

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONTEMPORARY CONDITION: LATIN AMERICA IN DIALOGUE WITH POSTMODERNITY AND POSTCOLONIALITY

1. Postmodernity as a Cultural Phenomenon

Regardless of the range and complexity of the postmodernity debate, certain minimum criteria may be set to guide us through the labyrinth and serve as a point of departure for establishing a position with respect to Latin America. I regard postmodernity as a phenomenon which begins in the United States at the end of the fifties and later spreads in various stages through Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere. Thus, I begin with an historical-epistemological conception of postmodernism and avoid a merely typological one that retrospectively and arbitrarily tends to read and understand all culture as "postmodern." Situating the postmodern condition in the second half of this century avoids the problem of having to consider authors of different periods and works as dissimilar as those by Rabelais, Cervantes, Joyce, and Borges.

The debate on postmodernity may be summarized by three representative groups of opinion: 1) That which considers postmodernity as absolutely new and a break with modernity, which is criticized as an exhausted, negative system. Such is the point of view of Susan Sontag, Barth, Fiedler, Roberto Venturi, and others in the sixties and seventies. 2) That which adopts an extreme position and reproaches postmodernity for having distorted and betrayed the goals of modernity. It characterizes postmodernity as a cheap imitation of modernity, in comparison with which it is a conservative system, a reactionary, vulgar, trend, lacking originality. 3) That which offers a more balanced attitude,

seeing postmodernity as the result and culmination of modernity, so that it is possible to speak of a "modern postmodernity."

In view of these positions, the time that has already elapsed in the history of the postmodern, and the need to maintain an historical distance in order to analyze it, fashionable uses of the term should be abandoned. Let us dispense with battles over labels which have led all civilizations to be freely characterized as postmodern, have turned the debate into a Tower of Babel, and led to polarizations that belong more to the ideological or the irrational than the parameters of science.

By postmodernity I understand an historical-cultural phenomenon which follows modernity (a period from Baudelaire to the new novel, from about 1850 to about 1960) and occupies approximately the last 30 years of our century. Postmodernity is not only a consequence of modernity, a habituation, continuation, or culminating moment of the latter, but an enlightened, integrative, and pluralistic recodification which embraces and reconsiders the broad paradigm of western culture—although not exclusively so—in order to rethink cultural tradition and open a new paradigm in which totalizing and exclusive metadiscourses are ended in favour of paralugia, dissent, and the culture of debate. I would go so far as to characterize postmodernity as a "recodified Renaissance," by which I mean an intent to practice—in a radical way—the Heideggerian activity of *Verwindung* (reintegration/perlaboration), as interpreted by Vattimo, just as Lyotard interpreted Freud's terms of *Verarbeitung* (elaboration/conscious work) and *Erinnerung* (memory). Memory initiates the activity, while elaboration works on a particular material and perlaboration transforms it into a new creation combining the old and the new, and producing globalization on the one hand and difference on the other. This kind of culture is accessible to mass recipients because it supercedes sectarian and exclusive "-isms." Postmodernity is far from being solely disillusion or nostalgia, or a reactionary, globalizing, and equalizing phenomenon. It is the possibility of a new organization of thought and knowledge in an open form through the relativizing of totalitarian paradigms and the decentralization of Discourse, History, and Truth. Understood thus, postmodernity is a new utopia as yet undiscovered under the cloak of a modernity which still covers our thinking.

This concept of postmodernity, based mainly on the principles outlined above, derives from positions taken by Derrida (1967, 1967, 1972). Derrida showed the weaknesses and problems of discourse based on closed systems by

advocating plurality in both oral and written systems of language and emphasizing that each new discourse produces new texts, a practice which leads to the foundation of *différance* as a strategy of plurality. This concept is consistent with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome and with Baudrillard's simulation, in the sense that Derrida's plurality and difference do not mean the manifestation of discourses arising from diverse *origins* which unite and separate in their course, but a plurality of courses where the signification of the elements in play is dispersed. That is to say, these elements are not ideal types of "pure units" but "tainted units" which, through connections with others, open new trajectories and combinations.

This concept of postmodernity is also found in Lyotard (1979), who begins with the concept of paralugia, of debate founded on continuous dissent and the capacity for difference in language. In his description of the postmodern condition, Lyotard reveals modernity's failure because it reduced life to specialized disciplines, to universalizing, exclusive, and authoritarian systems which, in turn, produced weariness and a disenchantment with utopia. Multiplicity was replaced by a rigorous particularism. On the other hand, finding a point of departure in Nietzsche and Heidegger, Vattimo (1985) understands postmodernity as trans-modernity rather than anti-modernity, as a critique and farewell to the ideology of newness. He criticizes universalizing theories and ideologies and questions dominant values and the propagation of untouchable truths. Beginning with Heidegger, he defines *Verwindung* as release from the idea of leaving something behind and passing from one state to another in the course of which the past is diluted and re-integrated. The perlaborated condition of postmodern thought, according to Vattimo, is weak, that is to say hybrid, inasmuch as it feeds from a great diversity of positions, is open to science and technology without having to connect them to metaphysical suppositions and implications, and offers the opportunity for a new beginning which is not directed against modernity, but inhabits it and appropriates it by reincorporating and recodifying it.

