



THE NOTION OF OTHERNESS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF NATIONAL CULTURES

HERNÁN VIDAL
University of Minnesota

Why are we now so assiduously talking about Otherness in academic Latin American literary criticism? Our profession undergoes periodical cycles of modernization when we introduce in our reading new analytical, descriptive and interpretive theories and methodologies, which publishing trade marketing makes fashionable according to strategies not always clear in their origin, inception and intention. The vogue of such technologies is apparent in professional conferences, symposia and publications, where we witness demonstrations of their degree of efficacy by scholars who achieve recognition precisely by means of such demonstrations. These modernization cycles are also marked by the clear predominance of certain topics of research generated by the heuristic capabilities of the technologies involved. A demonstrational effect is thus created whereby scholars are motivated to join the latest vogue out of professional responsibility and commitment to renovate their critical tools. In this way we maintain and upgrade our professional credibility.

During the last decades we have had sequences and convergences of structuralism (French or otherwise), psychoanalytical archetypal criticism, various Marxist and semiotic trends, and deconstructionism. Ungenerous comments label this as “trendism.” In a more constructive approach perhaps we should ask whether—following Thomas Kuhn¹—literary criticism is a paradigmatic scientific discipline, a question that has tormented some of the social sciences for years.² Kuhn designates a science as paradigmatic when long-standing consensus is achieved among practitioners regarding models that best define its subject matter, the relevant phenomena to be observed within it, and their interpretation according to the laws, theories, and hypotheses provided by the models. Scientists working within a paradigm are not innovators, but puzzle-solvers who conduct as many studies as possible in order to confirm the validity of the established models, until enough anomalies are detected and the existing paradigms are discarded and replaced. If this description is correct, and if we are skeptic about our profession, we might say that the diversity of technologies being applied indicate literary criticism is certainly not a paradigmatic discipline; if we are tepid about it, we might say it is a pre-paradigmatic field; if we are positive, we might say that, quite the contrary, it is multiple-

paradigmatic. Yet unless we come up with concrete sociological information about how the cycles of modernization take place, the change in technologies within our field will tend to have a highly erratic, irrational, non-cumulative aspect; we do not set common tasks the profession will accomplish until a new technology will be necessary. Some of these technologies simply bring back very old topics to the research agenda, although with a new jargon.

The coming 500th anniversary of the Conquest and Colonization of territories in America by Spain, sponsored by the Spanish government under the very problematic slogan "Encounter of Cultures," has perhaps introduced another element into the problem of professional retooling. Now we have an institutional intervention with a clear origin and intention—the promotion of scholarship dealing with the Spanish-American historical and intellectual interface. In particular, this intervention has led many literary critics in the Latin American field to respond to the research promoted by integrating the anthropological notion of the Other to their work and applying it to Colonial literature. On the positive side, this intervention has been one more incentive for the growing interest in Colonial literature studies and the expansion of interdisciplinary trends in our field. Yet given the way in which new analytical and interpretive tools are usually adopted, I do not think there has been a generalized discussion of the ideological implications of this new adoption.

From a socio-historical perspective, this paper is intended to make a contribution in this sense by situating the notion of the Other within the broader concept of national culture in Latin America. I will work with a Gramscian concept of national culture: it is the articulation and neutralization of various other alternatives of social and economic development projects by the hegemonic capacity of a power block. My main argument will be that the knowledge we may now acquire about the way in which radically different cultures are represented epistemologically and discursively cannot be separated from two of the major cultural preoccupations in Latin America at present—the critique of the application of foreign models of social and economic development in the area as the basis for the protection or violation of Human Rights: the right of nation States to self-determination, and within autonomous nation-states, the right of native people to the preservation of their culture and civilization. Once the notion of Otherness is situated among these issues, the result is a chain reaction; the problem of self-determination implicitly entails the creation of nation-states with autonomy enough to allow the population to arrive at a consensual definition of national needs, priorities and systems for social, cultural and economic development without distorting influences from abroad. On its turn, the consensus required for such definitions within high ethnic and cultural heterogeneity brings back to the research agenda problems now

traditional in Latin American studies—those of cultural synthesis, articulation, syncretism, and the national identity, now in its contemporary modulations.

