The Global Promise*.

- 31 Jameson, in a recent revision of his own concept of postmodernism, has noted in this respect that:

The postmodern may well in that sense be little more than a transitional period between two stages of capitalism, in which the earlier forms of the economic are in the process of being restructured on a global scale, including the older forms of labor and its traditional organizational institutions and concepts. That a new international proletariat (taking forms we cannot yet imagine) will reemerge from this convulsive upheaval it needs no prophet to predict: we ourselves are still in the trough, however, and no one can say how long we will stay there.

Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p.417.

- 32 Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, «Posmodernidad, posmodernismo y socialismo.» *Casa de las Américas* 175 (1989), p.145.

- 33 The equation of postmodernism and North American yuppie culture has been made forcefully by Fred Pfeil in «Making Flippy Floppy: Postmodernism and the Baby Boom PMC.» *The Year Left 1* (London: Verso, 1985). On the other hand, it may be the case that postmodernism is in fact a better representation of what the Latin American left is actually doing or can do today. At a 1988 Casa de las Américas conference where postmodernism was very much on the agenda, I was shown by one of the Cuban participants, a literature professor, the press packets the American Interest Section in Havana sends—unsolicited—to selected Cuban intellectuals and opinion-makers. In the area of cultural reportage, the stories dealt almost exclusively with postmodernist painting, music, dance, theater, etc., as if to suggest that these delights would be theirs if only they embraced the Free World (and the free market). What the Interest Section perhaps failed to perceive is that this material was much anticipated and appreciated because a lively Cuban production of postmodernist painting, music, dance, criticism, etc. was already taking place «within the revolution»—to recall Fidel's famous dictum. (For a glimpse of this see e.g. the special issue of *Social Text* 15 (1986), on contemporary Cuban culture, particularly the essay by Gerardo Mosquera. The support of TV Martí by the Bush administration and the more reactionary sectors of the Cuban community in the US conceals from the American public the fact (perhaps that is its real purpose) that in spite of the boycott Cuba is buying increasing amounts of American TV—mainly from CNN—, that US films, videos and music continue to be popular and more or less readily available, and that there are growing relations between Hollywood and the Cuban film and television industry. The last time I was at the Havana Film Festival—in 1987—director Sidney Pollock was there to receive an award for *Out of Africa* (and to scout out locations for his recent film, *Havana*) and the most popular film in town were Paul Leduc's *Frida* and Eddie Murphy's *Beverly Hills Cop*.

Sociocriticism Vol. VII, 2 (N° 14) pp. 51-78
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THE POLITICS OF POSTMODERN REALISM*

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... the convenient working distinction between cultural texts that are social and political and those that are not becomes something worse than an error: namely, a ... re-enforcement of the reification and privatization of contemporary life. Such a distinction reconfirms that ... gap between the public and the private, between ... the political and the poetic, ... which ... maims our existence as individual subjects and ... alienates us from our speech itself.

Frederick Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*

The Poststructuralist Impasse

As Susan Friedman apprises us, poststructuralism is entering hard times with the nineties. Simultaneously, and with little cross-fertilization, broad critiques of poststructuralism are mounting from within and without. From within there is a «post/poststructuralism» which draws upon Foucauldian power-relations and Bakhtinian dialogism to question the hegemonic, «monological» quality of two decades of poststructuralist

* An abridged version of this paper was read at the First International Congress on Cultural Conflict in Contemporary Literature, February, 1991, at Mayaguez, Puerto Rico.

theory. From without there are signs of a full challenge to poststructural textuality and performance theory, with their banishment of the author, of referentiality, of the need for any particular or pressing critical stance, or of a meaning structure based upon the concrete experience of history or « the real. »

With the return of such banished terms as « engagement, » « work, » « author, » « self, » and « reference, » there is also the return (as neo-poststructuralist Paul Smith argues in *Discerning the Subject*, 1988) of at least the possibility of resistance. Noting the renewed legitimacy « of ethics and politics, of agency and action, of intention and meaning..., » Friedman sums up the entire trend as « a shift in the critical mass toward commitment, vocation, social responsibility » (Friedman 465 and *passim*).

My only point of disagreement with Friedman is the newness she attributes to this call for responsibility. Correct as she is about the privileged status of poststructural theory in the last two decades, she too easily passes over those voices in the wilderness—Graff, Said, Gaggi, Arac, LaCapra, etc.—who for more than a decade have conducted the essential fifth column work that set the current trend in motion.

The term « post/poststructuralism » is perhaps fitting for some of these insurgent projects (though certainly not for Graff's) in that it implies an element of continuity between the politics of poststructuralism and that of its current detractors. The problem is that this continuity is largely rhetorical. As early as 1982, Graff complained of that « left textualism » which talked of liberation while in fact putting social reform—or even the merest social reference—on permanent hold (« Textual Leftism, » *passim*). The most that can be granted, by way of apology, is that the goals of poststructuralist rhetoric finally won out over post-structural inertia. Post/poststructuralism was spawned by the failed politics of poststructuralism.

Post/poststructuralism, then, comprehends the deficiency of « continual textual 'self-creation' without lifealtering consequences... » (O'Hara 122). What the textual theorists created was « a cultural amusement park, a Disney World for highbrows » (122). The turn against them begins with the recognition that in a world where real action is desperately needed against real injustice, nothing sounds so much like « let them eat cake » than talk of an endless play of signifiers.

The Ideological Turn in Criticism

The current reaction against (or revision of) poststructuralism is in fact the second wave of a larger ideological turn in which poststructuralism itself has played a part (though just one part). This turn is marked by the recognition, as Myra Jehlen puts it, that the ideological dimension of literary works is « integral to their entire composition » (1). As Said observes, criticism has left the isolated text behind, and has long since abandoned literature as « the harmless rhetoric of self-delighting humanism » (*Text*, 225). Jameson goes so far as to describe « the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today ... but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation » (17).

From this perspective « ideology is not something which informs ... symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological... » (Jameson 79). Though a politicized aesthetics is familiar from the 1930s, today's ideological turn is less bound up with the externals of socio-economic circumstance—i.e., no depression is required to seal the literary-political bond. Ideological criticism has been normalized, so to speak, in having passed beyond the marginal status of mere « radical » theory.

The surprising thing is that this could happen in the « me generation » of the late 1970s and the conservative 1980s. In an age which was supposed to have settled down to capitalist basics (narcissism, consumerism, careerism, etc.) there has been an unprecedented concern for the political « Other, » a « zest for uncovering ideological bias or linking a critical construct to the world that it came from and that it is meant to serve... » (Lindenberger 399).

Needless to say, such an interpretive revolution could not take place without resistance. Many believe, as Gerald Graff ascerbically notes,

that the present crisis in literary studies can be attributed to literature professors' meddling with politics and culture instead of tending to their traditional critical business of producing interpretations of literary works. In response to this complaint, I would point out that it is only very recently that the interpretive function of literary criticism has been detached from broader moral, cultural, and political functions. The narrowing of criticism to textual explication in not « traditional » in any valid sense of the term... (« Teaching » 854)

Graff somewhat exaggerates the traditional aspect of this contextual turn. The cultural dynamic of the current political restoration is new in its infrastructural connection with a postindustrial world. Even its acknowledged antecedents are « new » in the sense that they represent a very different tradition from the modernist canon. It is clear, for example, that the concept of the inseparability of literature, politics, and culture—so reminiscent of Gramsci's conception of culture in general as an extension of political reality (Said, *Text*, 170-71)—has been greatly facilitated by the migration of European culture theory to America in recent years, bringing with it far more complex ideological equipment than American thought ever possessed (Jehlen 1).

Unfortunately this new cultural awareness has seemed to underscore the ubiquity of power relations in the Foucauldian sense, with reality tied to discursive formations that could not be transcended. Reform, under these circumstances, becomes an empty exercise, there being no « outside » from which rational criticism and reform might be launched (Kennedy 30). This view tends to promote withdrawal into a disengaged postmodernism, associated with extreme relativism, passivity, and textual retreatism. Gradually, however, a new realism has emerged, regenerating the more activist and engaged tradition of American pragmatism. The conflation of these two traditions—European culture theory and ideology with American pragmatism—is producing a promising synthesis, namely, postmodern realism.

Postmodern Realism

This new postmodernism is unabashedly engaged ideologically, and by no accident it is seeking a mode of representation capable of relating itself to external reality. Breaking with the art/world dichotomy which has dominated modernist aesthetics, categorically dividing « fact » and fiction, it exists in the expanding borderland between art and the « world. » Here the process of knowing the « real » becomes an acknowledged part of any reality that could be known. Postmodern realism thus combines an appreciation of verisimilitude with an acute awareness that « the verisimilar ... is not the thing itself » (Murray Krieger qtd. in Hutcheon 44).

That awareness destroys the bond which has presumably tied realism to conservatism, allowing allows a host of closet conservatives to pose as « radicals » by virtue of their poststructural anti-realism. To the extent that postmodern realism incorporates the imaginative, creative processes of art, it affords a canvass for alternative visions of reality, possible worlds which transcend « given » reality yet can become powerful forces for change in our « given » world. To write this realism off as a mere chimera would be at once a rejection of radicalism and an 'unhistorical' reductionism; yet to admit the historicity of such realism is to abandon forever the positivistic dream of certain knowledge.

As Richard Rorty stressed in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), the « thing itself, » as an object of epistemological certainty, is far less important to us than it was to our philosophic predecessors. « What is clear is that the older certitudes in the different fields ... are giving way to some « new » (or in some instances a return to older) modes » (Bell 216). This is to say that the « thing itself » is not important to us in any « foundationalist » sense; but ironically it is all the more important to us in the pragmatic sense which unites Goodman, Putnam, and Rorty in their neo-realist « return to the given » (Lilla 233).

Modernists, of course, were prepared (all too prepared) to give up the « thing itself » in a limited aesthetic sense, thereby isolating art from the world. On the surface postmodernists might only seem to differ in view of their willingness to give up certitude more broadly; but by relativizing or fictionalizing the world, they have closed the circle between the world and art, effecting a qualitative transformation in the form of a flat rejection of the modernist sanctification of autonomous art. Historical and cultural context is restored with a vengeance, though it is understood that history and culture (so far as we know them) are social constructs.

Postmodern reference is therefore problematic and tentative, its object being as much a discursive as a mimetic representation of reality. We cannot stress too much that it is both at once. Thomas Pavel (*Fictional Worlds*, 1986) ties the discursive, fictional act of world-making to the lived historical world, thereby approaching an ontology of fiction without reducing the possible worlds of art to the singular « real world » which most people believe themselves to inhabit (Raval 565, 566, and 570).

Toward a Realist Postmodernism of Resistance

Since this discursive/realist model applies as much to history and general culture as to literature and art, it invites a full reexamination of the relationship between aesthetics, social thought, and ideology. We are carried back to the worldview and critical commitments of Antonio Gramsci, who challenged « scientific Marxism » with his unique blend of humanism, on the one hand, and historicist and situational dialectics on the other (Kahn 161, 165, and 170).

A key issue in this postmodern reexamination concerns the relation between knowing and telling, or what Hayden White dubs the « value of narrativity » and the « impulse to moralize reality » (qtd. in De Bolla 50). A related issue is the possibility of any sustained resistance to a politically or culturally enforced pseudo-reality. Huyssen, in this context, criticizes most of what passes for postmodernism, yet defends the raw concept of a postmodernism of « resistance » (292).

More implacable critics such as Eagleton, Jameson, and Habermas charge that postmodernism simply mirrors the commercial force of mass culture. While sharing their concerns, we also share with Huyssen and Arac (308 and 315) a determination to nurture a counter-force within postmodernism. We suggest that postmodern realism offers the resources for something more potent than Marcusean negativity (the preferred critical form where autonomy is favored over involvement). It affords, rather, a critical idiom in keeping with our times—one which is not irrelevant to every given power structure, as most 'left' criticism has proven to be (Graff 852).

This critical device extends to (and is serving to restore the credibility of) humanist approaches to reform, such as those adopted by Norman Podhoretz with his « neo-conservative » conversion—or what he prefers to describe as his continuing loyalty to a tradition which his colleagues unwittingly abandoned (Podhoretz 865). It subsumes the putative anti-postmodernism of Gerald Graff (*Literature Against Itself*, 1979), whose work has erroneously been written off as « right wing, » due largely to its call for realist referentiality; Graff in fact emerges as an archetypal exponent of postmodern realism in the politically critical sense. This is a mode of criticism which privileges pragmatism over final solutions, realism (however complex and imaginative) over escapism, and Arnoldian ethical engagement over purely aesthetic formalism.

Such a critical postmodernism would be impossible where « postmodernism » takes the form of either uncritical populism or pseudo-critical deconstructionism. In the former case, as Baudrillard puts it, « The masses ... accept everything *en bloc* into the spectacular » (qtd. in Angus 344), while in the latter a purely symbolic « liberation struggle is conducted in the name of ... indeterminacy of meaning in the face of ... any normative supposition that objective values or meanings exist » (Shaw 255). Ironically this pseudo-critical posture is taken up by to-day's academic « left, » for which « anti-Enlightenment reactionaries like Jung, Nietzsche, and Heidegger suddenly emerge as populists! » (Graff 852). As Graff expressed it in 1984,

the main « political » effect of American Marxism is on the politics of the university, where more-radical-than-thou positions are very effective in putting rival academic schools on the defensive... The effect is to raise the rhetorical *ante* to increasingly utopian and apocalyptic levels, less and less related to any actual or conceivable political situation. But this is by no means to say that academic cultural radicalism has been without significant consequences in the real political world. On the contrary, it has been highly effective at discouraging the « mere » reformist liberalism which is all that stands in the way of the complete triumph of the Right. (« Teaching, » 853)

Said came to much the same conclusion the year before, charging that

the putative Left, no less than the Right, is very far from playing a genuinely political role. Indeed, what distinguishes the present situation is ... a greater isolation than ever before in recent American cultural history of the literary critics from the major intellectual, political, moral, and ethical issues of the day... » (*Text*, 160).

Recently, however, « 'mere' reformist liberalism » has begun a dramatic comeback. Even more remarkable, it is doing so from within postmodernism, which is regaining its radical edge in the form of a politically engaged realism that is not so much anti-deconstructionist (in the manner of Graff's *Literature Against Itself*, 1979, or Silvio Gaggi's *Modern/Postmodern*, 1989) as post-deconstructive. That is, while accepting

deconstruction as a legitimate point of departure, postmodern realism moves on to a reconstructive comprehension of the world. This carries it beyond textual hermeticism and (potentially) beyond the rhetorical postures which have made literary criticism the « closed garden » that Said finds so invigorating (*Text*, 161). Though postmodern realism makes no transcendent claim to objectivity, it is determined nevertheless to maximize objectivity through tentative representations of a decentered world.

Referentiality and Responsibility

One of the paradoxes of intellectual life in this « decentered, » postmodern culture is that while literary elements have « colonized » the social sciences, and even to some extent the natural sciences, literature in the « grand sense » has all but perished. So too, the long contest between romantic and modernist literary values has given way to postmodern values where, as Alvin Kernan notes, « the masterpieces of literature, ... are ... void of meaning, or, what comes to the same thing, filled with an infinity of meanings, their language indeterminate, contradictory, without foundation.... » (Kernan 2).