For Deleuze and Guattari (1976) the main characteristics of the rhizome are its proliferation in all dimensions, its changeable form, its accidental nature, its refusal to form genealogical trees, dualism, or deep structures, and its lack of a subject or object. Symbolically speaking, the rhizome is a net, a web, where only lines exist and supra-codification is prohibited. They cite the example of an ideal book, which would include an outline combining all its multiple elements (experiences, historical determinations, conceptions, individuals,

social groups and formations) on one page. Their idea is closely related to Lyotard's paraologia and debate, and Baudrillard's simulation. The rhizome "deterritorializes" a new cultural term and "reterritorializes" it within its own system. There is neither imitation nor similitude, but an explosion of two or more heterogenous series along the lines of the same rhizome. The rhizome is a ticket that permits many entries and is not made of copies; it is open to all dimensions; it is productive and not a reproduction; it is performance, not competence.

By simulation, Baudrillard (1981) understands a virtual reality, which is not empirical and, for this reason, has no referent; it is an invented reality which reproduces what does not exist; a virtual reality which presents itself as reality, a hyper-reality. For Baudrillard, simulation does not involve imitation, reproduction, or parody, but is a replacement of the referent, an operation which eliminates the ontological substance of the real. This operation offers all the signs of the real which, *de facto*, are only its simulation or usurpation. Simulation, or hyper-reality, denies the difference between fiction and reality, between the true and the false. It nullifies the utopian principle of equivalence between sign and reality as a result of a radical negation of the value of the signs. The phenomenon is simple, and consists of the following: there are signs which hint at hiding something and others which pretend that there is nothing behind them. The former represent the traditions of the true and the secret while the latter inaugurate the era of simulation. The most radical epistemological consequence of this is the negation of the category of origin and the original, and by extension the negation of identity. In the world of communication today, it is no longer possible to separate reality from virtual reality. Today, one desperately searches for reality because simulation is disguised as such. Reality becomes fiction while simulation becomes reality in a distressing, disquieting, and strange hyper-reality.

The philosophy of the authors alluded to above dispenses with Cartesian rationalism and rigor, as it does with metaphysics. Preference is given to a plurality of paradigms, to difference, dissemination, heterogeneity, deconstruction, inter-culturalism and intertextuality, dissent, and antagonism. Postmodern philosophy is open, and may be understood as a creative and transforming re-reading of traditional discourses which resorts to the philosophical tradition of modernity and to the tradition of the West in its entirety in order to found a new philosophical discourse. This is precisely the context which reveals the full dimension of Jorge Luis Borges and shows how

he founds his own discourse by entering into a dialogue with the center from the periphery through themes that are vital to the center, but are ultimately universal. Thus, Borges takes over the center, or imposes himself on it from the periphery, so that the periphery becomes part of the center.

2. Latin America and Postmodernity: Inhabiting Cultural Paradigms

2.1 Towards a Theory of Postmodernism in Latin America

It is difficult to speak of postmodernity in Latin America because it is a global phenomenon which originates outside the continent in a site that does not share many of the same characteristics, especially in the socio-economic, scientific, and political domains. Indeed, it is this global dimension that produces a strong attitude of rejection in Latin America, although there are other reasons for it. One particular stream of thought persists in refusing to accept, as Borges had already formulated decades ago, that much of Latin American culture is inseparable from Western culture, even if his opinion is reformulated to state that Latin America lives various types of cultural systems simultaneously.

In light of various ideological, social, and ethical factors, it may be argued that Latin America—constituted by syncretism—is characterized by dissociation at all levels: the cultural level does not correspond to the economic, nor the economic to the social, and these in turn do not correspond to the political. Although Latin America has produced great poetry since the beginning of this century and has seen intense activity in the essay and the novel since the fifties, science, economics, technology, industry, and politics are in a state of under- or modest development, notwithstanding certain exceptions. It could be argued without exaggeration that much of the continent never entered modernity and the few countries that did faced bankruptcy for their pains. Nevertheless, it is easy to speak of a Latin American literary modernity which begins around 1888 and develops in stages until the 1960s;¹ and if this is

¹ The first stage runs from 1888 (Ruben Darío's *Azul*) until 1925, the second from 1925 (Neruda's *Residencia en la tierra*) until about 1955, and the third from 1955 (Carpentier's *El Acoso* and Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*) until the early sixties.

accepted we must use a different term, such as postmodernity, to name and describe what follows, unless we wish to petrify the notion of modernity.