The thrust of my arguments is to move the implicit implications of the use of anthropological concepts in literary criticism to the frontiers recently shown by discourse analysis as it has become more pervasive among literary critics: i.e., literature is only one of the symbolic forms created in the self-reproduction of society and should not be privileged exclusively in culturally oriented research programs. Full understanding of literature's social nature requires that it be placed comparatively among other clusters of discourse that define the historicity³ of a society—i.e., the cultural models trying to become hegemonic in a society as orientation of the process of capital accumulation: the nature of the "good life," the ideal image and gender of human beings, and the various forms of knowledge needed to achieve them. If this is the case, the approach I am proposing reinforces the contemporary tendency in the human sciences to blur their boundaries, particularly as it pertains to the crucial importance now being given to the narration strategies of research findings.⁴ If so, then perhaps we should take the next step and come to the realization that literary criticism could be understood as a discipline within symbolic anthropology. Once in this new realm, perhaps two benefits would accrue. First, from the socio-historical perspective we could come to the conviction that at least this type of literary criticism finds objective, scientific paradigms in the cultural models that regulate capital accumulation; second, the way would be open for debates similar to those that continuously engage ethnographers and anthropologists vis-a-vis their contribution either to the subjugation or self-determination of peoples. I will discuss the first issue at the end of this paper.

The need for such a debate appears obvious if we take into consideration that the notion of "the Other" encapsulates the sense in which anthropology elaborates its object of study: understanding the logic that brings together the institutionality, the functions, the symbology, and the process of self-reproduction of radically different cultures. Johannes Fabian⁵ explains that in order to constitute their object, anthropologists have always anchored their perspective in the present tense of European(ized) cultures as a fixed point in time from which to turn their interpretive gaze onto that radically different Other. Thus time was turned into a spatial dimension allowing for a taxonomic scheme; that fixed point was sequentially erected into a paradigm of religious redemption of civilization, and then of modernity. The characteristics of that Other came to be judged within an evolutionary scale in which the differences appear to be rudimentary manifestations of entities containing the potentials and the urge to move towards redemption, civilization and modernity. Fabian argues that no anthropolo-

gical trend—either evolutionist, diffusionist, functionalist, relativist, structuralist or semiotic—has ever been able to surmount this ethnocentrism. Together with the use imperialist powers have made of anthropological knowledge in their colonial or neo-colonial enterprises, this ethnocentrism has caused in conscientious and progressive anthropologists a continuous feeling of crisis in their profession, the need for public self-flagellation, and expression of guilt, remorse and nostalgia for the disappearance of primitive cultures under the homogenizing effects or control of transnational capitalism.

For Fabian nowhere is this crisis more clearly exposed than in the dislocation between direct field experience and the way anthropologists narrate their ethnographic reports. Responding to the professional demand of using technical paradigms and jargon, at the moment of narrating anthropologists must deny the experience of direct communication and cohabitation with human beings who show similar capacities to make symbolic sense of their space, time, actions, and the capacity to build a cultural identity in a present tense shared both by the observer and the observed. Anthropologists must rhetorically distance and separate themselves and proceed to place these human beings in a theoretical framework that turns them into archeological objects in an evolutionary continuum that consciously or unconsciously contrasts progress, development, and modernity with their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition. Fabian refers to this dislocation as “denial of coevalness” and “allochronism” evolutionary sequences and their concomitant political practice of colonialism and imperialism may look incorporative. After all, they create a universal frame of reference able to accommodate all societies. But being based on the episteme of natural history, they are founded on distancing and separation. There would be no *raison d'être* for the comparative method if it was not the classification of entities or traits which first have to be separate and distinct before their similarities can be used to establish taxonomies and developmental sequences. To put this more concretely: what makes the savage significant to the evolutionist's Time is that he lives in another Time. Little needs to be said, I assume, about separation and distancing in colonialist praxis which drew its ideological justification from Enlightenment and later evolutionism” (26-27).