Among the last great theorists of literature in the grand sense was Northrup Frye, who could still find an orderly (albeit mystical) relationship between the human soul and literature as a totality (Kernan 6). Now, such meaning as literature is thought to possess is at best provisional,

not inherent in the text or set in place for all time by the writer's word craft. Rather than being ... the most prized possessions of culture, universal statements about an unchanging and essential human nature, literature is increasingly treated as authoritarian and destructive ..., the ideology of the patriarchy devised to instrument male, white hegemony ... (Kernan 2)

The force of this charge against patriarchal literature, however, is blunted by the fact that all expression is now taken to be rhetorical, while all socially or politically purposeful expression is taken to be at once ideological and indeterminate. Both Jameson and Lyotard agree, for example, that Marxism involves an ideological metanarrative, and that postmodernism has effectively abolished all metanarratives (Montag 95). This postmodern

turn—which Ricoeur aptly terms « the hermeneutics of suspicion » (Kernan 7)—applies even to science. Neither science nor literature, as the later Wittgenstein recognized, can lay any credible claim to the structure of reality (Thiher 27).

A postmodern reading of Bakhtin's famous epigram—that « literary scholarship is one branch of the study of ideologies »—could not miss the paradox of such a statement as it relates to criticism. Granted, literary criticism now claims for itself a fully literary status (on a par, that is, with fiction, poetry, drama, etc.); but those who object to the exalted status of postmodern criticism have probably missed the point. It is not that criticism has been raised to literary heights, but that literature itself has been brought down to the level of criticism. Both, that is, are subject to ideological readings—or, as the case may be, misreadings.

This is to say that a work of literature can no longer pass as a « pure cultural object, the autonomous object which is in itself civilizing, without interpretative mediation, or representation... » (Kennedy, *Reading*, 39). For Alan Kennedy, following the lead of Kenneth Burke, this fact suggests a virtual state of siege in literature and criticism alike. Since all representation stems from interpretation, the salient question is, quite simply, whose interpretation will prevail? There is no escaping the political implications of this hermeneutic perspective.

That is exactly where many critics consider poststructuralism to have fallen short. Habermas, for example, faults Derrida for carrying the poetic or rhetorical aspect of language so far as to deprive all thinking of its critical force (Norris 55). Likewise he takes Lyotard to task for his heterogeneity of language games, which he considers to put all rational discourse in jeopardy. Habermas, however, is a confirmed anti-postmodernist who clings to Hegelian rationality and looks askance at far less radically heterogeneous theorists than Derrida—witness his famous debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer in 1967 (see Jay 98).

What makes this debate so crucial to our subject is that both thinkers share a commitment to language as communication, a view which sets them apart from their French adversaries (Jay 93). What divides them, meanwhile, is their respective attitudes towards Heidegger. Habermas follows his mentors in Critical Theory in his distrust of Heidegger, while Gadamer adopts Heidegger's linguistic view of human reality—a view which requires an endless project of interpretive reflection (Jay 94). This project is

distinctly postmodern in that it refuses Habermas's efforts to escape the bounds of the hermeneutic circle; yet at the same time it challenges the more radical epistemological projects of structuralism and poststructuralism. Gadamer holds fast to the relationship between art and reality—though this is no fixed or absolute reality, but one which « always stands in a horizon of the future of observed and feared or, at any rate, still undecided possibilities » (Gadamer 101). As Martin Jay reads him, Gadamer rejects

the earlier hermeneutics of perfect empathic understanding of an authorial mind.... But at the same time, by resisting the radical antihumanism of structuralist and poststructuralist criticism, [he] reminds us that subjectivity ... can in fact be objectified, if in an inevitably mediated and imperfect way. (Jay 106)

There has been much criticism of the alleged conservative implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics. This criticism has usually taken aim at his goal of a harmonistic—and hence, to some minds, totalistic—« fusion » of interpretive horizons; but Gadamer's openness to future horizons is sufficient to preclude the closure these critics attribute to him. Moreover, we cannot fail to notice that almost any political stance, to the extent that it requires some degree of visceral commitment, involves such a « fusion. » Nor is Gadamer the only victim of this witch-hunt against the very grounds of commitment. Richard Rorty, a pragmatist, has come under attack from Lyotard for the alleged « soft imperialism » of his (by his own confession) « frankly ethnocentric » liberal convictions.

Many within the poststructural camp, however, are beginning to doubt the wisdom—and perhaps even the ethics—of a « radical » epistemology that has little to say about most political issues and whose only practical product is inertia. The result is a « post/poststructural » call for commitment, social responsibility, and a « politics of recuperation » (Friedman 465). There is no getting around the fact that this project is grounded in the very referentiality which poststructuralism took extraordinary pains to eliminate.

The embarrassment of this is not simply due to the long neglect of referentiality on an aesthetic plane. The difficulty has a deep political cast, given the equally long association of realism with elitist social values and reactionary politics. As early as 1982, Gerald Graff—in defending the consistency of his own left realism—exposed the error of the « left

textualist » association of realism and reaction (« Left Textualism, » *passim*). Unfortunately it has taken nearly a decade for textualists to begin to admit that the natural product of a « de-realized » radicalism is a thoroughly de-activated politics.

To dodge the embarrassment of this 'realization' (in both senses), the term post/poststructuralism is affixed to the new referentiality. If referentiality follows organically from poststructuralism, as we are led to believe, it is only in the sense that a respect for traffic laws follows from a long series of traffic tickets and wrecks. A far better label, I would suggest, is postmodern realism, which will be used throughout this paper. Our project is to explore the roots of postmodern realism as a critically responsible turn against the irrealist turn of poststructural « postmodernism. »

It should be noted that an analogous « turn within a turn » occurred in the case of modernism. Andreas Huyssen distinguishes an adversarial early modernism from later modernism (264 and 265). Peter Burger (*Theory of the Avantgarde*, 1984) describes how the long-neglected anti-modernist avantgarde—often confused with the very modernism it opposed—anticipated what we term postmodern realism in its effort to sublate art and life. Charles Russell (*Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries*, 1985) shows that in Tristan Tzara's dada movement (his journal, *Dada*, being introduced in 1919) the celebration of instinct went so far as to condemn all meaning a priori. This anti-objective impulse, however, was too negative and anarchic to satisfy followers such as Andre Breton. Whereas

for Tzara instinct was privileged only because it undermined the authority of reason and any aesthetic, philosophic, or moral order, for Breton and the proto-surrealists the disruptiveness and passion they were exposed to while submitting to subconscious impulses seemed to promise an entirely new manner of perceiving and experiencing the world. Soon, they were dissatisfied with Tzara's contentment to merely repeat the playful litanies of destruction and arbitrariness that generated the dada artworks. Rather, they preferred to follow their newfound creative freedom to more productive ends. (Russell 126)

Postmodernism needs a similar periodization. If Huyssen is correct, the critical stance of what we term postmodern realism is in part a re-version to early modernist values. In its earliest stage it carried an adversarial power

which waned in the so-called me-generation of the 1970s, as early realist tendencies gave way to the poststructural textualism that Huyssen considers less an expression of postmodernism than a clandestine extension of modernism. Early postmodern realism had effectively bridged the gap between the intensive realism of Lukács, with its emphasis on lived experience, and Brecht's stress on the imagination as an instrument for dislodging false, consensual impressions of social reality. As Spanos notes, Brecht was a postmodernist in political purpose while remaining a modernist in technique (111).

Ginsberg and Early Postmodern Realism

Early postmodern realism was helping to close that gap, bringing technique and purpose into closer accord. A good example is found in the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, who forged a link between the alienated ethos of the Beats and the political commitment of the rising New Left. (The bridge fell short, however, if Christopher Lasch is right in his judgment that the New Left itself was largely premised upon alienation and other personal issues such as authenticity) (Clecak 235). He furiously regenerated the adversary ethos of early modernist art. The impersonality and « objectivity » of later modernism, in Kermode's estimation, had been an abrogation of responsibility (Kermode 664), producing more « muddle ... but no revolution, and much less talent » (Kermode 671). Ginsberg, by contrast, not only blasts us with his personality, but also with a whirlwind of realist passion. Like Keruoac he undertakes to grasp hard reality by recording every available thought and action (Simpson 68-69). His acute personalism and sacramentalization of everyday reality stand in stark contrast with modernist dogma as expressed by Auden: « Art is not life and cannot be/a midwife to society » (qtd. Kermode 662).

Still, as impossible as it is to separate Ginsberg's art from his life, his model of reality—in which his political concerns, his drug habit, and his homosexuality become the dubious building blocks of concrete referentiality—is never simply mimetic. At times it is even hallucinatory, but it is nonetheless a prototype for early postmodern realism. His vision of alternate realism as a political instrumentality corresponds to the transformation of the Left's comprehension of reality itself. While the Old

Left held fast to naive realism, the New Left adopted the kind of reconstructive realism that was often expressed—to the chagrin of culturally conservative leftists such as Philip Rahv, who supported the New Left while attacking the counterculture (Podhoretz 866)—as much in alternative lifestyles as in alternative ideas. Ginsberg, to be sure, practiced both. His objective has been to make a 'real' difference, responding, for example, to nuclear reactors by screaming, « I dare your reality... » (Plutonian Ode 36-37, in Ginsberg 703).

Sontag's Postmodern Realism

This iconoclastic realism was paralleled in the literary theory (or anti-theory) of Susan Susan. Though Sontag has not inspired any school or consistent following, this fact owes much to the unsystematic nature of her writing (Kennedy, « Archaeology, » 23). For the same reason, her place in the rise of postmodern realism can only now be recognized. Early in the 1960s she had adumbrated the fissure that is presently making for two rival postmodernisms. Twelve years before Baudrillard's similar stance in *The Mirror of Production* (1975), she faulted Lévi-Strauss for his structuralist « severity of theory »—that is, his neutralization of any given primitive society on the procrustean bed of scientific detachment (Kennedy, « Archaeology, » 31-32). She could acknowledge Levi-Strauss's « profoundly intelligent sympathy » for the pre-literate tribes that he studied (Sontag 72), yet at the same time she was revolted by the « philistine formulas » and stifling value-neutrality of an anthropology which « conquers the estranging function of the intellect by institutionalizing it. » Thus « the world is professionally divided into 'home' and 'out there,' the domestic and the exotic, the urban academic world and the tropics (Sontag 74). Like Ginsberg's hallucinatory realism, or, more recently, Edward Said's postmodern response to « orientalism, » Sontag's « erotics » of art would transform and extend rather than flatly deny « reality. »

The ideological corollary of this domestic/exotic dichotomy is the institutionalization of the « domestic » world as a social and political given. Thus Sontag considers the « anthropologist, so far as his country is concerned, as sterilized politically » (Sontag 74). Scientific detachment is closely bound up with political disengagement. The estranging function of ideological

discourse is negated along with primitive difference, offering in both cases a triumph over intellectual uncertainties. This, to borrow Daniel Bell's term from the late 1950s, could only mean the « end of ideology, » by way of the compression of all ideological discourse into a single, univocal form. Descriptive style under such circumstances could only take the form of abstruse and naive realism.

Sontag's realism, by contrast, invites cultural and political engagement with a radical 'other' that can only be understood experientially, like Ginsberg's alternative reality. Applied to art, this realism requires that critics cease to view literary and artistic works as simple « statements. » Art, she argues, « is not only about something; it is something » (Sontag 21). Nevertheless, art is not simply « self-referring »; for « works of art ... refer to the real world—to our knowledge, to our experience, to our values. They present information and evaluations » (Sontag 21). What distinguishes this content from the conceptual knowledge of science is its evocation of excitement, commitment, judgment, etc. (Sontag 21-22). This is the knot which binds Sontag's « erotics » with social and political engagement, and aesthetics with ideology.

Many of Sontag's concerns vis-a-vis Lévi-Strauss have found a hearing with the rise of « postmodern anthropology. » Here ethnography favors « discourse » over « text » and rejects the « observer-observed » ideology that so deeply disturbed Sontag. The new ethnography has been described as a process that first transforms everyday reality into the « restorative vision » of « disoriented consciousness, » and then returns it to « the familiar, but forever transformed, shores of the commonplace world » (Tyler 126)—a process strongly resembling Ginsberg's poetics and Sontag's « erotics, » with one major difference: like Derrida, postmodern ethnography has tended to hold that « the point of discourse is not how to make a better representation, but how to avoid representation » (Tyler 128). Ginsberg and Sontag, like all postmodern realists, are not averse to representation, but only to the repressive misrepresentations of ideological fiat.

A similar flexibility informs Sontag's response to humanism, by contrast to that of the poststructuralists (whose thought has been all too often been equated with « postmodernism » in general). Ideology, for Sontag, is the web of cultural assumptions which represent an unnatural « truth » as reality itself (Kennedy, « Archaeology, » 24-25). Humanism is one such outmoded ideology, producing repression in the name of « culture. » Within

literary culture it forces incorporation in the name of « interpretation »—hence Sontag's famous diatribe, *Against Interpretation*, 1966. Nevertheless, what she calls for is not a totalistic war on humanism but a pluralism which transcends such ideology: rather than an 'either/or' she endorses a 'both/and,' consciously modeled on Kenneth Burke's pluralism. This open-ended dialectics of difference is Hegelian in its call for negation, yet post-Hegelian in its negation of absolutism. Combined with that dialectic, Sontag's abiding commitment to experience and consciousness merely 'untotalizes' humanism without discarding it.

That is where she breaks with Derrida and most poststructuralists (Kennedy, « Archaeology, » 26-27). Against Foucault's broad-spectrum dismissal of meaning and value—ironic totalizing from a nominal anti-totalist (who broke with structuralists, for example, over their imposition of totalistic categories on history) (Foucault 15-16)—she is satisfied simply to open new, countervailing modes of representation. Against Derrida's absolute relativism and endless deferral of meaning, her rejection of pseudo-realistic truth-claims takes the form of an endorsement of truth as a horizon beyond discursive meaning. Experience, in other words, is prior to meaning and certainly prior to language (Kennedy, « Archaeology, » 30-31)—a priority that could well pass for an axiom of post-modern realism and an anecdote to the poststructural collapse of all content and signification.

Some relation to content, then, remains obligatory for Sontag. Even Ortega and Robbe-Grillet, she tells us, cannot completely escape the spell of content without « giving to 'form' a defiantly anemic ... look » (Sontag 31). As a corrective, she undertakes « to do justice to the twin aspects of art: ... as the overcoming or supplementing of reality and as the making explicit of forms of encountering reality, as autonomous individual creation and as dependent historical phenomenon » (Sontag 31).

In the mid-sixties Sontag's conscious allegiance was unfortunately given over to « the problems and objectives of 'modernism' in the arts. » This led her to favor an art where « content may be considered as a device of form, » and where historicism gets at most an honorable mention (Sontag 92). Lukács's critical realism, as developed in his *Realism in Our Time* (1956), gets less honorable mention; but her choice of Lukács and Lévi-Strauss a polemical adversaries is revealing. It has the nature of a family feud on both sides. She is related in important ways to both of these antithetical titans. For all her solicitude for « form, » she shares with Lukács an abiding concern for content;

and for all her distrust of Levi-Strauss's dispassionate form, she greatly covets his primitivist content.

What Sontag is desperately searching for is a new form—one capable of containing, without leakage or reductionism, that most important content of them all: consciousness itself. The difficulty of finding a secure place for consciousness is that, in her view, consciousness is always ineffable and indescribable. Great art draws much of its power from « the contradiction between expression and the presence of the inexpressible... The most potent elements in a work of art are, often, its silences » (Sontag 36). Since for Sontag these silent contents are nonetheless real, the mimetic theory of Lukács will simply not do. She differs, however, with most apologists for modernism in that her concern is not so much with what Lukács includes in his mimetic theory as what he excludes. Likewise she departs from the New Critics, on the formalist side, due to their exclusions of context. She is not so much disturbed by a deep relationship between literature and history as by the notion of a simple relationship between them. The same applies to the relationship between literature and culture.