This hypothesis is centered on a line of thought in Latin American cultural studies which attributes the dissociation described above to postmodernity as well as to modernity. It also pursues the objectives of describing Latin America's own contribution to postmodernity and avoiding its omission from discussion, as has happened so often in the past. Studies on culture in Latin America have dealt with postmodernity since the eighties and have turned in the nineties to postcoloniality, just as in the U.S. and Europe, taking the socio-cultural focus of communications, sociology and literary theory as their point of departure.² The general drift of these studies is based on the concept of heterogeneity: the de-centralization of the discourse of the center in the context of deconstruction, as re-appropriation or perlaboration (to use our terminology) of theories which originate with Foucault, Deleuze, and Baudrillard and derive from an archeological conception of language and culture (Herlinghaus 1994:49ff). At the same time, they are critical towards nationalistic, monolithic tendencies which claim a "pure" or "autochthonous" identity so that the *difference* of Latin America with respect to the so-called center is made to be exclusive and dogmatic and does not allow for openings that will permit the barriers imposed by specialization in different fields of knowledge and culture to be overcome in favour of trans-disciplinary and trans-cultural perspectives. Authors such as García Canclini (1989), Lienhard (1992), and Schumm (1994) understand the Latin American condition as a phenomenon of *hybridity*, which corresponds in the long run to Baudrillard's *implosion du sens* (Brunner 1987:36-37), Deleuze/Guattari's rhizome, nomadic thought, the absence of *telos*, and impurity of systems and genres, Lyotard's paralogia (Lienhard 1992) or superceding of master discourses (Sánchez Vázquez 1990:12-13), Derrida's *dissemination du sens*, and Vattimo's weak structure (Brunner 1987:36-37; 1994:49). Latin America has always been transcultural and hybrid, which does not mean that it has always been a postmodern culture *avant la*

² Although the scarcity of publishing resources is a problem, Latin America and its contribution (primarily in sociology—with its ideological overtones—but also in architecture) have been discussed since the mid-eighties. In addition to the studies referred to above, the following have contributed importantly to the discussion and were consulted while preparing this essay: Ferraris (1987), Morandé (1987), Pérez (1987), Casullo (1988), and Ravera (1988).

lettre, as Monsiváis (1994) and Brunner (1987:35) have argued, or that it has had a postmodern theory. postmodernity is born of the inter-relation between theory and practice, from a particular *condition* that has precise origins and should not be deduced merely from an agglomeration of cultures or cultural elements, which would be to confuse the cultural object with an historical, socio-cultural phenomenon. Indeed, postmodern cultural manifestations had already been produced in Latin America before there was a postmodern theory and the essays of Alejo Carpentier (1964), Severo Sarduy (1974), and Octavio Paz (1956) were already precursors of a theorization of Latin American postmodernity.

A fundamental change in the way of thinking in Latin America occurs when intellectuals and theoreticians finally decide to *inhabit* their culture, to use Homi Bhabha's term (1994), when they appropriate and re-appropriate it without adopting a peripheral and marginalizing attitude consisting of simply rejecting what is not wholly Latin American while considering all eurocentric thought to be hegemonical. By contrast, in their cultural, technological, scientific, and economic development, both Europe and the U.S. have questioned their way of thinking from the perspectives of Derrida and Lacan, Bell, Jameson, and others. On the one hand, the globalization of economics, technology and science has relativized the so-called national or monolithic cultures and, on the other, has made differences in culture necessary, or manifest, through hybridization. Heterogeneity and the fragmentation and de-centralization of thought and the self are not phenomena unique to Latin America, but appeared in the sixties at the latest in Europe, the continent considered the most homogenous till then. Today, homogeneity is an exhausted ideology, in its final throes before Europe is declared to be an immigrant continent. Both in the Old World and in the northern and southern hemispheres of the New perlaboration prevails.

Through the de-centering of the subject, the relativization of Western, eurocentric thought, and the abandonment of authoritarian, universal systems which lay claim to truth, Latin America, like those countries which are considered or consider themselves peripheral for historical and economic-scientific reasons, has acquired the opportunity to engage in a dialogue based on a way of thinking and a knowledge governed by a *hybrid* structure. Such a notion or experience rejects dogmatism and the rigorous models of a restricted, teleological way of thinking and is open to rhizomatic systems, that is to say, to the search for its elements and the integration of diverse or even

contradictory systems. Latin American thought has not only become part of the predominant postmodern discourse of our historical-cultural moment, but contributes to the search for forms and paths that correspond to its own historical and socio-cultural character.

2.2 Postcoloniality

The current discussion on postcolonialism—understood as a relativization of the present state of things and the beginning of a dialogue, perhaps a redistribution of power between the center and the periphery in the area of culture—is encompassed by postmodern thought. However, since the term has several definitions, some of them contradictory, I will replace it with “postcoloniality,” by which I mean an intellectual, social and cultural attitude linking the periphery and the center in a pluralistic and internationalizing way in order to produce dialogue. The epistemological site of postcoloniality is *postmodern culture*. As an epistemological category, it may be understood as a re-writing of the discourse of the center, a counter-discourse, or a subversive discourse of decentering, to be taken in its semiotic-epistemological sense, not as ideological-militant engagement, nor as the reconstruction of a substantial identity or essence, but as an appropriation of the discourses of the center which are introduced in a recodified form through inclusion in a new context and historical paradigm.