Fabian's arguments are an effort to distill the core meaning of the historical development of anthropology, so he had to carry them on at an extremely high degree of abstraction. Nevertheless, anthropological discussions must secure a firm base in the actual workings of particular cultures to be of any theoretical value. For my purposes I will be anchoring my arguments on the cultural experience of Chile during the last two decades under a militarized Liberal regime. This will demand that I discuss the notion of Otherness by means of an abrupt juxtaposition of Liberalism and the

Socialist alternative of organizing society, since the struggle for these two cultural models brought about the institutional crisis in Chile. My narrative, though, will try to expand the Chilean case as a typical Latin American experience for the discussion of Otherness.

At first sight it would seem that the notion of the Other has no place in the critical language of a Latin American progressive intellectual. After more than a hundred years of apparent political independence we are direct heirs of the Liberal project of the early 19th century towards the formation of strong, independent nation-States, based on the material progress gained from participation in the rising international capitalist market. The emerging Liberals envisioned these new States with an integrating capacity stemming from the development of cohesive, homogenizing master narratives of national identity diffused by the educational system among ethnically diverse populations, once the Liberal project became hegemonic. During the 20th century this project showed its contradictions when these very same national master narratives, as used by the middle and working classes, became obstacles in the Liberal utopia of a free world circulation, accumulation, and transfer of capital. With the demise of the Liberal cultural-nationalist project, the ideal of autonomous nation-States was raised by the national bourgeoisies, the middle classes and the Socialist revolutionary movement. All contemporary critical thought originated in these sectors has been sustained by anti-imperialist and anti-dependency notions, vying either for a protected national capitalism or for an institutional rupture towards Socialism. Throughout the recent decades these trends have evolved into a deeper awareness about the disintegrating effects of an unrestrained transnationalized economy on the national policies. Within these nationalist parameters, what sense could it make to look at one's own national culture with an imperialist gaze, as if some of its components actually were that radically different Other?

I am afraid posing the question in this way is simply submitting to Liberal ideologies of national cohesiveness which the actual reality of dependency easily disavows. Ever since its inauguration as a satellite of Spain and Portugal, and later under the influence of England, the United States, and nowadays the ubiquitous transnational conglomerates—the “global economy”—, Latin American material and symbolic production has been carried on within the framework of combined and uneven development. These various Metropolis have selectively integrated some aspect of material production in the satellite economies into their control, in response to the changing cycles of commercial demand in the international market. Following directives generated abroad, the local seat of production of such commodities is turned into the locus of modernity vis-a-vis the science and technology used, the productive methods, systems, and equipment employed, and the deployment of an administrative, distributive infrastruc-

ture, and means of communication. The new pole of development eventually forces the reconstellation of the old, outdated productive systems so that they may serve a supporting role for the modern one. Thus the most ancient forms of primitive communism still surviving in the hinterland may be brought to function together with sierra located semi-feudal latifundia, urban industry still based on mechanical means of production, and the most efficient electronically controlled, foreign market oriented enclaves. In these conditions, the capitalist system maintains and self-reproduces by means of various forms of strategic gate-keeping of the key positions in the networks of distribution and circulation —oligopolies, clientelism, *gamonalismo*, *ladinismo*, for example. These “hinge” devices function simultaneously to maintain and articulate cultural fragmentation in a pyramidal sharing of political power and appropriation of economic surplus. At the representational level, this constellation of diverse modes of production is complemented with a kaleidoscopic mosaic of symbolic systems that may abruptly juxtapose and confront in simultaneous coexistence pre-Columbian magical world-views with the latest, most modern forms of scientific cultural discourse. The foreign symbolic capital circulated by the media and the educational systems, the accumulation of master narratives of national identity, the persistence of pre-Columbian and African folklore and the massive migrations of the population throughout the national territories and beyond, according to economic fluctuations controlled from abroad, generate forms of creolization which fuse together all kinds of expressive elements in complex patterns of cultural syncretism. Julio Cotler⁶ has referred to this process as urban ruralization and rural urbanization. Alejo Carpentier theorized the artistic implications of combined and uneven development with his notion of “real maravilloso.” Cultural syncretism is a spontaneous response of populations who must carry on their lives and reproduce themselves within the boundaries of a nation-State and the cultural models accumulated therein, yet responding to dynamic factors emanating from a productive logic outside their control.