Clearly Sontag's realism breaks with the usual mimetic relationship between art and world, observer and observed. It presents, rather, a tidal process—toward and away from given reality, toward and away from mimetic expression, toward and away from form. Whereas modernism reduces this reciprocity to unilateral formalism, Sontag offers a content/form continuum. Postmodern realism, thus conceived, is not the negation of formalism, but simply its organically related complement, its obverse side.

From Foucault to Postmodern Ideology

Along similar lines, Michel Foucault took his stand against « ahistorical, asocial formalism » (Said, *Text*, 243). This explains his scorn for Derrida's ahistorical, laissez-faire textualism (Said, « Foucault, » 7). Foucault can well be appreciated in the light of Lentricchia's cogent argument (in *After the New Criticism*, 1980) that current theory has been paralyzed by its disengagement from social reality. He can also be appreciated for his contribution to a postmodern (anti-Hobbesian and anti-Leninist) understanding of local as opposed to central power structures (Walzer *passim*).

The problem is that Foucault pushes localism to the point of anarchy and nihilism; and he so generalizes the concept of power (despite his penchant for Nietzsche as an anti-generalist) that resistance to power (as in Foucault's own political stance of May, 1968) gives way to fatalism. In short, as Said notes, Foucault's methodological breakthrough becomes a theoretical trap (*Text*, 244).

Foucault's ideas on generalized power, according to the French liberal humanist Marcel Gauchet, have inadvertently promoted the notion that exclusion and imprisonment are so much the essence of Western civilization that on this score there is no significant moral distinction between Western democracies and the Soviet sphere of power (Pavel 21). That notion, of course, suffered in the 1980s as the Soviet Union plunged deeper into corruption and inertia, and as « socialist » countries of the Third World came to be viewed on a scale running « from repressive Cuba to genocidal Cambodia... » (Pavel 22). These developments, according to Pavel, contributed to a

post ideological frame of mind, which dismissed the older yearning for both « the end of history » and a radical cut with the past. Since the destiny of society ceases to be the object of dogmatic speculation, political philosophy again has meaning. The new thinkers are moderate humanists... (Pavel 22)

Some of these thinkers, in addition to being neo-humanists, are confirmed postmodernists. We would only differ with Pavel's characterization of this new frame of mind as « postideological. » It indeed has departed from the « true believer » line of ideology; but it is all the more concerned with open ideological discourse and the exploration of ideological alternatives. Here, as with Sontag, the principle concern is with difference. By disclaiming access to universal or absolute truths, postmodern realism restores the ground for political and cultural alterity.

The Hermeneutics of Postmodern Realism

The price of alterity is the chaos of indeterminant history, a labyrinth whose monster is the irreducible « thing itself. » Taken in all its facticity and particularity, such a world is epistemologically uninhabitable—in fact, it is

scarcely a « world » at all, but only the blooming and buzzing chaos that James somewhere described as reality in the raw. « Worldmaking, » to borrow Nelson Goodman's term, becomes an epistemological and ideological imperative. Like Ginsberg's paradoxical blend of public and private, worldmaking is as intensely personal as it is social and political. While its personal element restores the capacity for engagement, after decades of modernist impersonalism, it also, through its respect for difference, divides pluralist, postmodern ideology from totalitarian 'in-difference.'

The rise of postmodern realism out of the ashes of poststructural nihilism promises a more « engaged » approach to literature in years to come. A case in point from the world of fiction is the direction John Barth's work has taken after *Lost in the Funhouse* and *Chimera*. The autocritical, self-deconstructive nature of these earlier works carried limited possibilities for political and ideological involvement. Barth seems to have sensed this, and subsequently turned to a more direct encounter with ideology and realism alike—albeit a complex, postmodern encounter.

His vehicle for this engagement was the place he assigned to the CIA in both *Sabbatical* and *Tidewater Tales*, where his liberalism was given a free hand. Unlike Pynchon, Barth has elected to take an overt political stance (Bradbury 64), adopting the CIA as his symbolic bete noire. His « realistic » depiction of the CIA does not in any way sacrifice the ambiguity which inevitably attends CIA activities—the perfect analogue for postmodern literary activities. Realism and ambiguity cease to be antipodes for Barth or postmodern realists.

Several questions arise, however, within this realist context. Does radical ambiguity carry us into spheres of meaning which preclude « public » philosophical judgment in social and political areas, resulting in the « anything-goes » postmodernism that Habermas so deplores? Such an outcome is part of the legacy of poststructuralism, which reinscribes philosophy as mere « writing. » Philosophy can then aspire to no more « than other genres of literature, namely to private edification » (McCarthy, « Private, » 364).

An alternative is offered by Richard Rorty (McCarthy 363), whose theory of the novel closely follows Kundera's position in his *Art of the Novel* (1988). Here the « wisdom of the novel » consists of its portrayal of a Kafkaesque world whose relativism squares with the reality of life in our Godless, modern world. Unfortunately, having moved in the direction of

postmodern realism so far as literature is concerned, Rorty proceeds to turn this Kafkaesque model against religion and ideology, as if these were static entities, immune to the same 'postmodernization' which Rorty would apply to literature. Religion and ideology, by this account, are reduced to the idealistic retreatism of the « true believer »; but Rorty's opposition to religion—in the name of his « New Pragmatism »—seems curiously at odds with the deepest roots of pragmatism on the religious question. William James, in *The Varieties of the Religious Experience*, rejected such categorical terms; and the same pragmatic perspective that James brought to religion is now emerging in the ideological discourse of postmodern realism.

This approach to ideology dispenses with attempts to ground knowledge in conceptual structures apart from experience; and it has little more use for the positivist perspective which would bind us to the notion of direct correspondence between the « world » and the words that describe it. It challenges, likewise, the dominance of « analytic philosophy, » which long reduced meaning « to atomistic terms and sentence structure ... » (Bell 216). With Rawls and Dworkin it returns moral discourse to a central role, supported by a blend of rational inquiry and moral intuition (Bell 217).

Daniel Bell relates this entire trend to what he terms a « turn to interpretation »—a turn which shows us how far we have come since Sontag's *Against Interpretation*. For Bell « interpretation » contributes the very alterity which it denied for Sontag. As she used it, the word connoted cultural repression, leading her to conclude that rather than a « a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art » (Sontag 14). In postmodern realism, however, we have the two as a complementarity: both a hermeneutics and an erotics. Sontag, in fact, did as much as anyone to make this complementarity possible.

This is the « new hermeneutic » of Jameson, in opposition to poststructural critics of hermeneutics (Jameson 21). Jameson cites Ricoeur's dual sense of hermeneutics—as both mystification and demystification. The hermeneutics that Sontag strenuously objected to was clearly the former: a cultural and ideological closure. Ricoeur, however, espouses hermeneutics as a « reduction of illusion » rather than a « message » or « proclamation » (qtd. in Jameson 284).

Bell's sense of the word « interpretation » owes much to Gadamer and Ricoeur, and spells the end of the long reign of « naive observation » in a host of fields: radical behaviorism in psychology, physicalism in philosophy (Bell

218), and, we would add, the dualism of naive realism and blanket anti-realism in the humanities. This turn is also associated with Clifford Geertz in anthropology, Robert Bellah in sociology, and Nelson Goodman in philosophy. Goodman takes the project so far as to jettison the art/science schism in favor of a common prismatic perspective of « rightness » as opposed to « truth » (Bell 218-19).

This circumvents the presumed opposition of a text's factual and fictive qualities—qualities which have dominated naive realism and modernist formalism alike. The modernist position is in fact shared by that strain of « postmodernism » which, in the deconstructive spirit, « carries the traditional modern hostility of literature toward public language to its nihilistic extreme... No wonder that Gerald Graff (1989) after surveying de Man's work remarks that ... structuralism and deconstruction look remarkably like the latest attempt in a long historical line to establish the importance of literature by discrediting ordinary language... » (Kernan 166-67).

Such « ordinary language » would include, of course, the languages of politics, history, and all social sciences. Naturally these disciplines resist Paul de Man's definition of language (in « Semiology and Rhetoric, » 1979) as « pure rhetoric. » Part of this resistance, however, has itself taken a postmodern form—namely, postmodern realism. The postmodern turn is especially pronounced in the working assumptions of today's intellectual history, where Quentin Skinner and Dominick La Capra have led the way toward the balanced interpretive methodology that may be called the hermeneutics of postmodern realism. The turn away from positivist theories of meaning in history—or what La Capra calls « natural history »—occasioned a highly symptomatic shift in interest from Wittgenstein's verification theories to his study of language games. In his *Philosophical Investigations* (no. 43) Wittgenstein states that « the word 'meaning' ... can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in language » (qtd. Thiher 25).

Needless to say, such a linguistic criterion of meaning would disturb a great many historians; and for this reason Hayden White's major works (*Metahistory*, 1973, and *Tropics of Discourse*, 1978) have been better received by literary critics than by working historians. Skinner and LaCapra, however, have managed to steer a middle course: utilizing hermeneutics in a postmodern sense while avoiding the worst excesses of Wittgensteinian « word games. » (Let us be frank, the metaphor of « play » is rather difficult

to accept when the topic under historical investigation is, say, the Nazi holocaust). La Capra's concern for « dialogue » in historiography brings him close to Bakhtin's concept of a dialogue which subsumes the language of individual speakers. « Far from diminishing the creative powers of the individual through textualism or pantextualism, La Capra's critical method takes him beyond both to a new point of critical interaction between language and the world » (Thornton, forthcoming). This critical nexus owes much to Hayden White, who has been unfairly dismissed by many who fail to realize the new directions of fiction in the area of postmodern realism.

In short, the 'fictionalization of history' can only be taken as a grievous affliction where fiction itself is viewed as pure illusion, escapism, or the like. A more serious view of fiction, one which understands its purpose and practice in contextual as well as textual terms, offers an entirely different prospect where fiction and history intersect. For White, the real danger is not from fictionalized history but from history with no literary dimension... (Thornton forthcoming)

A similar point was being made by Quentin Skinner in a precocious article of 1975, « Hermeneutics and the Role of History » (*New Literary History*, Vol. 7). Mediating the textual/contextual rift, Skinner notes how both historians and literary scholars tend to overstate the division between heteronomous and autonomous modes of interpretation—hence, they treat the text either as « history » or as « literature, » respectively. A similar mediation is taking place within cultural history. Against Baudrillard's insistence that « the real is no longer real, » but only an illusion, Macherey argues that « Art and reality are not two independent domains... On the contrary, we must understand that art is something completely real, completely material » (qtd. Montag 97).

Such mediation, however, does nothing to solve the further problem of institutional regulation: which texts are worthy of interpretation, and by whom? So long as the historical text was treated as a positivist document, and the literary text as a self-contained artifact, in the manner of the New Criticism, this ideological question would not even arise. Postmodern realism thus 'opens a new can of worms,' politically speaking. The hermeneutics of postmodern realism foregrounds ideological issues which compel personal involvement on the part of authors and readers alike.

Such involvement has been most pronounced in contemporary nonfiction literature, which shows signs of emerging as a postmodern genre in its own right (Thornton and Thornton, *passim*). The conflation of « fact » and « fiction » in this genre contributes to the current dialectic of novelistic and journalistic narrative strategies, producing a plurality of pos-sible « real » worlds (Zamora 44). This can take several forms: 1) the « non-fiction novel, » as represented by Capote, Mailer, and Hunter S. Thompson; 2) the « new journalism, » as represented by Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe, and Joyce Carol Oates; and 3) documentary fiction, as found in E. L. Doctorow, Gore Vidal, and Carlos Fuentes—the latter being inspired by the example of Ambrose Bierce, who becomes the protagonist of Fuentes's *The Old Gringo*. Documentary fiction, as opposed to traditional realist fiction, « incorporates historical material into its fictional structure, actively engaging it in the service of the fiction rather than making it merely a backdrop for the fictional action ... » (Zamora 48).

The organizing power of these narrative strategies, like Goodman's « rightness » model, accords with the postmodern recognition that ideologies, as systems of interpretation, are less to be treated as true or false than as functional or institutional, relating to concrete political situations. At an early stage postmodernists concluded that « the language in which realism—or any other mode of representation—operates cannot escape ... ideological 'contamination.' However, it also reminds us ... that awareness of ideology is as much an ideological stand as common-sense lack of awareness of it » (Hutcheon 180).

Thus the ideological awareness which condemned realism by association with humanism, or with the political status quo, finally rebounds to a qualified defense of realism. Not just realism, but representation as such, carries an ideological taint. The issue, then, is no longer to affirm or deny realism, but to ask a number of distinctly ideological questions: « WHOSE reality is being represented? » (Hutcheon 182), whose is being repressed, and toward what end?

Asking those questions is an act of critical distancing, not from ideology in general, but from particular dominant and repressive ideologies. Such distancing, for Ricoeur, is a way to understand ourselves and our world more objectively and « realistically, » in the postmodern sense of the word. Since there is no critical ground outside of history, society, or one's own interest, any critique of ideology must remain partial: it « is only a

moment—albeit an important moment—in the endless hermeneutical task of renewing and appraising our social-historical heritage » (Thompson 188).

Our understanding of that « hermeneutic task » has undergone sufficient change since 1966 that we can now affirm Sontag's experiential postmodernism while moving beyond her conclusion that in « place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art » (Sontag 14). The either/or she applied as an erotics/hermeneutics dichotomy is no more necessary than the either/or of Rorty's « pragmatic » contest with religion and ideology. What Sontag failed to anticipate was the 'postmodernization' of hermeneutics. Likewise, with the postmodernization of ideology, it is finally possible to grant the ideological underpinnings of literature and art without committing these cultural forms to either political or socioeconomic reductionism.

Conclusion

Though still formative and amorphous, the politics of postmodern realism can be recognized as a profound critical departure within the more general politicization of literature. That broad political turn, in Gerald Graff's opinion, is but a restoration of traditional literary concerns. This study can agree with Graff in some measure; yet it is necessary to qualify his position by stressing some distinctly new elements of cultural postmodernism. The cultural impetus behind the return to politics is new in two vital respects: its infrastructural ties with the postindustrial world, and its radically transformed mode of representation, which we term postmodern realism.

As we have seen, the new postmodernism breaks with the art/world dichotomy that has long dominated modernist aesthetics and has carried poststructuralism to even greater anti-representational extremes. By abandoning the fiction/nonfiction schism of naive realism, postmodern realism reaches beyond the « given » world of established power structures. It thus challenges the presumed bond between realism and conservatism which has permitted closet conservatives to pose as « radicals » by virtue of their anti-realism alone.

Postmodern realism fully incorporates the imaginative regions of art, affording a place for alternative visions of reality. These « possible worlds » become potential forces for change in our « given » world. It is a short hop,

therefore, from postmodern realism to a truly critical postmodernism. That critical departure is not so much anti-deconstructive, in the manner of Graff and Gaggi, as post-deconstructive. That is, it moves on from deconstruction to a reconstructive comprehension of the world beyond textual hermeticism. It absorbs Sontag's critique of humanism and hermeneutics, yet moves on to a postmodern corrective for both. It accepts the importance that Foucault gives to power structures, but flatly rejects the fatalism that attends Foucault's too-general conception of power. It largely affirms Rorty's relativism, yet sides with Thomas McCarthy against Rorty's turn from public philosophical judgment (see McCarthy, « Exchange » and « Private »; and Rorty). Critical postmodernism, in other words, takes a dual position on ideology. Even as it contests ideology as a program for definitive order and meaning (i.e., closure), it embraces ideological discourse as a medium of pluralist difference. Whereas realism has long been condemned for its association with the political status quo, there are signs that the tables could soon be turned. Anti-realism now stands accused for its sublime irrelevance in the face of real injustice on the part of established powers.