This concept should be seen epistemologically as a palimpsest, which supercedes the traditional opposition between the discourse of the colonizers and that of the colonized, or between the center and the periphery.³ Understood in this way, postcoloniality is a cultural term which (without removing its ideological content or depoliticizing it) re-codifies and perlaborates the past and the present with respect to the future, but does not incur in neo-colonialism, which would constitute a form of colonialism at a more refined level, where the possibility for dialogue would only occur from the perspective of the center. Neither race, space, nor matters of geopolitical-technological-scientific importance have a unique and special function in the conflict of discourses. This is a cultural concept, in an operational sense, detached from the scientific

³ Ella Shohat (1992:108) makes a similar proposal, in contrast to Anne McClintock who asserts that “the term ‘post-colonialism’ nonetheless re-orientes the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/post-colonial” (1992:85).

necessity that consists in defining the field of knowledge in which the scientist is competent. If we do not distinguish between cultural production and technological-scientific production, not only would we become simplistic, but would also remove the possibility of discourse from countries which possess it now but are not economic-scientific powers (see Shohat 1992:113 and 106-07). In a theory of culture, postcoloniality as a cultural category naturally includes the sociological, political, economic, and scientific, without incurring dogmatic classifications, just as it considers the contradictions and discontinuities (impurities) that occur in the various fields of the history of culture.

Postcoloniality as a postmodern perspective is characterized by an attitude and an intertextual, inter-cultural, and deconstructionist (in the sense of a critical-creative reflection) thought, by ways of thinking which re-codify (decenter) history, and by heterogenous or hybrid thought, which is radically particular yet radically diverse and, in consequence, universal. Postcoloniality is not exclusive, but includes the multidimensional or the interaction of various codified forms of knowledge, and seeks to unmask what colonialism and neo-colonialism had established as *History*, as irrefutable *Truth*, in order to reveal their contradictions and irregularities. As a result, it has become possible to interpret the contradictions, the plurality, and the discontinuities of history and culture concretized in diverse discourses, such as fictional discourses. Postcoloniality, in its postmodern spirit, initiates and creates; it does not polarize and is not militant. It is the militancy of the old local-nationalist discourses which, in many periods of the history of culture, has produced exactly the opposite. With their dogmatism they have prevented open discussion and the fostering and development of the Other in the cultural centers of the periphery.⁴

The question arises whether postcolonial discourse, when inserted in postmodern dialogues, will have any “power.” That is, whether it will be recognized and accepted, and have any effect on the founding concert of

⁴ For example, in the fifties and sixties the Chilean Ministry of Education’s curriculum for literature in secondary schools, or at least in schools applying for private status, many of them reputed to be the best in the country, excluded authors such as Rivera, Rulfo, Carpentier, Cortázar, Vargas Llosa, Fuentes, and García Márquez who were considered communist or pornographic. A similar situation, although without the same extremes, prevailed in history which was taught on the basis of “heroic deeds” in order to foster a deep sense of nationalism.

dominant discourses. As I shall show, a certain dialogic process is established without a sharing of power, or sharing it with restrictions. But, is it possible to engage in a decentered, ambivalent, or hybrid dialogue without imposing oneself? I believe that it is, which does not mean that equal participation in a dialogue will have immediate consequences in the exercise of power. The existence of a dialogic process leads to the transformation of the terms postcolonialism/postcoloniality, and periphery/center, in that they become redundant because there can no longer be a question of a discourse of the other or the colonized, but only of the other thinker. If postmodernity, as a paradigmatic way of thinking, based on plurality, multiplicity, and rhizomatic proliferation, eliminates hierarchies at the level of discourse, inasmuch as the Other is only the other word, then the terms postcolonialism and periphery/center would be reduced to their economic, scientific, and technological dimensions. The division between culture, economy, ethnology, etc., not only seems theoretically appropriate, but appears necessary in practice and should be clearly legitimized and established in order not to incur the problems described by McClintock (1992). This is especially so if, after the dissolution of the capitalist and communist blocs, the collapse of ideology and the program of progress both in Communism and Capitalism during the Reagan/Bush era, it is thought that the U.S. and Europe are in a period of post-history while the Third World is still located in a history where problems are solved by force. Postcolonialism and postcoloniality should not, in any case, be seen as subordinated to a retrospective linear relationship with respect to Europe, but are an attempt at decentering this form of reference.⁵ For this reason, I wonder whether the term postcolonialism runs the risk of re-affirming the state of colonialism.