Within the framework of combined and uneven development the Latin American intellectual castes have traditionally played the role of internalizing and adapting to local conditions the foreign symbolic capital brought by the historical cycles and waves of dependency. The prototype of this role emerged during the Conquest of America, when the anthropologist priests separated young children from their indian communities to serve as informers on their logic, organization and resistance strategies. Later on the prototype was readapted by means of scholarships and fellowships to obtain advanced academic degrees abroad. During the independence movements of the 19th century an urban based intelligentsia articulated a historical script defined by the tenets of Enlightenment, a script which certain sectors of the commercial and land-owning oligarchies felt inclined to

pursue; the creation of secular societies, with organic ties with the international market, nation-States in which the irrationalities grafted into the minds of the Latin American popular masses by the religious world-view of the old Mercantile Spanish and Portuguese Empires would be eradicated and replaced with a modern, rational, scientific, and technical administration of society. From then on the various fissures in the combined and uneven development mosaic came to be discussed under the bracket of Civilization versus Barbarism. At the material level, Liberals projected the synthesis of these components by diffusing from the main cities the civilization they imported from the advanced capitalist countries. At the ideological level, the Liberals expected to arrive at the cultural synthesis by creating, institutionalizing and disseminating master narratives of national cohesiveness articulated by imported ideologies. In this sense Liberalism attempted a cultural synthesis from the top. Liberal intellectuals have always had to adopt the imperialist gaze and observe the rest of the national culture as that radically different Other. Yet the long term chronological rhythm required by a peaceful cultural synthesis clashed with the speed needed by the national economy to readjust to the rapid cycles of commodity booms and busts in the international market. Given this predicament, governments based on free trade policies have always been tempted to use State military force to achieve fast solutions to the contradiction between actual national needs and international market demands. Military force is the panacea for securing real estate for export production in the hinterland through genocide of native peoples, and for neutralizing social upheaval against chronic foreign indebtedness, inflation, periodic devaluations of the local currency, substantial price increases, and the fall of living standards which are endemic in a Liberal economy. Such upheavals reinforce among Liberals the suspicion that barbaric elements do exist among the masses —whether they are called indians, anti-socials, communists or subversives.

The Liberal need to secure the national territory for unimpeded circulation of capital, for the establishment of foreign production enclaves, and a migrating labor force that will move around in response to the productive calendar disrupt the myths of nationality:⁷ the notion of a “we” gathered together in a community sharing similar historical experiences and future projects sedimented in an ongoing creation of symbols and master narratives of national identity, the notion of “the people” (*lo popular*) as a fundamental sense of collective justice that will satisfy the dignity requirements even of the most dispossessed sectors of the population, the notion of citizenship that demarcates the channels and procedures by means of which individuals will have the right and obligation to participate in the national projects. In its starkest repressive forms militarized Liberalism cancels this symbolic universe and exhibits itself as sheer domination. At this point Liberal intellectuals have lost all legitimacy as articulators of the national, in-

tegral common good and become spokesmen for the non-nation. In compensation, and in line with the geopolitics of the Doctrine of National Security, they shift their arguments towards the apology for the total continuity and parity between the elitarian civilization they represent locally and the rest of the Western-Christian world.⁸ The dislocations introduced into the national community by transnational capitalism are covered with an enthusiasm for hundreds of anecdotes that illustrate the adventure of fast change in modernization and excite a superficial nationalism.⁹ The national symbology and the folklore of the native peoples submitted to genocide are turned into exotic commodities attracting tourists, ornaments, ceremonies, rituals, carnivals and festivals to be performed within tourism complexes and enclaves, and images that may create an aura of prestige and a recognition factor for the exports of a country. In present day Liberalism the fissures of dependent, combined and uneven development have become permanent and the "barbaric" component of the national culture freezes into a marginal, estranged Other, permanently unemployed or underemployed, that has no place in the economy and in civilization. The barbarians can only be exorcised by means of the repressive tactics of Low Intensity Warfare, welfare handouts or pious statements about the need for society to accept the "human cost" of modernization. Using Fabian's language, in its crisis Latin American Liberalism has achieved the maximum denial of coevalness and allochroism.