It has not been the purpose of this paper, however, to adjudicate that charge; for the issue no longer hinges on the hackneyed conflict between realism and anti-realism. From the perspective of postmodern realism, all significant representation is an amalgam of fact and fiction. That negates the very premises of the realist/anti-realist polarity. This paper, then, should not be read as a defense of the efficacy of realism IN GENERAL. Realism in general would be so diffuse as to be pointless. Any critical realism must be ideologically focused, and capable of asking such pointed questions as 'whose reality is being represented, and toward what end?'

The germ of this critical, postmodern realism can be traced to Ginsberg's poetry of the early 1960s. Appalled by the social and political irrelevance of modernism, and strongly suspicious, like Sontag, of the academic/Establishment alliance of most literary criticism, Ginsberg brought realism into the service of the counter-culture. There is no better prototype for today's politics of postmodern realism than his scream of protest: « I DARE YOUR REALITY! ».

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Sociocriticism Vol. VII, 2 (N°14) pp. 79-88
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« FAITS DIVERS » (HUMAN INTEREST STORIES)
AS A NARRATIVE GENRE*

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Love tragedy, stealing of a bridge forty meters long, apparition of the Blessed Virgin, disturbing confession of a transsexual, discovery of the remains of four occupants in a flying saucer; every day our newspapers reserve more or less space to these kinds of news items which are as diverse as they are curious. Some newspapers grant the column of « faits divers » only a very modest space, whereas others turn it into something of a specialty. Be that as it may, « faits divers » are part of the news universe and, of course, part of the universe of discourse. It is as this special kind of discourse that we are going to study the « faits divers ».

We have divided this study into four different parts. Firstly, we shall discuss the definition and main characteristics of « fait divers ». Secondly, we shall cast a glance at history to trace the evolution of « fait divers » in France. Thirdly, we shall deal with questions concerning the narrative structure of « fait divers ». Finally, we shall examine the social functions of the kind of discourse that a « fait divers » presents.

* Ce travail a été effectué au sein du groupe de recherche *Marginalisation et marginalité dans les pratiques discursives*, dirigé, à l'Université de Montréal, par le professeur Antonio Gómez-Moriana. Ce groupe de recherche est subventionné par le Conseil de Recherche en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH) et par le Fonds pour la formation de chercheurs et l'aide à la recherche (FCAR).

1. What is a « fait divers » ?

Dramatized reality

The most common meaning of the term « fait divers » is a column in a daily newspaper where the day's incidents, usually murders, accidents, suicides or other outstanding incidents, are grouped together. Use of the term dates back to the creation of the national press in France, that is, to somewhere in the last 30 years of the 19th century. The primary meaning of the term is of professional order as it denotes a news category. The term does, however, also signify a piece of news of little importance, an insignificant incident as opposed to significant news and historic events. If a Frenchman wants to minimize the importance of an incident he can say: « Ce n'est qu'un fait divers! » (« It's only a piece of news ! ») or if he wants to emphasize the importance of a news item he can say: « Ce n'est pas un simple fait divers ! » (« It's not just a piece of news ! »). This pejorative use of the term is the reason why the column of « faits divers » is often pushed into the background in the major daily newspapers. It is with just cause that Roland Barthes calls the column « the ragbag of unclassifiable news items »¹. Newspapers which devote a lot of space to faits divers, as well as those weeklies which do the same, are generally regarded as the popular press, even as the common press. Newspapers such as *Le Devoir* or *Le Monde* are qualitatively contrasted with weeklies such as *Allo Police* or *Détective*.

The column of « faits divers » is also commonly associated with horror and bloody crimes. Although the stories usually found in the column do relate a violent death, although murder is in fact the favoured subject, one cannot, however, label this column « the horror column ». The choice of topics is certainly limited but not to murder alone. The column also takes an interest in suicides, certain types of accidents, natural catastrophes, monsters and abnormal individuals, various curiosities of nature - such as eclipses and comets, manifestations from the hereafter, heroic deeds, miscarriages of justice and, finally, in anecdotes and misunderstandings². As can be seen from this list of topics, a fait divers is always about some sort of a transgression, a deviation from a norm (social, moral, religious or natural norm).

For Roland Barthes the main characteristic of a fait divers is to be « a complete piece of news or, to be precise, an immanent piece of news; it contains all the relevant information: one does not have to know anything to absorb a fait divers; it does not refer the reader to anything but itself »³. Immanence differentiates « faits divers » from other journalistic news which are not intelligible if taken out of context. Unlike other news, « fait divers », according to Georges Auclair⁴, can be read and understood out of all historic context.

In addition to immanence, « fait divers » has another characteristic: the recurrence of topics. In fact, it seems that « fait divers » is eminently recurrent. The range of topics, which we mentioned earlier, remains the same through the years. However, as Michel Foucault explains: « on the other hand all these minor incidents - despite their frequency and monotony - must appear remarkable, curious, extraordinary and unique, or almost unique, incidents in people's minds »⁵.

Yet another characteristic of « fait divers » is that it passes itself off as truthful, topical and close to the reader. As a matter of fact, a fait divers fascinates people by this illusion of closeness. Accumulation of reliable details, remarks and confidences of both the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s), interviews and photographs all contribute to the authenticity of a story and to the illusion of closeness.

2. The evolution of fait divers in France

From oral to written

As mentioned before, the term fait divers dates back to the creation of the national press in France, that is, to the 19th century. Yet this particular type of news existed long before the kind of journalistic exploitation we have come to know today. In fact, until the 19th century, « faits divers » were closely linked to a form of popular entertainment in which the public participated, and to oral transmission.

It goes without saying that conversation was the very first method of spreading news. « But to spread among people news had to find its places of exchange and its regular distribution channels, and it was naturally in the 17th

century, with the boom in trade and the development of big fairs, that these indispensable structures were established »⁶. News was passed on at market places where people gathered both to get supplies and to find out what was happening in the world around them. The passing on of news in these places had at first a utilitarian purpose being the fastest way to find out if, for example, a war was raging in the neighbouring country, if a group of bandits was plundering such-and-such a region or if a plague was still ravaging such-and-such a village. Besides these useful pieces of information all kinds of « true and extraordinary » stories were told. They were a great success with the public.

At the same time, taking advantage of the rapid development of printing, « occasionals » were born. They were called occasionals « (...) because of their occasional publication (...) »⁷. The occasionals « in most cases reported the political events of the moment: the wars of Italy, the deeds and gestures of princes, royal visits, etc. but as early as this the reader could also find a great number of « extraordinary stories » and « curious news items » which were all the more unlikely the more their authenticity was uncontrollable »⁸. These publications were sold by hawkers in both big towns and in the country. However, « even when news is printed it remains strongly marked by orality when circulated among people. News is not absorbed individually but collectively and usually serves as a pretext for a real spectacle »⁹.

Gazettes, which were published on a regular basis, first appeared in the 17th century and were intended for a well-read and cultivated public. Likewise, handwritten news-sheets, which were sold by hawkers in the 18th century, were aimed at cultivated circles. With the advent of gazettes and handwritten news-sheets « the public is split into two groups which remain separate until the 19th century »¹⁰.

Among the general public a trade of occasionals and canards gradually developed and they both remained closely linked not only to conversation but to fairs as well. In the 19th century someone selling « laments » and canards was a familiar figure. He would set himself up to a busy spot where he would open out a painted cloth on which the key events of « fait divers » were depicted. People would gather around this salesman who would tell or sing a

story, usually a detailed account of a real-life drama. Then he would teach his audience to sing the story to a familiar tune. « At the beginning of the 19th century canards generally consisted of two parts. First there was an objective account of events, told by an anonymous voice, and then there was the « lament » of the criminal »¹¹. The illustrated texts of the story were sold at the end of the show. One has every right to assume that the sales of canards depended on the performance of the salesman.

Towards the mid-19th century a notable change took place: « newspaper aims to come out of its aristocratic isolation and, by lowering prices to become available to everybody, tries to conquer the immense general public which had been out of its reach so far »¹². The so-called « one-penny-press » is born. In addition to being reasonably priced and therefore available to the man on the street - which had not been the case with gazettes and handwritten news-sheets - these papers offered the general public « information, mainly in the form of « fait divers », presented in a romanticized and preferably melodramatic manner »¹³.

The « one-penny-press » quickly won public favour and ousted the traditional methods of spreading news. Consequently, it also modified the former ways of absorbing news. « Fait divers, in its henceforth printed form, shifted the reader from the collective spectacle, in which the public participated, to individual reading and thus to a much more passive role.

3. *Fait divers* as a narrative

The structure of « fait divers » according to Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes was the first to look into the problem of the structure of « fait divers ». The authors consulted for this study all refer to a short article by Barthes in which he aims to go beyond the taxonomic differences, which are more easily observable, in search of a structural difference.

Immanent, selective and repetitive, such are, as we have just seen, the main characteristics of « fait divers ». In addition to these, according to Barthes, there is a so-called closed structure which consists of at least two words that are somehow connected. « It is the problematics of this connection that constitutes « fait divers »¹⁴. It is the relationship between the two words

that is important. Two kinds of relationships are recognized: *causal relationships* (a crime and its motive, an accident and its circumstances) and *coincidental relationships*.

Let us first look at *the causal relationship*. This relationship, according to Barthes, is always paradoxical. As « fait divers » is supposed to amaze and surprise the reader, it should show a disproportion between cause and effect. The causal relationship must therefore be absurd or at least different from what one is entitled to expect. Here is an example: a young nanny kidnaps the baby of her employers - not to get a ransom, as one might expect, but simply because she adores the baby !

There are two kinds of causal relationships in what Roland Barthes calls « the problems of causality »¹⁵. First of all there are *incidents of which the cause cannot be determined straight away*, the unexplicables. These in turn are further divided into two categories of incidents: prodigies (UFOS, paranormal phenomena, religious phenomena, etc.) and mysterious crimes (where causality is deferred). Secondly, there are the « surprises of number »¹⁶ where minor causes result in major effects, such as: « An Englishman joins the legion: he didn't want to spend Christmas with his mother-in-law »¹⁷.

The coincidental relationship is equally divided into two. Firstly, we have repetition of an incident (third suicide in the same house, tenth accident in the same section of a road, etc.). As Roland Barthes emphasizes, this kind of « fait divers » « always encourages, in fact, to imagine an unknown cause, which only goes to show that in the popular consciousness the uncertain is always distributed, never repetitive »¹⁸ The repeated suicides in a certain place turn this place into a suspicious one, even haunted. Likewise, following a series of road accidents the road is named, in whole or in part, « the boulevard or road of death », therefore making the road responsible for all those deadly accidents.

Secondly, the coincidental relationship has an element which tends to bring two contrasting words together within the same incident. This is called *the bringing together of two qualitatively distant words* (a judge disappears on Pigalle, an old woman routs four gangsters). The coincidental relationship is all the more astonishing when stereotypes are involved.

4. The social function of « fait divers »

Dramas of private lives

Rejected by the intellectual élites, « fait divers » remains the type of news favoured by the general public - and this for several reasons. First of all, « faits divers » are real-life dramas drawn from the very private lives of ordinary people. Furthermore, they are written in a simple and familiar language and are usually abundantly illustrated, thus they are in everybody's reach. Even when the stories become public they still remain close to the everyday preoccupations of the reader. « Faits divers » are not about the actions of a head of state, about royal visits or other historic events, they are about the dramas in the lives of ordinary people: domestic crimes, suicides, kidnappings of children, tragic accidents, rapes, etc., and the reader can recognize himself in each of these stories which could basically be about himself. It is certain that the victims, the perpetrators and the witnesses of a published « fait divers », unchangeable in its printed form, instantly acquire a celebrity status. They stand out in the anonymity of the ordinary. « Faits divers » permit, as Michel Foucault stresses, to « trade the day-to-day routines for something different, to exaggerate proportions, to make a tiny piece of history visible, and in our everyday lives they give us access into a story »¹⁹.

The authors consulted for this study all agree that besides being popular, « fait divers » reflects the dominating beliefs, prohibitions and moral values of an era. « Faits divers point a finger at defiance thus mentioning the forbidden. These exemplary stories are to denounce all kinds of deviations and, by doing so, they reinforce the rules of behaviour laid down by the society. The fait divers « guards social cohesion against those who deny it and it does this by praising it...or threatens to destroy it... »²⁰.

The permanent and recurrent characteristics of « fait divers » refer, however, to more profound cultural constants. « The so-called morbid curiosity appeals to the most archaic sentiments of man: to assimilate some of the aura of tragedy or a bloody crime by seeing, touching, possessing an object or sometimes by merely reading « fait divers », that would virtually be like changing the signification from evil to perhaps good »²¹. « Faits divers »

suggest the existence of another, mysterious reality where the notions of destiny, fate, providence and miracle supplant those of chance, coincidence, good luck and bad luck. In reality, « fait divers » provides the public with a satisfactory explanation of something that goes beyond our comprehension. Nevertheless, by doing this it « casts a shadow on the coherence of the world, it suspects the univers of duplicity »²². Faced with objectivity and with scientific truth, which tends to clear all mysteries, « faits divers », on the contrary, maintain the ambiguity between the rational and the irrational, between the intelligible and the unintelligible.

Conclusion

We can define « fait divers » as a didactic, moralizing and an immanent story. These types of stories possess a closed structure - complete in itself, not referring to any contextual information outside the story itself - where at least two words are contrasted in either a causal relationship or a coincidental relationship.

« Fait divers » is also recurrent as it deals with the same topics year in year out: the challenge of the journalist is first of all to choose a potentially exploitable story and then to dramatize this story in a spectacular way. In other words, to turn a totally ordinary story into something unheard-of.

Furthermore, « fait divers » always presents itself as a real-life story; a story that is astonishing, curious, horrible or extraordinary, but true. Finally, a « fait divers » is about a transgression (social, moral, religious or natural). By pointing a finger at defiance, this type of news identifies social prohibitions, therefore reinforcing the system of values laid down by the society in which it finds itself.