Within this context, it seems to me that Lacan's writings on the formation of the self and the other, much like the research in historiography of Le Goffe and others, are fundamental, in that, by relativizing prevailing empirical methods, they also relativize their pretension or requirement to possess *historical truth*. New history resorts to all types of texts, whether oral, personal, or the everyday, which form a very diversified corpus. In this sense, Walter Benjamin's writings acquire an incalculable *postmodern* currency,

⁵ McClintock remarks, "In other words, the world's multitudinous cultures are marked, not positively by what distinguishes them, but by a subordinate, retrospective relation to linear, European time" (1992: 86).

sketching an archeology of knowledge which begins with the everyday and the margins of society and develops a history as an archeology of private life that extends outwards and combines in a kaleidoscopic variety as reflected in his texts on *les passages* and *le flâneur*.

3. Postmodernity and Postcoloniality in Literature

3.1 Jorge Luis Borges: The Beginning of Postmodernity

As I have argued in other contexts (Toro 1991, 1994, for example), postmodernity is inaugurated by Borges with *Ficciones* (1939-1944), not just in Latin America, but as a general cultural phenomenon, a remark that may be read as a contradiction since I have already indicated that postmodernity originates in the U.S. in the sixties, but any contradiction is chronological rather than systemic. Borges's work has experienced what has happened to many universal works of literature: namely that his discourse could not be historically situated, neither in what we might call high modernity or the avant-garde, nor in late modernity or the literature of the fifties, for the simple reason that his writing belongs to the second half of the twentieth century.⁶ This is also the source of the incomprehension it has produced both in Latin America and Europe. Within the paradigm of modernity Borges opened the paradigm of postmodernity and attracted attention in some philosophical and literary circles, such as the new novel and poststructuralism.

Borges's point of departure is a negation of reality, which he replaces with literature and then, in turn, replaces with a *simulation* of literature, in the sense which Baudrillard gives to the term. For Borges, the world is the result of ideas concretized in signs. The task of literature is "to pretend ... that those books already exist and to offer a summary, a commentary. This was how Carlyle proceeded in *Sartor Resartus* and Butler in *The Faire Haven*; works which have the imperfection of also being books no less tautological than others. Being more reasonable, inept, and lazy, I have preferred writing notes about imaginary books. These notes are *Tlön*, *Uqbar*, *Orbis Tertius* and

⁶ I periodize modernity in Europe as follows: a) early modernity, from Baudelaire to Flaubert and Zola and the beginning of the XXth century (1850-1910/20); b) from Proust, through Kafka, Woolf, and Joyce, to Faulkner (1910/20-1939); c) from 1955 to the beginning of the sixties.

Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain" (Borges 1980:407-08). Borges moves across a palimpsest which is a simulation of intertextuality in the sense that it does not use intertexts in a codified form, but in a rhizomatic form. His thought and his work are a ceaseless anti-teleological search and his route has no limits or transitions, only connections. His thought or discourse are determined by deconstruction, the rhizome, meta-discursive play, interculturality, historicity, cognitive reception, the ludic experience, heterogeneity, subjectivity, re-creativity, radical particularity, diversity, and, consequently, universality. Other characteristics include minimalism, irony, humor, integrative fragmentation and collage, and the disappearance of frontiers between fiction and criticism, art and non-art, reality and fiction, and virtually between author and reader. His writing is contaminated with the impurity of ideas, genres, and textualities. It is similar to *oulipisme* which, according to Genette, may be defined as a playful transformation: "*oulipisme* is a game of chance, like roulette. However ... this perilous recreation [*récréation*] cannot before long resist becoming re-creation [*recréation*] for the transformation of a text always produces another text, and thus, another meaning" (1982:56; our translation).

Borges's spirit of deconstruction, the rhizome and simulation is concretized as a reading of a palimpsest which reveals the meta-textuality of a text and its epistemological transgressions in a *para-reading* having as its objective the use of other texts as a point of departure which is then forgotten or eliminated. For this reason, deconstruction is the reading that privileges difference and the discovery of breaks or semiotic positions at degree zero. Postmodern deconstruction in Borges endeavors to surpass metaphysical binarism and oppositions such as interior (soul-spirit-thought-logos) versus exterior (body-writing-material) which come from Platonism, through Rousseau to Saussure. It is not a question of searching for the "pure idea," but for its *différance*, its original impurity. It is therefore a matter of decentering the subject in favor of transformations that are opposed to totalitarian systems. According to this theory, thought, like speech, is considered as the *play* of infinite substitutions within a limited totality.

Borges resorts to the palimpsest procedure as to a playful game, as a "channelled rhizomatic simulation,"⁷ by employing certain pre-texts, that is, by

⁷ By this term I mean "the intent to re-codify in another form, on the basis of memory, dreams, visions, and fantasy, the signs become lost and irretrievable in their course through history. Such signs are pragmatically,

using different types of textual insertions, including texts of his own as well as of various authors, different periods and types. This attitude is a palimpsest-deconstructionist one, but the use of pre-texts is merely apparent and hypotextual, namely quick passing allusions made without any semantic implication. The palimpsest does not lead to a version, transformation, or reversion of given themes, but creates a text which cannot be reduced to a superior codified structure, in the sense that, were we to stray from the traditional procedure of the palimpsest (which always presupposes a transformation of codified structures), we would find ourselves blocked. Nor is the originating text used for a newly concretized and actualized re-reading. Such is also the case for the post-text, which does not produce a new signified (an inter-text) in the inserted syntagmatic space and does not connect the signified of the pre-text with the new context, but uses its signifying structure. This is clearly seen in Borges's short stories in their resistance to interpretation at the level of the signified leaving the impression of a void and a radical segmentation.