For intellectuals responding to the Socialist utopia the feasibility of the Latin American cultural synthesis posits two fundamental issues: first, the articulation of an anti-imperialist revolutionary movement representing all organized social sectors affected by dependency —bourgeoisie and middle classes whose economic survival is imperiled by transnational finance capital and conglomerates, peasantry dispossessed of their land, marginalized and active working class and second, articulating the interests of heterogeneous ethnic groups in the anti-imperialist struggle and future society in such conditions that their cultural identity will be preserved, and their autonomy will be promoted. Among them Marxist-Leninist vanguard parties will be present or will later evolve. Traditionally these parties have congregated disaffected bourgeois and middle class intellectuals, and the most socially minded elements of the working class; therefore they contain a seminal experience of cultural synthesis. The critical thought behind these movements exposes the fragmentary, dislocating, distorting, marginalizing, polarizing effects that transnational capital introduces into the national social relations. A call is made for a liberation movement that will establish a sense of balance, proportion, continuity, integration, and justice in the projects of social and economic development.¹⁰ In order to implement this strategy, a new national State must be created, with enough autonomy to define in independent terms the real national needs, allocate the resources

required to satisfy them, and open autonomous spaces and decision making mechanisms for the participation of ethnic groups. Since the transnationalized local bourgeoisies and their external allies are not expected to relinquish their power peacefully, some kind of military capability must be assembled. In concerting and assembling the revolutionary front and articulating its political platform, in waging the military campaigns, the urban, enlightened, literate intellectuals must develop the capacity to interact with most heterogeneous sectors in terms of race, ethnia, language, and literacy. This interaction can bring on fundamental and mutual changes of life-style and world-view that inaugurate a new, more democratic cycle in the national culture —the rise of the New Man/ Woman. This cultural synthesis will be accelerated and deepened if the conditions are there to move forward from the bourgeois-democratic to the Socialist revolution. During this process the experience of cultural synthesis gained within the Marxist-Leninist parties becomes a way to institutionalize the new social relations. These revolutionary movements are an attempt to produce the cultural synthesis from the social base, maximizing coevalness, and erasing allochroism. Although the difficulties entailed are enormous, the accomplishments of the Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Salvadoran revolutions, and the Indian participation in the Guerrilla Army of the Poor and the Organization of the People in Arms in Guatemala, the Shining Path and the Revolutionary Movement Tupac Amaru in Peru illustrate the feasibility of the synthesis.

Keeping in mind the imperialist history of the notion of the cultural Other, fully maintaining it within Socialist revolutionary interpretive parameters is questionable. Although it can be argued that progressive intellectuals in dependent societies may be as ignorant of the ethnic heterogeneity of their national culture as any European, the social project entailed is essentially different. Knowledge will not be gathered and narrated to subjugate the Other or to satisfy open-ended academic requirements, but to visualize some form of popular political agency or to expedite practical alliances towards national liberation. If produced within political party structures, much of this knowledge will unfortunately remain reserved due to security exigencies. Yet some important aspects of it will reach the general public through various sources: post-facto testimonials, the production of intellectuals gathered in think-tanks who do sociological research or theorize in order to orient party lines or to participate in national debates, from party-affiliated or progressive, independent academic scholars who want to test or upgrade the validity of certain social theories or ascertain the historical and cultural meaning of specific conjunctures. The problem here is to produce knowledge of society from the perspective of the dispossessed and for the dispossessed so as to clarify the existing system of alienations that reproduces their subordinate status. This is the first step in charting the long-range strategies and practical organizational and mobilizational tactics, so

that the dispossessed will have better access to the benefits of collective material and symbolic production. In the Marxist-Leninist parlance this is the notion of "partisanship" or "tendentiousness," which is ground zero for all cultural analyses and interpretation. The theologians of liberation would refer to it as the "option for the poor." The challenge here is for intellectuals to come out of their middle class social identity, their habits and reflexes, and make their own the cause of the dispossessed, whose milieu and culture are often alien to their experience. As previously indicated, in the Marxist-Leninist tradition the vehicle for this transformation has been the vanguard party and the party cell. Here the efforts, minds and living styles of people from all walks of life are fused together in the process of meeting the political tasks set by the organization. Thus these personnel are turned into organic intellectuals who collectively represent, elaborate and act on the preoccupations and interests of the working classes.