NOTES

- 1 Traduit du français: « le fourre-tout des inclassables de l'information » Musée national des arts et traditions populaires (France), *Le faits divers*, Paris, éditions de la réunion des musées nationaux, 1982, p. 60.
- 2 Musée national des arts et traditions populaires (France). op. cit. p. 52
- 3 Traduit du français: « une information totale, ou plus exactement, immanente; il contient en soi tout son savoir: point besoin de connaître rien du monde pour consommer un fait divers; il ne renvoie formellement à rien d'autre qu'à lui-même ». Barthes, R., *Structure du fait divers, Essais critiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, p. 189.
- 4 Auclair, G., *Le mana quotidien : structures et fonctions de la chronique des faits divers*, Paris, Anthropos, 1970, p. 14.
- 5 Traduit du français: « il faut d'autre part que tous ces menus événements-malgré leur fréquence et leur monotonie-apparaissent comme singuliers, curieux, extraordinaires, uniques ou presque dans la mémoire des hommes » Foucault, M., *Ces meurtres qu'on raconte, Moi Pierre Rivière ayant égorgé ma mère, ma soeur et mon frère*, Paris, Julliard, 1973, p. 269.
- 6 Traduit du français: « Mais pour se répandre dans le public encore fallait-il que cette information trouvât ses lieux d'échange privilégiés, ses circuits de transmission réguliers et c'est naturellement au XVII^e siècle, avec l'essor du commerce et le développement des grandes foires, que ces structures indispensables se mirent en place » Musée national des arts et traditions populaires (France), op. cit. p. 111
- 7 Traduit du français: « (...) en raison de leur publication épisodique (...) » Ibid., p. 111
- 8 Traduit du français: « rapportaient le plus souvent les événements politiques du moment; les guerres d'Italie, les faits et gestes des princes, les « entrées royales », mais on y trouvaient aussi, dès cette époque, quantité de « récits extraordinaires » et de nouvelles curieuses « d'autant plus invraisemblables que leur authenticité était plus incontrôlable » Ibid., p. 111.
- 9 traduit du français: « même imprimées, les nouvelles diffusées en milieu populaire restent fortement marquées par l'oralité. Leur consommation n'est pas individuelle mais collective et sert généralement de prétexte à un véritable spectacle. » Ibid., p. 112
- 10 Traduit du français: « le public de l'information se scinde en deux parties, qui jusqu'au XIX^e siècle restent séparées ». Ibid., p. 113
- 11 Traduit du français: « Les canards, au début du XIX^e siècle, comportaient en général deux parties. L'une était le récit <<objectif>> des événements, fait par une voix anonyme; l'autre était la <<complainte du criminel >>. Foucault, M. op. cit., p. 272.
- 12 Traduit du français: « le journal tend à sortir de son isolement aristocratique et, en abaissant son prix de vente pour se mettre à la portée de toutes les bourses, cherche à conquérir l'immense public populaire qu'il n'avait pu atteindre jusque-là » Musée des Arts et Traditions populaires, op. cit. p. 114
- 13 traduit du français: « Une information essentiellement composée de faits divers présentés d'une manière romancée et volontier mélodramatique » Ibid., p. 114.
- 14 Traduit du français: « C'est la problématique de ce rapport qui va constituer le fait divers » Barthes, R., op. cit. p. 190
- 15 Traduit du français: « les troubles de la causalité » Barthes, R., ibid. p. 191
- 16 Traduit du français: « les surprises du nombre » Barthes, R., ibid. p. 193

- 17 Traduit du français: « Un anglais s'engage dans la légion : il ne voulait pas passer Noël avec sa belle mère ». Barthes, R., *ibid.*, p. 193
- 18 Traduit du français: « engage toujours, en effet, à imaginer une cause inconnue, tant il est vrai que dans la conscience populaire l'aléatoire est toujours distributif, jamais répétitif. » Barthes, R., *ibid.*, p. 194
- 19 Traduit du français: « de changer d'échelle, [de] grossir les proportions, [de] faire apparaître le grain minuscule de l'histoire, [d'] ouvrir au quotidien l'accès du récit ». Foucault, M., *op. cit.* p. 269
- 20 Traduit du français: "assure, en l'exaltant, la cohésion sociale face à ce qui la nie (...) ou menace de la détruire (...) ". Auclair, G., *op. cit.* p. 197
- 21 Traduit du français: « La curiosité dit <<morbide>> ferait ainsi appel aux sentiments les plus archaïques de l'homme: par la vue, le toucher, la possession d'un objet ou quelquefois la seule lecture, s'assimiler un peu de l'aura du tragique ou du sanglant, ce serait virtuellement en inverser le signe, de maléfique le rendre possiblement bénéfique ». *Ibid.*, p. 183
- 22 Traduit du français: « jette le doute sur la cohérence du monde, il soupçonne l'univers de duplicité. »
Musée des Arts et traditions populaires (France), *op. cit.*, p. 110.

ETUDE

OJOS Y OIDOS DEL RENACIMIENTO ROMANO : PIETRO ARETINO Y FRANCISCO DELICADO

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«Language is the main instrument of man's refusal to accept the world as it is»

George Steiner, *After Babel*

«On peut déjà se demander si une littérature purement orale et auditive ne remplacera pas, dans un délai assez bref, la littérature écrite... L'écriture supprimée, qu'en résulterait-il ? D'abord — et ceci serait heureux — le rôle de la voix, les exigences de l'oreille reprendraient dans la forme, l'importance capitale que ces conditions sensibles ont eues et qu'elles avaient encore, il y a quelques siècles. Du coup, la structure des oeuvres, leurs dimensions, seraient fortement affectées ; mais d'autre part le travail de l'auteur deviendrait bien moins facile à reprendre.»

Paul Valéry, «Notre destin et les lettres»

Si la vista y el oído resultan esenciales para establecer el primer contacto *ideológico* con el mundo que nos circunda, enraizando así en ese mundo nuestro sistema intercomunicativo, estos dos sentidos siguen siendo imprescindibles dentro de la esfera del código escritural, en la medida en que todo escritor oye, previamente, las palabras que alinea sobre el papel. Por tal razón, Delicado estipula de esta manera su posición frente a la lengua oral :

Y si quisieren reprehender que por qué no van muchas palabras en perfecta lengua castellana, digo que siendo andaluz y no letrado, y escribiendo para darme solacio... conformava mi hablar al sonido de mis orejas» (422-3)¹.

Partiendo de tal premisa, lo que nos proponemos examinar en el presente estudio es el modo en que dos escritores del Renacimiento (un andaluz y un toscano) configuran dos vibrantes y singulares *retratos* de Roma, ejecutados en los primeros años del *Cinquecento*, en los que se enlazan lo oído y lo escrito. Demostraremos, asimismo, que Delicado, sin descartar el aspecto visual, favorece la dimensión acústica y la «realidad» sonora intensificada por los vivaces diálogos de sus personajes, mientras Aretino, casi siempre en posición de mirón, prefiere incluir en su narración las descripciones que acentúan el elemento plástico y la variación cromática en los efectos de luz. Consideremos en primer lugar el predominio de lo acústico en *Lozana* que contrasta, como después veremos, con la hegemonía de lo visual en el Aretino.

Para poder recrear la vida y actividades de una determinada comunidad, en algunas áreas bien delimitadas de la ciudad papal («es la mayor parte de Roma burdel, y le dizen 'Roma putana'.» [XII : 124]), es preciso que el *auctor-Proxeneta-espectador* personaje se encuentre constantemente a la escucha de los discursos, gritos, imprecaciones, blasfemias y refranes populares. Nuestro «curioso e impertinente» testigo oye interjecciones, términos y vocablos típicos de las ferias, de los mercados, de las *estufas*², de los hospitales y del barrio de la judería. Vive en contacto con las grandes concentraciones humanas, ricas en localismos y conversaciones animadísimas, cuyo ritmo y cadencia siguen el compás desarticulado de las conversaciones de plaza de mercado. Conversaciones de las que la burla y el escarnio constituyen un elemento raramente ausente. El mercado es un sector privilegiado para captar conversaciones, gritos, palabras groseras, jergas populacheras y otros desmanes lingüísticos con el consecuente relajamiento del tono³. Los personajes-histriones ponen a sus lectores oyentes en la plaza del mercado, piedra imán que ejerce irresistible atracción, no ya sobre todo visitante, sino también, sobre un mundo abigarrado y permanente de cortesanas, letrados de raída capa, histriones, bufones, mendigos, peregrinos, pícaros y mercachifles de todo orden⁴. Oigamos a Rampín :

Por esta calle hallaremos tantas cortesanas juntas como colmenas... (XII : 121). Este es Campo de Flor, aquí es en medio de la çibdad. Estos son charlatanes, sacamuelas y gastapotras, que engañan a los villanos y a los nuevamente venidos... Está diziendo que quita el dolor de los dientes, y que lo dará por un bayoque... ¡ Y mirá el otro cuero hinchado, aquel papel que muestra ! Está diziendo que tiene polvo para verme, que son lonbrizes (XV : 154).

En otro contexto, después de haber presenciado una escena íntima entre Lozana y Rampín (XIV) el *auctor* (siempre atento a los ruidos) lamenta no poder describir el sonido que producen los ronquidos de los amantes : «Quisiera saber escribir un par de ronquidos...» (XIV : 145). Desde luego, mediante semejante efecto, el lector «oye» los ronquidos que se expanden por todo el discurso narrativo.

A medida que el lector se familiariza con aquellos lugares y ambientes de baja estofa, se sensibiliza con relación a la atmósfera que permea todo el relato. Delicado transcribe en su novela los gritos de la calle, el movimiento, la agitación, el tumulto, la algarabía que caracteriza a esos lugares propicios a las grandes concentraciones humanas : fiestas religiosas y proclamación de un nuevo papa (VI : 96), celebraciones (XIII : 136) y negocios (XVI). Paralelamente, encontraremos el hablar grosero y procac del carnaval⁵, del vulgo, así como la risa persistente de la feria y de las fiestas. Mucho nos intriga, por ejemplo, la metafísica de Lozana :

Señor Salomón, sabé que quatro cosas no valen nada si no son participadas o comunicadas a menudo : el plazer, y el saber, y el dinero, y el coño de la muger, el qual no deve estar vacuo, según la philosophia natural (LXI : 400).

El discurso épico traducía, en la época medieval, las impresiones de un mundo sordo ; el verbo «decir» y el nombre «palabra» no se empleaban en su sentido estricto⁶. Estos vocablos implicaban, más bien, una expresión, una enunciación, una información, pero nunca la voz sonora en sí, a la que accede Delicado. La risa cómplice de la voz, en el espacio de la ciudad es inherente al discurso delicadiano y constituye un elemento narrativo por sí misma. Al hacer reir a sus personajes, Delicado introduce una nueva dimensión en el tejido del discurso narrativo. Los matices de la narratividad dependen de la contex-

tura del lenguaje polimórfico. Narrar es vivir y hacer vivir el tiempo — encauzándolo, conformándolo, invirtiéndolo, entregándolo al buen capricho del lector (XVII). Las voces circulan libres y sonoras, reverberando en las risas de una comunidad totalmente despreocupada, y el texto se convierte en una cámara de ecos, en la cual resuena un afán de vivir y un deseo de olvidarse de las tribulaciones que inevitablemente acompañan a la pobreza. Escuchemos a Leonor, amiga de Lozana :

¡ Ay, qué gorda está esta putana ! Bien parece que come y bebe y triunfa y tiene quien bien la cavalgue para el otro mundo » (XLVII : 333).

En contraste con el trabajo del escritor de aquella época, el cual trataba de evocar mediante su relato los ruidos, las conversaciones, el ambiente de un lugar en particular (como una ciudad, un convento, un mercado, una taberna, un palacio, unos jardines), la intención de Delicado será la de dejar entrar directamente la voz de Roma en su relato : voz sonorizada por un *sancocho* o babel de lenguas. Aquella voz polifónica, característica de la ciudad se impone poco a poco y le da unos armónicos específicos al discurso literario. Delicado se percata de los más leves matices de la lengua castellana y de la italiana, que no sanciona ni rechaza, sino que transcribe tal como las oye en una escritura fonética. Introduce, maliciosamente, giros particulares de los esclavos plagados de concordancias vizcaínas :

Lozana — ¡ O qué linda tez de negra ! ¿ Cómo llamar tú ? ¿ Conba ?

Esclava — No. llamar Penda de xñora.

Lozana — Yo dar a ti cosa bona.

Esclava — Xñora, xi. Venir, venir, xñora dezir venir (XXIII : 200).

En otras palabras, el retrato acústico de una Roma-escenario teatral sirve de caja de resonancia a los diálogos entre los distintos personajes⁷. Recordemos, por ejemplo, los localismos que irrumpen en el relato durante la escena de la compra de las berenjenas, entre Rampín y el *Frutarolo* (XXXI). Otra característica secuencia callejera es la del mamotreto X, que se particulariza antes que nada por el uso del catalán, en una ciudad donde en la calle reinan oficialmente el latín y la lengua vulgar, contaminada por la intromisión de otros dialectos regionales (y comunidades inter-étnicas). Delicado intenta demostrar que la famosa tolerancia romana — en este caso, de carácter socio-

lingüístico — se singulariza por la preservación del idioma de origen de cada grupo racial representado en la Urbe. La laxitud de las costumbres se traduce en una laxitud en cuanto al instrumento de comunicación y una relativa negligencia en la ortografía. Sin embargo, el escritor es mucho más receptivo ante la «melodía» que ante la «grafía», por lo que trata de reproducir fielmente las mínimas inflexiones de la lengua catalana⁸. Advertimos que las palabras están mal escritas pero bien oídas, porque el *auctor* se fija más en lo que capta auditivamente que en la transcripción erudita de lo que está oyendo⁹. Además, hay que señalar que uno de los propósitos de Delicado era el de «devolver» al lector las palabras de la calle en su «autenticidad sonora» («audibilia pro visibilia» XLV : 321), y no tanto en su ortografía convencional.

Para el presbítero cordobés, la ciudad papal posee, lingüísticamente, una función lúdica indiscutible. Las fiestas, las reuniones, las ferias, definen la cadencia así como el compás de la vida urbana, y transforman esta misma vida, convirtiendo la ciudad en un auténtico espacio escénico. El recorrido de la ciudad y la visita a la judería (mamotretos XV y XVI) constituyen un cuadro acústico de nuevos ambientes y nuevas lenguas. La voz romana es proteica, polifónica y pluridimensional. Se niega a la homogeneidad de un purismo dictado por unas instancias pedantes y altaneras. La vía pública — no ya en el Renacimiento, sino a través de los tiempos — ha sido reacia al formalismo y al carácter normativo de las reglas gramaticales. La vía pública posee sus gamas de *entonación* y modulaciones verbales, que no son ni las del purista ni las de los libros, y estas reglas están en perpetuo cambio y constante ebullición. Constituyen el venero inalienable de la voz popular, rescatada de su anonimato gracias al sabroso acopio literario de los oídos delicadianos. Podemos establecer desde este momento una primera coincidencia entre la obra de Delicado y la del Aretino : ambos escritores tuvieron una profunda percepción de la importancia y peculiaridad lingüísticas del medio ambiente en que vivían. La lengua vive y evoluciona caprichosamente, por las calles, mientras que los libros y las gramáticas normativas no son nada más que pobres ataúdes de palabras que se murieron antes de llegar a la vida.

El itinerario geográfico emprendido por Lozana y Rampín se transforma, así, paulatinamente, en un recorrido étnico lingüístico. Nuevos ambientes y nuevas voces penetran, se integran y se instalan en el seno del discurso narrativo. La ciudad papal experimenta una multiforme y abigarrada cultura vocálica, oral y chillona. Semejante código cultural permanece estrechamente vinculado a la organización política y a las costumbres sociales de la

Urbe. Dichos rasgos culturales son sintomáticos de una visión laica de un mundo que se independiza de la verdad dogmática, y en la mayoría de los casos, se inserta en la tradición dionisíaca y carnavalesca de la antigüedad. Es, acaso, el re-encuentro del pueblo en su lugar : la calle y la plaza.

El desarrollo de la ciudad pone todavía más de relieve esta «literatura oral» : la feria con el carnaval, las farsas, las sátiras, las burlas y toda esa literatura escabrosa y erótica, encontrará cabida en el libro. La palabra fonética, el enunciado, el sonido mismo se convierten en voz del libro¹⁰. Si debemos señalar la negligencia ortográfica de Delicado, no es para achacar un descuido al autor ; al contrario, es para demostrar que el escritor se preocupa no tanto de la descripción visual como de la «alta fidelidad» acústica. Con la excepción de algunas breves ingerencias como narrador-espectador (IV, final del LXVI) y los títulos de los mamotreos-capítulos, *La Lozana Andaluza* es una novela auditiva (como lo es *La Celestina*) más apta para ser dramatizada que leída. Delicado pudo alcanzar una fidelidad acústica con efectos muy «realistas» (donde se destaca la nota de verosimilitud), gracias a una ortografía «inventada», imaginativa, fantasiosa que se adaptaba más a la palabra-sonido (a su peso acústico) que a la palabra escrita, y que se adecuaba más, por tanto, a una especie de lingua franca, idioma bastardo e híbrido por excelencia, que carece de reglas y normas orgánicas. Tal lenguaje oral se captaba en las calles de Roma. La fonética se hace signo literario. Delicado adopta con maestría el argot popular, en el texto literario, transcribiéndolo con una ortografía independizada de la *tiranía* así como del *totalitarismo* de las normas gramaticales. Y lo hace porque concede más importancia al oído que al código escrito. Transcribe así un sistema fonético de signos que se origina en el meollo mismo de la naciente clase burguesa y del bajo pueblo, se propaga por toda la ciudad y queda fijada en su forma más genuina y característica en el espacio de la novela.