There is a clear example of this concept in *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins* in the allusion to the dissimilar objects and terms combined in a Chinese encyclopedia (Borges 1981:142), mentioned by Foucault as the starting point of *Les mots et les choses*. *The Garden of Forking Paths* is also an exemplary representation of a controlled rhizomatic simulation:

and therefore semantically, orphaned today, at the moment in which they are thought. Borges *simulates* this chaos." "To simulate is not to imitate (in the sense that I share with Genette), inasmuch as to imitate supposes a highly codified structure within a hyper-textuality. Simulation is the attempt to reproduce the chaos of signs, the rhizome. Moreover, Borges ... takes the texts, words, and phrases from other texts as mere *motivating rhizomatic structures*, that is to say, as points of departure for *dreaming signs*. Borges's fantasy, inspired by one particular structure, creates another which, in general, has little or nothing to do with his point of departure. Thus, we have a simulation of dreaming, in the sense of inventing, but without parameters set *a priori*, a '*channelled rhizomatic simulacrum*' since it is a *channelled chance*, but not in the sense of serial-aleatory music, or Robbe-Grillet's novels." "The rhizome refers to its decentering and is controlled insofar as it results from mediation through language, which is inevitable. Hence the term *channelled rhizomatic simulation*" (Toro 1994:16; our translation).

In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of Ts'ui Pên, he chooses— simultaneously—all of them. He *creates*, in this way, diverse futures, diverse times which themselves also proliferate and fork. ...all possible outcomes occur; each one is the point of departure for other forkings. (Borges 1962:26)

He believed in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. This network of times which approached one another, forked, broke off or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces *all* possibilities of time. (Borges 1962:28)

Dr. Yu Tsun believes at first that the labyrinthine structure of the book by his ancestor, Ts'ui Pên, may be described in the terms of a circular structure similar to that of the *Thousand and One Nights*. This procedure supposes the elimination of certain possibilities as a result of a particular selection. The method of production and reception of the text would be traditional, according to the principle of a genealogical tree, and, with this in mind, he speaks of the evolution or heritage of a text which may be preserved, retrieved, updated, and therefore understood through the method of the palimpsest: "I imagined as well a Platonic, hereditary work, transmitted from father to son, in which each new individual adds a chapter or corrects with pious care the pages of his elders" (Borges 1962:25-26). After failing to interpret his ancestor's work, Dr. Yu Tsun realizes that Ts'ui Pên's principle of composition is *simultaneous*, *aparael*, or *rizomorphic* in our terminology. Hence all the possibilities of combination of all the terms usually found in opposition are feasible: "Sometimes the paths of this labyrinth converge; for example, you arrive at this house, but in one of the possible pasts you are my enemy, in another, my friend" (26). The phrase cited above, "each one is the point of departure for other forkings," suggests that each fork produces other forks and ramifications acausally. The commentary that his ancestor was a novelist of genius, although the novel was a despised genre, shows that he could cultivate it because he was a brilliant man of letters, not merely a novelist who superceded genres and the barriers of classification and whose thematics (metaphysics, mysticism, philosophy) were pretexts for something else for him and his time. Since

composition was simultaneous, or *aparael*, Dr. Yu Tsun is speaking of the rhizomorphic principle. Moreover, the rhizome may be noted in two other aspects of the book: on the one hand, in an act of war and an act of espionage and, on the other, in the theory of writing and the theory of non-metaphysical thought (as the allusion to Plato clearly confirms), which are connected in an *aparael* form after they have been de-territorialized. Something similar also occurs in the story itself: at first the act of invasion has no connection to Stephen Albert's visit. It is insinuated that he wishes to save himself from the danger pursuing him after he has been discovered. The ancestor's writing has no relation to the other texts cited at the beginning. The agent's labyrinth or rhizome is to save himself and send the message expected (Ts'ui Pên's book), that of Dr. Yu Tsun is to interpret it, and that of the reader is to follow and understand the system of the signifier that lacks a signified. Borges not only deconstructs the genre of spy or war novels, but also their structure, as well as the structure of the *Thousand and One Nights*. These are cited as possible starting points in order to be cast aside later and do not contribute either to a possible interpretation of the signified or to the constitution of a signifier. They are mere citations intended to show the contrary. Such structures do not invert or transform the signified/signifiers insinuated in the books of the books, but create a rhizome, something new, a unique, unrepeatable system which denies itself.