Due to the externally generated dynamics of social change in a situation of dependency, all Marxist and Marxist-Leninist oriented parties and intellectuals must strive to update their concept of the popular classes and popular culture. The constant renegotiation of the ways in which the local economies are periodically reinserted in the international market profoundly modifies class relations. In a limited sense, this entails the displacement of the problem of the radically different Other to another context. This context is the changes and generational shifts among militants, which forces the party bureaucracy to renovate and reinforce among them the experience of the heterogeneity in the national culture for mobilizational purposes. Despite these changes and shifts, the pool of acquired knowledge and experience still remains in the institutional memory through various interactions: the recollections of old and/or retired militants, the permanent efforts made to recruit from among that heterogeneity, the assets in exile, if the vanguard party is undergoing severe repression at home.

The definition of the popular classes is perhaps the simplest issue and has been solved through a functional approach. They are the classes and fractions of classes most threatened in their interests by imperialist penetrations; therefore they are those who may potentially participate in a national liberation front as a consequence of their objective and subjective situation. Perhaps later on they will also participate in propelling the institutional rupture towards a Socialist State. Quite the contrary, the definition of the substantive nature of the popular culture—an immanentist approach—is the most debated issue for historical materialism, because, on the one hand, the existence of a "national soul" being gradually expressed through historical time is an unacceptable idealist philosophical contrivance, and on the other, the notion of a nation's "peculiar social physiognomy" or "collective personality" has not been theorized. Nevertheless, an effort at a substantive definition of popular culture must be attempted because in both revolu-

tionary scenarios—bourgeois-democratic and Socialist—the most subordinate social classes become the mass for political and military manoeuvring. Therefore, knowledge of their customs, mentality, and symbolic universe is imperative for the creation and maintenance of a revolutionary front composed of disparate social and ethnic elements, and for the efficacy of the leadership conducting the movement.

It would appear that these requirements force historical materialist theoreticians to the rush conclusion that a popular culture exists *prima facie*, on the basis of the materialist notion that all human beings, because they are human beings, cannot but acquire and create meanings and patterns of behaviour out of the array of symbolic and material instruments historically accumulated in a society. It stands to reason, then, to think that the subordinate classes do possess their own, distinctive culture, elaborated from whatever access they have had to the instrumental pool, according to the orientations dictated by the administration of the hegemonic cultural model. The theoretical crisis comes at the moment of defining that distinctiveness substantively, while at the same time avoiding the trap of an essentialist "expression of the soul of the people." At this point we discover that the question is being begged, because it is illogical to prove the existence of an entity by starting from the promise that the entity already exists. The question becomes even more complicated when the definitions of the concept of culture brought to bear clash among each other.

This issue lies at the core of the debate on the nature of popular culture recently generated by Néstor García Canclini.¹¹ Fusing the concept of hegemony from Antonio Gramsci and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of reproduction of domination through the administration, access to, and acquisition of symbolic capital, García Canclini defines "popular cultures" as "configured in a process of unequal appropriation of the economic and cultural capital of a nation or ethnicity by its dominated sectors, and by the real and symbolic comprehension, reproduction and transformation of general and specific conditions of life and work" (47). Later on he explains: in a sense, the boss and the lineworker share the same work in the same factory, seeing the same television channels, etc. (although obviously from different perspectives that generate different decoding); but at the same time economic and cultural options exist that differentiate them, separate jargons, and communication channels distinctive for each class. Both spaces, that of the hegemonic and that of the popular culture, are interpenetrated, so that the typical language of the lineworkers or the peasants is in part a construction of their own and in part a resemantization of the language of the mass media and political power, or a specific way to allude to social conditions common to all (for example, jokes about inflation). In a reverse sense, there is also this interaction: "the hegemonic language of the media and the politicians, to the extent it wants to reach the population as a