La supremacía que Delicado concede al oído, se halla asimismo en el Aretino. Sin embargo, dado que el escritor italiano tenía una formación pictórica, en su discurso narrativo se impone el elemento visual¹¹ : colores, formas, disposición y organización de los objetos, accesorios, cuadros y distribución del espacio. El retrato que tenemos de Roma se evoca mediante una sucesión de *Pinturas* que surgen dentro de las reminiscencias de Nanna, formando un marco urbano susceptible de dar una unidad espacial a este amplio fresco de la sociedad romana (cf. *Le voci dell'istrione*, 1977). El *Flagelo de los Príncipes* no deja de estipular que las técnicas de los pintores se usan para sugerir escenas (no olvidemos el tópico horaciano : «Ut pictura poesis») :

E perciò io mi sforzo di ritrarre le nature altrui con la vivacità che il mirabile Tiziano ritrae questo e quel volto ; e perchè i buoni pittori apprezzano molto un bel groppo di figure abbozzate, lascio stampare le mie cose così fatte né mi curo di miniar parole» (*Sei giornate*, 1980 : 146).

Por su lado, Nanna, cuya percepción de los demás, y de cuanto sucede frente a ella, le permite enseñorearse del campo narrativo, no pierde ocasión de mirar, contemplar, observar :

... deliberai vedere... e perchè nell'oscuro si vede meglio con un occhio che con dui, chiuso il mancino, e fissando il dritto nel foro che era fra mattone e mattone, veggio...»¹².

Si las descripciones de Nanna son auténticas fiestas para los ojos, la meta que busca el escritor toscano toma otro rumbo. Mario Baratto afirma claramente que en los *cuadros* de Messer Pietro se realza la necesidad de escribir, buscando un acercamiento más fiel y menos sofisticado, al espectáculo de la calle. Oigamos al crítico italiano :

La pintura bella y serena no es el objetivo de Aretino, ni distingue a priori la poesía de la no poesía. Aretino sólo quiere revelar el carácter distinto, porque es contemporáneo de su narración, y las posibilidades de un arte más natural. Esta posibilidad no excluye una «pintura» que tienda a un efecto más violento y directo sobre quien escucha : «Eres una pintora que se basta con las palabras ; oyéndote me he enojado» exclama Pippa después de una pintura particularmente 'viva' de Nanna. El arte de Aretino se define más bien por un gusto descriptivo y sensual en el cual es fácil hallar una adhesión a la pintura, más que a la literatura de su época. «Esta pintura ha sido robada de la capilla» observa Balía (*Teatro y luchas sociales*, p. 298, n. 3)

Cabe señalar que el elemento ocular, como instrumento artístico de calibración ha sufrido un cambio drástico de la Edad Media al Renacimiento. En efecto, la tendencia medieval de San Agustín hacia las artes visuales, difería sustancialmente de la óptica humanista de un Leonardo da Vinci. Observador agudísimo, San Agustín había percibido inmediatamente el

peligro del sentido de la vista. En *De la fe de lo que no se ve* (op. cit., pp. 679-682), el obispo de Hipona nos informa de los riesgos y engaños que entraña la percepción visual. A lo largo de la Edad Media, los teólogos sostienen incluso que es malo fiarse de los sentidos. En el siglo XII, el cisterciense, Bernard de Clairvaux considera que los ojos son «annuntii fornicationis. Visio est prima occasio fornicationis. Mens enim per oculos capitur. Per oculos enim intrat ad mentem sagitta amoris.» (citado por Bubnova : 170). No podemos descuidar el hecho de que, en el siglo XIII, Gonzalo de Berceo ve en los sentidos corporales un instrumento de engaño e ilusión y, sobre todo, la puerta abierta a toda clase de pecados : «Cinco sesos del cuerpo que nos façen peccar,/ el ver, el oir, el oler, el gostar,/ el prender de las manos que dizimos tastar» (op. cit., p. 63). La visión conecta el espíritu con la materialidad del mundo.

Consciente de la malicia que estriba en la mirada, Aretino imagina una celda de convento, cuyas pinturas apuntan a una deliciosa subversión de la «Camera della Segnatura», decorada por Rafael Sanzio entre 1509 y 1511. El escritor imagina sobre las cuatro paredes de la celda la ilustración de un verdadero *Kama Sutra* occidental. Nanna, protagonista de *Sei giornate*, describe a Antonia los motivos de semejantes frescos :

La camera avea quattro facce : nella prima era la vita di Santa Nafissa... Nella seconda c'è la istoria di Masetto di Lampolecchio... Nella terza ci erano le suore che fur mai di quello ordine, con i loro amanti appresso e i figliuoli nati di esse... Nell'ultimo quadro ci erano dipinti tutti i modi e tutte le vie che si puo chiavare e farsi chiavare ; e sono obbligate le moniche prima che le si mettino in campo con gli amici loro di provare di stare negli atti vivi che stanno le dipinte (op. cit., *Passim*, pp. 14-5-6).

Puesto que no podemos transgredir los límites del *espacio* de nuestro estudio, algunas conclusiones se imponen, antes de rematar la presente exploración textual. Al contrastar la vida y la personalidad de la Lozana con las de Nanna, hemos encontrado que la comunicación oral y el dominio de un aparato lingüístico-callejero (audio-visual) constituyen un mundo de información derivada de un conocimiento empírico. Entendemos que la Lozana vive sus aventuras a medida que el *auctor* las escribe. Sin embargo «lamentamos» que este último haya privilegiado el lado acústico en detrimento de lo que los personajes hubieran podido «ver». El itinerario lozanesco por las calles de

Roma se asimila al laberinto de la escritura de Delicado, el cual registra los mínimos detalles y los convierte en sonidos-palabras. El telón de fondo de Nanna ante el que Nanna evoluciona resulta, en cambio, más amplio, incluso, con efectos de perspectivismo ; gracias a las virtudes histriónicas de la heroína romana, tenemos la impresión de encontrarnos en un escenario circular donde las voces provienen de distintos puntos. Es patente que detrás de cada retrato surge la posibilidad de «reconstruir» desde el metatexto, el retrato personal de Delicado y de Aretino como individuos que llevan una vida poco edificante, en el seno de una sociedad que promueve la hipocresía y el cinismo.

Para terminar, vale declarar que lo que hicieron Delicado y Aretino como individuos pertenece a la historia del siglo XVI, mientras que lo que escribieron en sus respectivas obras fascina a la crítica literaria de los albores del siglo XXI. El oído y la vista incorporados a la graffía literaria nos permiten participar, desde nuestra perspectiva de lectores, en esa fiesta de la comunicación literaria en que el tiempo biográfico ha quedado transformado en substancia de poesía.

NOTAS

1) Todas las citas de *La Lozana* provienen de la edición de B. Damiani y G. Allegra, Madrid : Porrúa, 1975. Hemos consultado igualmente la de Giovanni Allegra (Madrid : Taurus, 1983) y la de Claude Allaigre (Madrid : Cátedra, 1985).

Con relación al testimonio auricular, podemos añadir que lo que Stephen Gilman (*La España de F. de Rojas*, p. 315) observa sobre la técnica de composición de Rojas y los efectos de la oralidad del discurso celestinesco, se aplica igualmente a Delicado frente a su narración :

Hombre de prodigiosa (para nosotros inconcebible) sensibilidad oral, Rojas oía voces tan auténticas y reales como cualquiera de las oídas por Juana de Arco. Las voces de Rojas, sin embargo, no venían de lo alto, sino del infierno de la conciencia humana, y en el mismo acto de leer y escribir se dejaban escuchar a través de su propia boca.

Del mismo modo, apuntamos que en los días de Delicado, Joachim Du Bellay (1549) estimaba muy positivos los intercambios lingüísticos, puesto que servían a enriquecer el propio idioma ; el poeta de la *Pléiade* escribió : «Ce n'est point chose vicieuse, mais grandement louable : emprunter d'une langue étrangère les sentences et les mots pour les approprier à la sienne.» (*Défense et illustration de la langue française*, Livre I, Chap. VIII, 1948 : 46-7)

2) Se percibe, ostensiblemente, la animación que reina en los establecimientos termales, baños de vapor — o *estufas* — y otros sectores urbanos, a través de los gestos, movimientos y parlamentos de los personajes (XI, XII, XIII, XV, XVI).

3) Conviene destacar desde ahora los ecos de una nueva tradición que Bajtin ha denominado carnavalesca, en su estudio sobre la obra de François Rabelais (1974). El post-formalista ruso ha polarizado su trabajo en torno al género de la novela polifónica que extiende sus raíces hasta el folklore carnavalesco y sus ramificaciones más inmediatas: los diálogos socráticos y la Sátira Menipea. De esta última, Bajtin recoge la familiarización carnavalesca que permite la libre relación de las cosas más opuestas. Sólo es necesario para mantener la vigencia del género polifónico la actitud carnavalesca ante el mundo. Actitud que implica la creencia de concebir la labor poética como un todo, como una *summa*. La importancia del carnaval radica para el crítico ruso en que desarrolla un lenguaje completo de símbolos que aparece sólo en la infraestructura del relato. No se habla pues de un marco externo e inmóvil; sino de una visión creadora, flexible, de la aparición de nuevas posibilidades artísticas. El mundo del carnaval se rige por sus propias leyes. Es un mundo sin escenario y sin la división característica espectador-actor.

4) El plurilingüismo, o *heteroglosia* del género novelesco acentuado con vigor por Bajtin — i.e. su multiplicidad constituyente de discursos y estilos — aparece ostensiblemente en la novela delicadiana, complementado por la noción de *zonas de Personajes*. Escribe Todorov:

... l'hétérologie est également dispersée dans le discours que tient l'auteur autour de ses personnages — créant des *zones de personnages* particulières. Ces zones sont formées par le demi-discours des personnages, par les différentes formes de la transmission cachée du discours d'autrui, par les mots et les expressions dispersées de ce discours, par l'intrusion d'éléments expressifs étrangers dans le discours de l'auteur (points de suspension, interrogations, exclamations). La zone est le rayon d'action de la voix du personnage, mêlée d'une manière ou d'une autre à celle de l'auteur (*Le Principe dialogique*, p. 113).

5) Acerca de la relación que vincula la cultura carnavalesca a las nuevas estructuras sociales Tatiana Bubnova afirma lo siguiente:

Con el advenimiento de la sociedad de clases y paralelamente al surgimiento de las formas primitivas del Estado la arcaica percepción del mundo, de la naturaleza y del hombre se refugia en la cultura del carnaval, o 'cultura popular': complejo de festividades populares y otras manifestaciones expresada en 1) formas rituales de espectáculos; obras cómicas representadas en plazas públicas; 2) obras cómicas verbales *ac hoc* e independientes de diversas naturalezas (incluso las parodias) que incluyen textos orales y escritos; 3) diversas formas y tipos de vocabulario familiar y grosero (insultos, juramentos, lemas populares, etc.). La visión del mundo asociada al conocimiento 'racional' tiende a ser absorbida por la cultura 'culta', para Bajtin, 'oficial', en función de la justificación, la preservación y el desarrollo de la organización social plasmada en instituciones, esto es, en las formas diversas del Estado. Así la visión del mundo asociada al carnaval se opone a la visión racionalizada del universo como el caos al cosmos. Bajtin relaciona esta oposición con la que opera entre los registros del discurso: serio/no

serio; autoritario/de convicción interna; oficial/familiar o íntimo; culto/de plaza pública, etc. (*F. Delicado Puesto en diálogo...* p. 42).

6) Refiriéndose a la novela de Antoine de La Sale, *Jehan de Saintré* (1456), Julia Kristeva habla precisamente de aquel mundo sordo, encerrado y osificado en la narrativa medieval:

Antoine de La Sale ne peut, ni semble vouloir DECREIRE une fête, un repas, un corps, un amour. Il ne parle que pour indiquer cette fête, ce repas, ce corps, cet amour. Il en résulte un curieux silence; un mutisme envahit ce livre qui, néanmoins, n'est constitué que par des DISCOURS juxtaposés. Dans ce roman-mosaïque de discours (les Ecritures et les nombreux auteurs classiques cités, les maximes de la Dame, Saintré, le Roi, l'Auteur, etc., qui vont prendre la parole) — on entend à peine la rumeur vocalique que la ville bourgeoise introduira dans le livre. Dans ce monde sourd d'Antoine de La Sale, encore épique et scolastique, le verbe 'dire' et le nom 'parole' ne semblent pas être employés dans leur sens strict (*Le texte du roman*, p. 208).

Tal carencia de descripciones que Kristeva observa en Antoine de La Sale se refleja en un cierto sentido en la narración de la novela dialogada de Francisco Delicado.

7) No hay duda de que Francisco Delicado privilegia el oído puesto que durante la Edad Media y gran parte del Renacimiento el receptor del mensaje escrito era oidor y la lectura se hacía en voz alta:

... el texto es leído en voz alta, recitado de memoria, salmodiado, cantado, su público era un público de oyentes, un 'auditorio'. Los manuscritos servían para fijar y apoyar la lectura en voz alta, la memorización, el canto (Margit Frenk, 1980: p. 103; cf. Marshall McLuhan, 1972).

Tenemos la impresión que el manuscrito en aquellos años fungía de «partitura» musical, para que resucitara la relación «milagrosa» entre la palabra escrita y el sonido equivalente. Había una ejecución oratoria y declamada, de parte del lector actor que transmitía el mensaje escrito a varias personas (cf. Maxime Chevalier, 1982). Mucha razón tiene mi excelente amigo, el profesor Maxime Chevalier cuando me señala que, durante el Siglo de Oro, la lectura en voz alta alcanza diversas finalidades. Cada lectura tiene un sentido diferente. Varios hombres (cultos) leen *La Celestina*, re-distribuyéndose los papeles. Una dama suele leer textos al emperador Carlos Quinto. En los conventos y las tabernas se lee, durante la comida. El autor de un soneto lee su composición a sus amigos. En las aldeas un semi-letrado descifra un pliego para los demás. Como muy bien lo comenta Delicado en la primera oración de su *Dedicatoria*, cuando se dirige al «Ilustre señor», todo lo que encontramos en *La Lozana Andaluza* es digno de ser oído:

Sabiendo yo que vuestra señoría toma placer quando oye hablar en cossas de amor, que deleytan a todo ombre y máxime quando siente dezir de personas que mejor se supieron dar la manera para administrar las cosas a él pertenecientes» (*Dedicatoria*: 69).

8) No se puede descuidar (porque Delicado lo conocía perfectamente), la personificación-transmutación del *Libro*, que el Arcipreste de Hita opera sobre su famoso poema. De tal manera, dicho *Libro* se asimila a un instrumento musical, dejando al lector-«músico» la opción de sacarle las armonías de acuerdo a los registros que seleccione. Prestemos atención al *Libro*:

De todos los estrumentos yo, libro, soy pariente: Bien o mal, cual puntares, tal dirá ciertamente; Cual tú decir quisieres, y faz punto o tente: Si puntarme sopieres, siempre me avrás en mente (*op. cit.*, 1970: 70)

Desde este ángulo, *El libro de buen amor* se define como un instrumento de música, cuya singular interpretación del lector puede sacar acordes armónicos o disonantes, según la tonalidad básica de cada lectura.