All the texts cited by Borges show an affinity with him with respect to intellectual and literary attitude, eclecticism, fragmentation, erudition, speculation, the problem of perception and dreams, the use of paradox, the taste for the esoteric, etc. Yet these factors also make it clear that they are not used in order to be inserted with a particular function at the level of the signified/signifier, but, on the contrary, with the intention of never being retrieved, thereby denying the possibility of their reception as new concretizations. Borges had already demonstrated this in *Pierre Menard, author of the Quixote* (1962:36-44) and in *Averroes' Search* (1962:148-55). What remains is the introduction of a new literary procedure: the palimpsest, ambiguity, error, or anachronism, in effect, the rhizome as a generating principle. But reception and the renovation of tradition are made impossible by the course of history and the pragmatic change of culture: in the end, the signs remain, like dislocated atoms which join and separate, and are varied and fused together by chance. Inasmuch as he forges a new form of deconstruction, this type of procedure makes Borges quintessentially postmodern: the literary

referent disappears, not by elimination or by being superceded but by perlaboration, so that a new text is produced in a way that contrasts with how Cervantes proceeds in *Don Quixote*, where the literary referent is always evident.

3.2 Borges: A Case of Postcoloniality

The postcolonial way of thinking, writing, and being received by the world in Borges may be shown from *The Argentine Writer and Tradition* (1962:171-79), *The immortal* (1962:105-18), *The Garden of Forking Paths*, *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, *The Handwriting of God* (1981:235-38), *Tlön, Uqbar Tertius Orbis* (1962:3-18), and *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote* and from authors such as Ricardou, Foucault, Deleuze, and Baudrillard. We begin with the premise that Borges is an author who appropriates the past, or his debt to it, and creates a future. If Latin America is peripheral and colonized, so that everything comes from the outside, then it is legitimate to appropriate the cultural elements of the center. Yet, when Borges begins his reading and initiates his journey through literature, he does not use it as an intertextual pastiche or a parody, but elaborates and perlaborates it to produce *his* unmistakable discourse—pure Borges—although whether or not it is also Argentinean is another question.

During modernity and neo-colonialism the value of Borges's discourse was not recognized or considered; at best it was avidly usurped without crediting him and his contribution was denied in order to claim it for the center. This situation changed, in part, when others began to quote him incorrectly, without conviction, and with ill will, and when he was admitted to the center. His discourse represents the struggle of the difficult relationship between periphery and center which may be summarized in general terms in the following conditions: a) his discourse is recognized, but hidden (the new novel); b) it is recognized, but dismissed as archaic (Ricardou); c) it is used as a fundamental point of departure (Foucault); d) it is used, but misinterpreted (Baudrillard); and e) it is completely ignored (Deleuze/Guattari). The point may be illustrated with a brief analysis of *The Argentine Writer and Tradition*.

Borges begins with the statement that the problem of the Argentinean writer and tradition—the character of Argentinean writing, “lo argentino,” Argentinean identity itself—and, with it, the relationship of Argentina to others on the periphery who wish to be part of the center, is an impossible problem which, he adds, does not really exist, but is a problem of rhetoric, proper only

to the pathetic in the context of local discourse and bar-room patriotism. The “Argentinean problem,” according to Borges, is an “appearance,” a “simulacrum,” a “pseudo-problem,” which is a problem for Latin America and the periphery in general, so that what he is really addressing is the periphery/center relationship. He analyzes the arguments used to constitute a discourse that legitimizes “lo argentino” and refutes them point by point with respect to their generic and thematic elements, as well as their formal characteristics.

His discussion may be summarized in relation to three theses which he describes and refutes through reference to examples. The first proposes the concept of “local color,” according to which Argentinean literature is based on *gaucho* poetry, with its lexicon, procedures, and themes that form an archetype or paradigm. The second states that Argentinean writers should follow the Spanish tradition in order to found their own, and the third argues that Argentineans are detached from the past and from Europe, as if at the beginning of creation, so that it is wrong to look to European procedures and themes.

For Borges, *Martín Fierro* is a paradigmatic work, but not an archetype because it is a link in a chain, not a starting point, or the original source. Furthermore, the comparison proposed between the *gaucho* genre and the art of the *payadores* (*gaucho* minstrels) is not valid because they differ substantially in form. While the *payadores* resort to a cultivated language and avoid the popular, those who adopt the *gaucho* style try to use localisms to such an extent that they must include a glossary of terms in their books in order to be understood. While the *payadores* treat general themes, the *gaucho* poets resort to the popular and the local. Thus, Borges concludes that works in the *gaucho* genre are as artificial as any other literary work. Local color is considered inadequate as a criterion for defining “lo argentino” (remember Borges's negative judgment of Flaubert's objective in *Salambô*) and Borges cites examples of Argentinean works which do not use it, such as Enrique Banchs's *La urna*, where the local is combined with the universal, the suburban rooftops of Buenos Aires with the nightingales of the Greek and Germanic traditions. According to Borges, “lo argentino” is rooted in the use of images: thus, the nightingale symbolically represents an Argentinean sense of decency and difficulty with secrecy and intimacy.