whole, will have to take into account the particular forms of popular expression" (pp. 48-49). Then García Canclini concludes: "Conceiving (the popular cultures) in this way, we distance ourselves from the two predominating positions in the scholarship addressed to the issue: the immanentist interpretations formulated in Europe by romantic populism and by nationalism and conservative indigenism in Latin America, and on the other hand, by a positivism that, concerned about scientific accuracy, forgot the political sense of the symbolic production of the people" (p. 49).

Upon commenting on this endeavour, José Joaquín Brunner¹² has called attention to the tautological and paradoxical nature of the Gramsci-Bourdieu combination in García Canclini. If we follow the Bourdieu component of the definition, we will arrive at the conclusion that popular culture is constituted by the ways in which the subordinate classes internalize their domination, a fact so basic in historical materialism that needs no redundant elaboration. Then, if we follow the Gramscian component, we have to realize that culture must be understood as the expression of an existing hegemony. Therefore it is composed of a number of indispensable elements: a specific, unified conception of the world that binds together the various sectors of a power block, an integrative capacity to articulate within its power other world-visions vying for hegemony, neutralizing their hostility while showing animosity towards them, a specialized intelligentsia charged with the articulation, elaboration and readaptation of that world-view, an organizational base for its production and dissemination among the population in order to orient its behaviour to the convenience of the dominant class through consensus or conformism and identifiable social sectors that function as the preeminent incarnation of that world-view. Because they have never been part of a power block, these ingredients are beyond the reach of the dominated classes; their symbolic production appears dispersed, disparate, inarticulated, uncohesive. It is, therefore, quite evident that here we are meeting a paradox in García Canclini's arguments; in order to define the concept of popular culture he uses theoretical concepts that deny its existence.

To solve the impasse Brunner recommends returning to Gramsci's notion of folklore to designate what García Canclini calls popular cultures. For Gramsci the subordinate classes possess folklore, not an elaborate, systematic, politically organized and centralized culture. Folklore is not a conception of the world, but multiple, juxtaposed conceptions of life surviving through history like mutilated, contaminated documents reflecting the impact of the various hegemonic cultures in fragmented, disfigured images, in capricious combinations, accumulated like strata that touch upon the gross in various degrees, all of which orient the practice and the beliefs of the dominated classes. Folklore decants a philosophical stance that Gramsci calls common sense. It is folklore of philosophy and, again, it is expressed in

dispersed, incoherent, incongruent ways, correlative to the social and cultural position of the subordinate masses. For Gramsci, the liberational aspects of folklore will be part of the raw material for the Socialist revolution and the inauguration of a new State and hegemonic culture. An appropriate educational system must carefully separate the submissive aspects of folklore from the liberational ones, so that a folkloric world-view will gradually be left behind. This should eventually lead to the birth of a modern national-popular mass culture, expressing a revolutionary power block articulated on the basis of the philosophy of praxis.

Gramsci spoke as a Marxist-Leninist about a cultural synthesis similar to the one being attempted in Latin America. The Socialist utopia was the integrating element of that synthesis at the dawn of Socialism in Europe, while the system was being built in the Soviet Union. Gramsci relied on the notion of the vanguard party for the conduct of the revolutionary process and the institutionalization of the new national-popular culture. Nowadays progressive Latin American intellectuals speak in the midst of very insecure redemocratization processes in the countries affected by Fascism, the collapse of the European Socialist block, the crisis of Socialism in the Soviet Union, and the impact it has on the Cuban, Nicaraguan, and Salvadoran revolutions. The severe internal strains occurring in the Latin American Communist movement have strengthened the influence of Social Democracy. Social-democratic intellectuals are displacing the issue away from a definition of the popular classes and popular culture, and into the theme of strengthening the more spontaneous micro-institutions of civil society vis-à-vis the political parties and the State. They would like to see the emergence of multiple, independent movements voicing neighborhood, community, ethnic, gender, and environmental concerns. They have abandoned the dialectic notion of the relative organic totalization of the different levels of praxis in a social formation and have come close to American Liberal pluralism; the dictatorship of the minorities can only be neutralized by the activation of multiple social agencies confronting each other in free conflict and competition, without State intervention. Therefore, these intellectuals condemn the instrumentalization of community based movements by political parties. Following Jürgen Habermas in many respects, they see no difference between the present outcome of Socialism in Europe and the social pathologies created by the bureaucratic administration of capitalism.