9) A propósito de la noción de texto como retrato auditivo, Stephen Gilman emite unos juicios acerca del efecto inmediato y del espacio acústico que Fernando de Rojas va creando en *La Celestina* que, a nuestro entender, se pueden aplicar a la oralidad de *La Lozana Andaluza*. El afamado crítico americano anota:

... en *La Celestina*... las palabras crean sus realidades en el mismo momento de ser pronunciadas y el autor no necesita preocuparse por adecuarlas a un conjunto completo y congruente. Para Rojas, el lenguaje no había perdido lo que Leo Spitzer, refiriéndose al romancero, llamaba, su fuerza invocativa, es decir, su fuerza para *traer* a la imaginación realidades nuevas y totalmente inesperadas (Stephen Gilman, *La España de Fernando de Rojas*, *op. cit.*, p. 318).

10) Robert Mandrou no se equivoca cuando recoge en sus notas la importancia fundamental que tiene la difusión oral, la voz viva que cuenta, re-cuenta, modula, se aleja, vuelve y concede a los relatos (hasta a la palabra sagrada), una maleabilidad, un tono de improvisación que hemos perdido con la palabra que se encierra en las líneas del papel:

I. Primauté de l'ouïe et du toucher. En cela, l'époque moderne prolonge un caractère essentiel de la civilisation médiévale; non sans un brin de paradoxe, puisque l'imprimé en incessante progression exprime apparemment la faveur croissante de la lecture: mais dans tous les milieux sociaux, elle se fait encore à haute et intelligible voix; elle est à la fois lecture et audition. L'information reste principalement auditive: même les grands de ce monde écoutent plus qu'ils ne lisent; ils sont entourés de conseillers qui leur parlent, qui leur fournissent leur savoir par l'oreille, qui lisent devant eux... et à la veillée, dans les humbles chaumières paysannes, c'est encore le récit qui nourrit les pensées et les imaginations. Enfin, même ceux qui lisent volontiers, les humanistes, sont accoutumés de le faire aussi en compagnie — et entendent leur texte.

A cette primauté il y a tout d'abord une raison d'ordre religieux: c'est la Parole de Dieu qui est l'autorité suprême de l'Eglise. La Foi elle-même est audition. (p. 76-77)

II. Rôle secondaire de la vue. Sans doute cette époque a-t-elle eu ses peintres, tout comme ses musiciens — et même ses dessinateurs, ne serait-ce que Léonard de Vinci. Encore que ces individualités, Vinci, Durer, Holbein et tant d'autres soient

passablement hors série. Il est assuré, en effet, que les contemporains de ces génies visionnaires ne sont pas habitués à voir des formes — à les représenter et les décrire... Rabelais lui-même donne vie à ses personnages par leurs discours: c'est frère Jean dans la tempête, qui parle, cependant que les cordages crissent, et que le mât s'abat à grand fracas (Robert Mandrou, *op. cit.*, p. 80-81).

11) Paul Larivaille sugiere que los relatos narrados por Nanna preanuncian la producción teatral de Aretino: «una diecina di racconti sono sviluppati più o meno a lungo e orchestrati con la precisione di un canovaccio teatrale.» (1980: 178, cf. Louis Imperiale: *El contexto dramático de «La Lozana Andaluza*, 1991 y «Captación auditiva e imagen visual en la Roma de Delicado y Aretino.» 1989)

12) *Sei giornate*, p. 121. A pesar de que no podamos, dentro del espacio que tenemos, referirnos a los múltiples ejemplos de *cuadros*, hechos con palabras, no obstante, reproducimos uno de los pasajes más representativos del discurso aretinesco:

... aveano apparecchiato un tavolino in su le grazie e postovi suso una tovaglia che pareva di damasco bianco... e acconciatovi tovaglini, piatti, coltelli e forchette per tre persone si pulitamente che non te lo potrei dire, e tratto fuora d'un panieretto molte varietà di fiori givano ricamando con gran diligenza la tavola. Una delle suore avea nel mezzo d'essa composto un festoncello tutto di frondi di lauro, e spartoci dove meglio campeggiavano alcune rose bianche e vermiglie; e di fiorancio dipinte le fasce che legavano il festone, le quali per lo spazio della tavola si distendevano... l'altra monica avea in ogni quadro della tavola ritratto una cosa bella: nel primo fece il nodo di Salomone di viole mammole; nel secondo il laberinto di fiori di sambuco; nel terzo un core di rose incarnate traspasato da un dardo che era del gambo d'un garofano, e la sua buccia lo servia per ferro: che mezza aperta, pareva tinta nel sangue del cuore... e le lagrime che versavano erano di quei bottoncini di aranci spuntati pur allora per le cime dei rami loro...» (*ibid*: 29-30).

La descripción sigue por varias páginas, entregándonos colores, disposición y espacialización de los objetos que componen el fresco. No olvidemos, tampoco, las vívidas descripciones del ermitaño (*ibid*: 56-7), del pedagogo pedante «il più unto, il più disgraziato e il più sucido che si vedesse mai» (*ibid*: 58). A partir de sus frustraciones de pintor fracasado, Aretino (al igual que Giorgio Vasari), re-estructura en su narrativa el tópico clásico de Horacio: «Ut pictura poesis»

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LE POINT SUR LA RECHERCHE
INSTITUT INTERNATIONAL DE SOCIOCRITIQUE

**RECHERCHES SUR L'ŒUVRE DE JORGE LUIS BORGES
ECRITURE ET REECRITURE ***

Position de Thèse

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Un jour à Montpellier, il y a dix-sept ans, j'ai ouvert pour la première fois un livre de Borges — c'était *El Aleph* — et j'ai lu « La casa de Asterión ». J'ai l'impression de ne plus être sorti de cette « casa » qui est, comme vous le savez, un labyrinthe et qui aura été pour moi, pour autant que je puisse le dire, un labyrinthe heureux. C'est sans doute ce jour-là que j'ai décidé de lire et d'aimer l'œuvre borgésienne.

En 1975, je dédiai ma maîtrise sur la première traduction en français du *Quichotte*, comme il se devait, à Pierre Ménard qui en était l'auteur. Puis ce fut la rencontre de la nouvelle « Tema del traidor y del héroe », à laquelle je consacrai ma première contribution au borgésianisme. Je me souviens de plusieurs mois de perplexité analytique et d'une perplexité encore plus grande le jour où je pus enfin lire mon article dans une revue universitaire, entièrement réécrit par un typographe pervers.

* Thèse d'Etat soutenue à l'Université de Paris IV en mars 1989. La réécriture d'une partie de cette thèse est parue en 1990, aux éditions du Seuil, dans la collection "Poétique", sous le titre *Borges ou la réécriture*.

Ce fut peut-être de ce texte borgésien que tout partit, plus encore que du texte précité. Un « coup d'écriture » final non moins stupéfiant, mais surtout le sentiment que, par la grâce de quelques ruses narratives, une machine à réécrire se mettait en marche et que le livre enfin, avec ou sans typographe inspiré, dévorait le monde.

La suite est l'histoire de quelques analyses et de quelques synthèses, dont je vous propose aujourd'hui l'aboutissement.

En 1981, dans le cadre d'une thèse de troisième cycle, je proposai une lecture d'inspiration structuraliste de l'ensemble de l'œuvre poétique de Borges et je désignai, comme « figure la plus profonde » structurant ce corpus, une sorte de « forme simple » que j'appelai « figure de l'énigme ». Si celle-ci renvoyait par exemple à la psyché de Borges ou à sa « philosophie », elle ressortissait pour l'essentiel aux vertus métareprésentatives de cette production.

En 1982, dans le cadre d'un fraternel colloque sur le « texte familial », ce fut plutôt de l'œuvre en prose que je tirai quelques structurantes leçons : que la production borgésienne était l'inexorable reconduction de quelques scénarios, que ces scénarios renvoyaient aux origines des textes et de leur scripteur, que ces textes, enfin, étaient structurés comme le nom de celui qui les avait écrits. Je précise qu'il n'y avait rien de magique dans de tels décryptages, mais seulement une attentive sollicitation des enseignements de Jean Ricardou qui, fondant le texte sur le dire de son faire, ne m'interdisait pas d'imaginer de le fonder, en outre, sur le dire de sa gestation.

Ce dernier moment de ma recherche était pour moi le plus satisfaisant, car il présentait l'avantage de ne rattacher les textes borgésiens à aucune transcendance extratextuelle (surtout si l'on veut bien admettre que le nom du scripteur est lui-même un microtexte) ; bref, l'avantage de ne fonder cette tentative de spécification d'une écriture que sur le textuel, ce qui est, me semble-t-il, l'ambition de tout poéticien.

Poéticien, sémiologue, textualiste, que l'on appelle cela comme l'on veut, c'est cela que je rêvais d'être, dans les années soixante-dix, en lisant les « figures » de Genette, les « problèmes » de Ricardou, la « lettre volée » de Lacan ou les « fragments » de Barthes... Interroger, sans violence mais non sans saveur, ce qui est peut-être, tout simplement, au plus profond de la conscience de l'homme : cet interminable désir de raconter des histoires, et parfois de les écrire...

Il me sembla que mes deux passions avouables ici — ma passion pour la poétique et ma passion pour l'œuvre borgésienne — me mettaient dans une

situation privilégiée. Si en effet l'on considère les relations que la critique a liées, au fil des décennies, avec cette œuvre, on y constate deux grandes tendances. On pourrait, en caricaturant à peine, dire qu'il y a d'une part la critique des hispano-américanistes, d'autre part la critique des poéticiens. Or, l'une et l'autre ne sont pas forcément toujours attentives à la lettre borgésienne proprement dite. La première, parce qu'elle se perpétue souvent sur la lancée d'un thématisme emportant tout et d'une personnalisation du débat, où l'homme-Borges est vite substitué à l'œuvre ; la seconde, parce qu'elle est souvent contrainte de travailler sur des traductions. Je ne prétends évidemment pas être le premier à lire la lettre borgésienne originale à la lueur des apports de la Nouvelle Critique, mais sans doute suis-je le premier à proposer une lecture, sous ces auspices, de l'ensemble de cette production.

De cet ensemble à traverser, j'eus pendant plusieurs années une vision restrictive : des textes borgésiens me manquaient et je me consolais en me disant que le poéticien n'a cure de corpus exhaustif, qu'un texte, une figure, un geste peuvent lui suffire. Alors se produisirent deux rencontres assez miraculeuses, celle de Rodolfo Borello et celle d'Antonio Melis : grâce à leur générosité, je me trouvai du jour au lendemain en possession d'un corpus qui était, du coup, quasiment exhaustif. Je jubilai, en me disant que l'hispano-américaniste, lui, avait tout à gagner à cette quasi-exhaustivité. La mort de Borges vint renforcer mon projet : il fallait lire et analyser tout Borges, depuis les recueils en prose reniés et les recueils poétiques remaniés des années vingt, jusqu'à *Los Conjurados*, 1985. Mais tout Borges, cela voulait dire aussi tout livre, tout texte que signe Borges : ouvrages en collaboration, manuels plus ou moins didactiques, préfaces, traductions, anthologies... L'obstacle à franchir n'était pas seulement d'érudition (retrouver les textes enfouis), il était aussi idéologique : lire ce qu'on ne lit pas, analyser ce qu'on dédaigne. Lire tout Borges, cela voulait dire encore — pourquoi pas ? — lire tous les entretiens et lire tous les critiques. Cete tâche-ci, à l'évidence, était infinie : j'ai essayé toutefois de la mener suffisamment loin pour que ce travail serve à signaler quelques contributions méconnues et, dans mon optique, remarquables — tant il est vrai que si l'œuvre borgésienne joue à ménager ses propres zones d'ombre, une même fatalité semble peser sur l'exégèse de cette œuvre.

Le biais analytique, maintenant.

Une des tendances majeures de la Nouvelle Critique, depuis plus d'une décennie, est peut-être de s'intéresser au lecteur plus encore qu'au scripteur, de

juger ce que Borges appelle le « fait esthétique » en termes de réception plus encore qu'en termes de production. Dès 1939, « Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote* » annonçait ce bouleversement théorique : si moi, lecteur, je décide qu'une partie du *Quichotte* a été écrite par le Nîmois, son sens s'en trouve changé. Par quoi se trouve affirmé non seulement que chaque lecture est créatrice, mais aussi que tout texte gagne à être mis en intime relation avec d'autres scripteurs, c'est-à-dire avec d'autres textes. On touche là à l'autre tendance majeure de la Nouvelle Critique récente — inséparable, comme on le voit, de la tendance précédente — qui est l'attention portée à la transcendance textuelle des textes, à ce que Gérard Genette appelle la « transtextualité », et plus précisément à la partie de celle-ci qu'il nomme « hypertextualité ». Ainsi, d'une manière stupéfiante, la « nouvelle Nouvelle Critique » est en quelque sorte programmée par la première fiction borgésienne, avec quelques décennies d'avance. Bien plus : c'est dès les tout premiers textes théoriques de Borges, dès les années vingt, que cette préscience se manifeste. Par quoi Borges se trouve érigé, dans le domaine qui nous occupe, en véritable fondateur de la modernité. Par quoi aussi se trouve justifié mon acharnement à lire son œuvre en poéticien : c'est que la poétique, la Nouvelle Critique viennent de Borges, et qu'elles y retournent !

Pour résumer les deux enseignements de « Pierre Menard », je pourrais dire : lire, c'est réécrire et écrire, c'est réécrire. On comprendra donc que ces deux tendances majeures qui n'en font peut-être qu'une, je les nomme « réécriture ». C'est le biais analytique que je me suis donné. Le terme est assez précis pour ne pas avoir tenté un théoricien qui se le serait annexé de manière définitive ; assez large pour renvoyer à toutes les procédures que privilégie l'œuvre borgésienne (citation, plagiat, copie, dictée, glose, paraphrase, correction, sélection, traduction, collaboration, anthologie...) et pour désigner à la fois ce que dit cette œuvre (sa thématique), ce qu'elle fait (sa pratique) et ce que d'autres font avec elle (son efficacité). Une théorisation de ce possible concept est esquissée de loin en loin, mais elle n'est qu'un moyen pour aller vers une théorisation de l'écriture borgésienne, qui reste l'objectif essentiel, comme en témoigne le dernier chapitre.

Quelques mots sur les trois parties que je viens de nommer.

En ce qui concerne la thématique, je me suis attaché à montrer comment l'ensemble des discours borgesiens sur le savoir était subsumé par le discours borgésien sur la littérature. Il en découle la nécessité d'ébaucher une poétique borgésienne qui fonde l'ensemble de ces discours et dont les deux figures tuté-

laires sont, à mon sens, Pierre Ménard et Héraclite : borne et emblème, respectivement, du territoire que devra parcourir cette écriture pour ne cesser d'être une réécriture.