The problem of local color arises only through an awareness of a peripheral cultural context, since if the argument were made from a more general cultural point of view, the problem of the autochthonous nature of

identity and influences disappears. In this regard, Borges mentions Racine and Shakespeare, who took themes from Italy and Classical antiquity without it occurring to anyone to deny Racine his Frenchness or Shakespeare his Englishness. Borges even adds that those who advocate the local color thesis should reject it as a foreign aesthetic, a point which brings to mind the controversial historical-cultural theory of Victor Hugo's *Préface de Cromwell*. Another example is his reference to the Koran where camels are not mentioned, according to Borges, because they are already part of the culture and do not need be especially mentioned. The lack of camels is transformed, in this case, into a proof of the Koran's authenticity and not a negation of its identity:

the first thing a falsifier, a tourist, an Arab nationalist would do is have a surfeit of camels, caravans of camels, on every page; but Mohammed, as an Arab, was unconcerned: he knew that he could be an Arab without camels. I think we Argentines can emulate Mohammed, can believe in the possibility of being Argentine without abounding in local color. (1962:175).

In support of his argument, Borges cites a few of his own works, strewn with localisms, which he considers as "books now happily forgotten" (175). Thus, for him, his story *Death and the Compass* (1962:76-87) is a nightmare where elements of Buenos Aires are deformed and its places are given French names. Nevertheless, its readers discover "the flavor of the outskirts of Buenos Aires" (175). Finally, he mentions *Don Segundo Sombra* by Ricardo Güiraldes, a book characterized as "national" but, according to him, full of metaphors "of the then current literary circles of Montmartre." "As for the fable, the story, it is easy to find in it the influence of Kipling's *Kim*, whose action is set in India which was, in turn, written under the influence of Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, the epic of the Mississippi epic" (176). As Borges points out, for a book considered to be so national, it nevertheless took three cultural contexts to make it what it is. He considers it unacceptable that nationalists should preach "to venerate the capacity of the Argentine mind" while limiting "the poetic exercise of that mind to a few impoverished local themes, as if Argentines could only speak of *orillas* [river banks] and *estancias* [ranches] and not of the universe" (176).

Borges has two objections to the thesis that Spanish tradition should be followed. The first consists in arguing that if Argentinean and Latin American

history are defined as an attempt to become separate or distant from Spain, then we are faced with a contradiction because the former colonial power cannot be taken as a model or source. The second is the fact that the pleasure of Spanish literature is an acquired taste. It is not always well received "without special apprenticeship" (177), while French and English literature do not pose the same problems. Finally, with respect to the third thesis, Borges does not share the opinion that every cultural link with Europe is false because Argentineans and Latin Americans are detached from the past, separated from Europe, and in a state of initiation. It is precisely because of its youth that there is a different historical and temporal sensibility in Latin America. The connection with the Old World is so close that whatever occurs there has a great impact in the New, in Argentina in particular.

Having refuted all other possibilities, the discourse that expresses "lo argentino" is established from the categories identified and discussed. Borges concludes by affirming that Argentinean tradition is steeped in Western culture, to which it has more of a claim than the nations which own it. He draws a parallel with the Jews, who, he maintains, act within Western culture but do not feel tied to it. Hence their capacity for innovation. For Borges, the debate over "lo argentino," the problem of identity, and the particular is mistaken because it "is simply a contemporary and passing form of the eternal problem of determination" (178), that is to say, the eternal question about origins, the unifying trace, and continuity in time. He advocates an open—postmodern—position when he maintains:

our patrimony is the universe; we should essay all themes, and we cannot limit ourselves to purely Argentine subjects in order to be Argentine; for either being Argentine is an inescapable act of fate—and in that case we shall be so in all events—or being Argentine is a mere affectation, a mask.

I think that if we abandon ourselves to that voluntary dream which is artistic creation, we shall be Argentine, and we shall also be good or tolerable writers. (179)

This passage gives an exemplary definition of what I have been calling Postcoloniality: the relationship of one's own context to others outside one's own locality, the appropriation and reclamation of discourses and cultural phenomena that are the patrimony of all, not just of one cultural region. Borges

showed early and with some success the way to follow. His discourse is unmistakable, but is it Argentinean? The question seems to have no meaning. However, if we try to answer it, we may say that Borges's discourse is Argentinean only from a civic or geographical point of view. It is interesting that a good many Argentineans and Latin Americans, even outside academia, had difficulties for a long time in accepting the Argentineanness or Latin Americanness of his literary production. He has been fully accepted in the literature of the U.S. from the sixties onwards by authors such as John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Federman, or Sikenik, among others, although his effect on the French new novel or the "Tel Quel" group is as yet unrecognized. In short, treatment of him in twentieth-century thought has varied, from direct reference to absolute silence or misinterpretation, a status that is itself a condition of postmodernity with respect to Latin America.

Alfonso DE TORO
Universität Leipzig

(translated by Adam Spires and Richard A. Young)

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