La partie centrale, consacrée à la pratique, est pour moi celle qui justifie cette recherche. Si Borges s'était contenté de parler de la réécriture sans la pratiquer, ce biais aurait eu peu d'intérêt. Mais son charme est de faire ce qu'il dit, de le faire d'une manière plus complexe, plus obsessionnelle que d'autres. Les réseaux et les procédures que relève la poétique borgésienne, on les retrouve donc à l'œuvre dans cette production. Au crible des figures hypertextuelles proposées par Genette dans *Palimpsestes*, il s'avère que c'est la figure de la transvocalisation (du changement de voix narrative) qui s'inscrit au plus profond de la pratique borgésienne. Si par exemple on considère le réseau des textes de défi qui va de « Leyenda policial » (1927) à « La noche de los dones » (1975), on y voit le narrateur jouer successivement presque tous les rôles proposés par la diégèse. On touche ici, au passage, à l'une des mythiques raisons qui font que Borges n'écrit pas de roman : les romans de Borges, ce pourrait être ces réseaux, ces continuum romanesques où la narration vocalise, comme dans les romans à plusieurs narrateurs de Wilkie Collins ou de Browning que Borges aime tant. La première variation que le scripteur inflige à une diégèse, l'élan infime qu'il lui donne et qui débouchera sur toutes les transpositions possibles, c'est ainsi du désir transvocalisateur qu'ils naissent. Le réseau des textes du Minotaure, que la transvocalisation ordonne pareillement, met en évidence ce qu'une telle pratique a de monstrueux. C'est le même scripteur qui octroie la voix narrative à tel ou tel acteur, qui va et vient du fictionnel au non-fictionnel, qui pervertit les genres, qui transforme un texte en séquence et une séquence en texte, qui réécrit les autres et qui se réécrit lui-même. Autrement dit : le Minotaure est révolutionnaire.

La troisième partie, consacrée à l'efficace, est une ébauche, puisqu'il est à l'évidence impossible de désigner tous les scripteurs qui réécrivent Borges. Il ne pouvait donc s'agir, dans mon esprit, que de tenter une description des sphères d'influence s'étendant concentriquement autour de Borges et une manière de phénoménologie des principaux mécanismes de filiation liant quelques contemporains à ce père admirable — à ce donneur de leçon d'écriture. Le seul intérêt d'une telle étude, outre la conscience de sa vanité, est peut-être d'amener à réfléchir plus attentivement à la « réalité » d'un rapport de réécriture : par exemple, est-on sûr qu'entre le texte A et le texte B, il n'y a pas un texte A' ? Et s'il y a un texte A', est-on sûr que B, qui réécrit A', réécrit

également A ? Ou encore : quand un duo de récrivains s'affiche, est-on sûr que c'est bien le fils prodigue qui réécrit le père admirable, est-on sûr que le sens va toujours du père au fils ? Lire mieux Borges, ce pourrait être ainsi lire mieux un Bioy Casares ou une Silvina Ocampo...

A ce moment de l'analyse, il m'a semblé possible d'aller plus loin et d'envisager de répondre à une question un peu magique, celle de l'objet de cette réécriture : *qu'est-ce que Borges réécrit ?* Autrement dit : y aurait-il un sens — ultime ou originel, comme on veut — que cette forme monstrueusement récurrente aurait pour fonction, pour justification de reconvoquer interminablement ? J'avais déjà été frappé par l'envahissement de cette production par un matériau autobiographique élargi, par l'incessante reconduction de scénarios originaires et à la question « qu'est-ce que Borges réécrit ? », j'avais déjà répondu : il réécrit la gestation, la généalogie de ses textes. Ou encore : il réécrit son nom. Mais j'étais frappé également, en relisant cette production qui, malgré certaines apparences, déploie plus que d'autres une véritable pédagogie de sa lecture, par la tendance de la pratique d'écriture de Borges à la spatialisation : tendance à considérer le livre comme un volume, la mise en recueil comme une géographie, le texte à venir ou le texte advenu comme un espace (un jardin, un labyrinthe, une maison, une ville, un tigre...), un microcosme que l'on parcourt, dont on privilégie tel lieu, dont on gomme telle région, un bloc que l'on arrache aux écritures du passé, un fragment sauvé d'un rêve. Ecrire une thèse sur Borges, c'était se poser pour soi-même des problèmes de transvocalisation ; c'était aussi apprendre à déchiffrer l'énigme de son propre nom ; ce fut enfin, donc, s'habituer à spatialiser son expérience des textes. C'est ainsi que j'eus le sentiment qu'il y avait une case vide, disponible, entre celle qu'occupait la représentation, par l'écriture borgésienne, de sa gestation, et celle qu'occupait la représentation de son déroulement. Cette case était celle de la représentation d'une espèce de point zéro de l'écriture, du moment du passage à l'acte d'écrire, du surgissement du texte. Tout ce que des textes borgésiens je ne savais pas lire s'y engouffrait et s'y ordonnait. On touche ainsi, au passage, à une autre raison mythique du refus du roman par Borges : ce que réécrit indéfiniment cette œuvre en morceaux, ce pourrait être les trois épisodes de ce roman familial à usage textuel. Autrement dit : ce qui se réécrit de texte en texte, ce pourrait être le roman du texte.

Le « fantastique borgésien », la fascination qu'exerce cette œuvre sur tant de lecteurs et de scripteurs, l'envahissement de la planète par la « matière borgésienne », la « modernité » de Borges, l'unité de cette polygraphie, la puis-

sance perturbatrice de cet homme de traditions et de réaction, c'est en fin de compte dans ce renvoi infini du textuel au textuel, dans cette minutieuse et secrète entreprise de métareprésentativité que j'en discerne la cause. Autrement dit : la réécriture borgésienne est révolutionnaire.

Je ne veux pas prolonger outre mesure cet exercice de réécriture un peu spécieux, ce mixte de réduction et de continuation qui consiste à rendre compte de ma thèse en disant conjointement un peu de ce qui s'y trouve et un peu de ce qui aurait pu s'y trouver. Je terminerai en formulant deux questions qui m'ont accompagné plus ou moins implicitement tout au long de ma recherche et dont je me dis maintenant, tout compte fait, que c'est peut-être de leur récurrence obstinée, insatisfaisante, douloureuse que ce travail tire son unité — si unité il y a :

1) est-ce que ce qui est dit de l'écriture borgésienne peut valoir pour d'autres écritures ?

2) est-ce que la réécriture est un concept ?

Bref, il s'agit de se demander, par le biais de ces deux questions qui, selon la formule, n'en font peut-être qu'une, si la théorisation d'une écriture a débouché sur rien de moins qu'une théorie de l'écriture. Je n'aurai pas la goujaterie de répondre, mais je voudrais toutefois proposer quelques éléments d'appréciation.

Après avoir dit tout ce que l'écriture borgésienne a de révolutionnaire, de spécifique, il peut sembler contradictoire de dire que les leçons de l'analyse valent pour d'autres écritures. Mais je crois qu'il faut assumer cette contradiction, en comprenant que ce que l'écriture borgésienne a de révolutionnaire, de spécifique, c'est peut-être, précisément, sa capacité à emblématiser ce que fait toute écriture, sa capacité à ménager dans le cryptage toutes les chances pour un exemplaire décryptage. Il n'est donc pas interdit de penser que tout texte met en place, outre la fiction de sa narration, celle de sa gestation et celle de sa surrection. Il n'est donc pas interdit non plus d'envisager de déduire de la leçon borgésienne telles lois plus générales qui pourraient ainsi se formuler :

1) Tout texte qui parle de réécriture réécrit, et réciproquement : tout texte qui réécrit parle de réécriture ;

2) tout texte qui réécrit est réécrit, et réciproquement : tout texte qui est réécrit réécrit (ou, comme dit Genette : « l'hypertexte appelle l'hypertexte »).

Le problème scientifique le plus profond, pour la poétique, est peut-être d'arriver à dire dans le plus grand détail *ce qui se passe* entre un texte A

et un texte B, qui répète, réutilise, réinvestit, réécrit le texte A. Entre l'ensemble initial A et l'ensemble final B, il y a un complexe de relations que l'on appelle en cybernétique, quand on ne sait pas le décrire, une boîte noire et que les poéticiens, généralement, n'analysent pas, à la notable exception de Ricardou qui propose d'appliquer une grille des similitudes et de Genette qui propose de recourir aux figures hypertextuelles. Je me suis trouvé moi aussi confronté à cette boîte noire, à cette espèce de non-dit de la poétique qui m'a interdit toute théorisation *a priori* ; j'ai emprunté les voies tracées par ces deux théoriciens rares ; et j'ai égrené, au fil de mon cheminement analytique, une série d'enseignements minuscules qui touchent par exemple à la trace paradoxale d'un hypertexte dans un hypotexte, c'est-à-dire à la façon dont un texte, en quelque sorte, enjoint un texte futur de le réécrire ; à telle procédure qui consiste, pour un texte, à s'écrire dans la mémoire d'un texte antérieur mais en excluant scrupuleusement de le réécrire en quoi que ce soit dans sa littéralité ; à telles autres procédures qui consistent, pour un texte, à réécrire un texte antérieur sans réécrire aucune de ses séquences, ou inversement à réécrire telles de ses séquences sans réécrire ce texte ; à la suture qu'exhibe ou que dissimule un texte à l'endroit précis où s'opère la greffe d'un texte ancien ; ou encore au précis cheminement intellectuel qui peut conduire tel scripteur hypermnésique à réécrire en fiction un *exemplum* médiéval qu'il n'a jamais lu... Ces approximations font-elles une théorie ? Je serais assez tenté de dire qu'il n'y a pas, en poétique, d'autre théorisation possible que celle que promeuvent de telles approximations.

Le 23 janvier 1927 paraît dans *La Prensa* un article de Borges intitulé « La fruición literaria », article qui sera recueilli l'année suivante dans *El idioma de los Argentinos*. Je ne me suis pas particulièrement arrêté à ce texte admirable dans ma thèse, je me contente de le citer une fois. Et pourtant, même s'il ne s'agit pas d'une fiction, beaucoup de choses sont déjà en place dans ce texte : l'emblématique topographie textuelle et les obsessions du critique qui confesse qu'il aime mieux relire que lire et qu'il se méfie de la nouveauté. Parfois, je me dis que si Borges n'avait écrit que *Ficciones*, cela suffirait à ce qu'on le considère comme un des quatre ou cinq plus grands écrivains de ce siècle ; parfois même, je me dis que « Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote* » aurait suffi. J'ai envie de dire aujourd'hui que « La fruición literaria » aurait suffi, où un Argentin de vingt-sept ans, qui certes a déjà beaucoup lu, beaucoup aimé et beaucoup voyagé, découvre, pour parler comme Borges, « certaines choses éternelles », sous couleur de raconter ses premiers émois de lecteur et ses pre-

mières frustrations de critique. Tout ou presque est dans ce texte et tout ou presque, comme il se doit, est aussi dans ce titre. On aurait envie de traduire « La fruición literaria » par « Le plaisir du texte », pour rappeler en clin d'œil que cet écrivain qui sort lentement de l'adolescence fonde la poétique moderne et ne cessera de se tenir, tout au long de sa vie, à l'extrême pointe où convergent une théorie et une pratique également révolutionnaires. Mais une telle traduction, à l'évidence, serait faible. Cette « fruición literaria » que Borges lègue aujourd'hui aux lecteurs reconnaissants, c'est le plaisir du texte revisité, réactivé ou — osons le mot en ce 4 mars — revalorisé par la réécriture, c'est-à-dire l'hyperplaisir de l'hypertexte, autrement dit, littéralement, « la jouissance de la littérature ».



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Revista fundada en 1982 y publicada por el Departamento de Literatura Española de la Facultad de Letras de la Universidad de Alicante. Aparece una vez al año, en volúmenes de 300 páginas aproximadamente. Publica trabajos de investigación en los ámbitos de la Literatura Española, Hispanoamericana y Comparada, la Teoría y la Crítica Literarias, sobre temas de los siglos XVIII, XIX y XX, y en todas las lenguas utilizadas por el Hispanismo internacional.

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- * Discours pragmatique et discours picaresque.

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Borges, Bryce Echenique, Cortázar, Fuentes, García Márquez, Puig, Roa Bastos, Rulfo, Vargas Llosa.

Edition du C.E.R.S., collection «Etudes Critiques», 1983, 255 pages, 75 F.

ANALES DE LA NARRATIVA ESPAÑOLA CONTEMPORANEA (Formerly *anales de la novela de Posguerra*)

Katleen M. Glenn, *Associate Editor, Wake Forest University*
Luis T. Gonzalez-del-Valle, *Editor, The University of Nebraska-Lincoln*
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De l'engendrement des formes

Edmond Cros

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De l'engendrement des formes se situe dans le prolongement des écrits antérieurs de Edmond Cros. *Théorie et pratiques sociocritiques* (1983) proposait, entre autres choses, une théorie basée sur la notion de *génomote* entendue comme la structure profonde responsable des phénomènes de surface (phénotextes), spécifique à chaque texte et considérée comme produit de l'histoire en dernière instance. Un article paru ultérieurement dans *Texte* de Toronto qui s'interrogeait sur les rapports entre les pratiques sociales et les pratiques d'écriture introduisait le concept d'*idéosème*, défini par sa double articulation sémiotique (pratique sociale) et discursive (pratique textuelle). Restait cependant à préciser le fonctionnement et le processus d'engendrement de ces génotextes et l'articulation de cette notion sur celle d'*idéosème*. C'est à cet effort de synthèse qu'est consacré *De l'engendrement des formes*, et ce à partir de l'analyse d'une série de textes qui vont du prologue de la grammaire castillane d'Antonio de Nebrija et le *Libro de Buen Amor* à un roman équatorien du dernier quart du XIXe siècle et à *Los Olvidados* de Luis Buñuel.

Cette recherche débouche cependant sur des conclusions inattendues, à savoir que le texte émerge de la coïncidence conflictive de discours contradictoires ; déstabilisés par une confrontation d'idées, de positions idéologiques, de pratiques sociales ou discursives, les concepts centraux qui sont les enjeux de ces débats acquièrent une totale autonomie, sous la forme de structures dynamiques similaires l'ensemble d'un champ morphogénétique. D'où viennent alors ces champs qui satureraient ainsi non seulement la vie culturelle mais encore les pratiques sociales ? Peut-on imaginer qu'ils soient pré-existants à la fois au texte et aux pratiques sociales ? La coïncidence de ces résultats avec la thèse du biologiste britannique N. Sheldrake permet d'envisager cette hypothèse. En ce cas le recours au vocabulaire de la biologie (génotexte, phénotexte, génétique textuelle...) ne doit plus être entendue au sens métaphorique. En jetant un pont entre la biologie et la théorie critique cet ouvrage couvre la critique littéraire tout autant qu'à l'anthropologie et à la sociologie de la culture de nouvelles et révolutionnaires perspectives.

JEAN FRANCO

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L'étude sociocritique de l'œuvre romanesque d'Agustín Yáñez (1904-1980) s'appuie sur l'analyse de *La Tierra pródiga* (1960), roman de la côte pacifique, considéré comme vecteur de conflits. Deux tracés discursifs essentiels procèdent des oppositions entre deux fractions de la classe dominante : le discours conservateur des caciques, émanation de la petite bourgeoisie agraire et le discours technocratique de la grande bourgeoisie industrielle en quête de nouveaux débouchés.

L'ambivalence qui marque en profondeur la plupart des représentations textuelles et affecte des signes positif et négatif à la fois le Cacique et la Machine, le monde rural et l'univers du progrès économique, prend sa source dans l'image-mère, celle de l'Apocalypse, qui informe l'œuvre et trouve sa matérialisation dans la récurrence obsessionnelle des notions de Conquête et de la figure du découvreur de la Nouvelle Galice, Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán. Une indéniable empreinte millénariste, décelable dans la visée catastrophiste de l'histoire et dans les angoisses des paysans *jaliszienses*, marque le roman et révèle une résistance maximale aux changements.

L'approche sociocritique met en lumière le rapport entre certaines pratiques sociales et le texte de fiction, ainsi que le rôle décisif joué chez Yáñez par un imaginaire religieux en partie occulté et pourtant vivace.

Georges PUISSET

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Vol. IX, Nos. 24-26, 1984

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Vol. X, No. 25, 1993

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