At this point in Latin American history, intellectuals in the Socialist tradition stand between a rich theoretical legacy, a deep crisis in the Socialist utopia and the need to reorient scholarly endeavours. What should be done?

My suggestion is amplifying priorities for research. The discussion of popular culture should also consider that Socialism is a subculture. In this sense two considerations are in order. On the one hand, the crisis in the

Socialist camp —*los Socialismos reales*— will not necessarily mean a decrease in the disintegrating effect of transnational capitalism in the Third World. Quite the contrary, if the invasion of Panama serves as an index, the lack of a counterbalance from the remnants of the Socialist camp may expand its scope and violation of Human Rights. The struggle to defend Civil, Social, Economic and Cultural Human Rights will probably increase. On the other hand if the utopia of Socialism is the grounding for the most effective, integral implementation of all Human Rights, the collapse and crisis of the *Socialismos reales* simply means that it is the party bureaucracies implementing the Socialist project who have failed, not necessarily the utopia. We therefore need to differentiate between the Marxist and Marxist-Leninist parties as bureaucratic institutions and the Socialist subcultures surrounding, supporting, and criticizing them. Perhaps the continuance and future dissemination of the Socialist utopia in Latin America will depend on that subculture and not on the party bureaucracies as we now know them.

Historical experience shows again and again that the party cadre and membership are an elite that do not totally account for the mass mobilizations of the subordinate classes. These parties become political vanguards only to the extent that they can objectively represent libertarian aspirations that motivate such mobilizations. This means that the vanguard parties are credible administrators of the Socialist ideals and symbology only to the extent they can erect themselves as points of political reference both before the popular folklore and the much more structured philosophical worldview of independent, Socialist oriented intellectuals. In other words, there are carriers and producers of a surplus of Socialist symbolic meaning outside party structures who circulate around, through, and into the political programs projected by the party bureaucracies. These are independent, well educated agents of all social classes who produce music, art, literature, and discuss, teach, and open spaces for a Socialist ethos in everyday life, without becoming members of political institutions, or doing so temporarily. They are the product and outcome both of the efficacy of the party bureaucracies in disseminating Socialist ideals, theories, and symbols, and of the periodic credibility failures of these bureaucracies. Some of them are children of actual or ex-party members. They represent and move within social circuits that reproduce personalities structured and consciously acting according to an ethos deeply committed to social justice, that generate peculiar life-styles where budgeting time and resources for such commitments is possible, that motivate particular selections of professions and trades, perhaps oriented to social service and the social science. To the extent that these spaces and social circuits do exist in societies where Socialism is not hegemonic, I think we are talking about a Socialist subculture. Within the realm of a Socialist counter-hegemony, this subculture stands half-way between the inarticulateness of popular folklore and the

highly structured discourse of the vanguard party bureaucracy that guides the party line towards the possibility of a revolutionary national State.

If the Socialist utopia cannot be reduced to party bureaucracies, we need to understand the origin and present expression of this subculture. Informally jotting down a possible research agenda for Latin American literary criticism and discourse analysis, it would be fruitful to go back and look into the Socialist trends and the literature produced within the radicalized Liberalism and Positivism, and into the Anarchist and Anarcho-Sindicalist thought and literature of the 19th century and beginnings of the 20th. What happened to this symbolic expression when Marxism-Leninism arose with the Soviet revolution and the Communist parties were founded? What tensions did Stalinism create among Socialist intellectuals? It would be important to direct a new gaze on exemplary, conflictive figures such as José Revueltas and members of the Grupo de Guayaquil. Research re-evaluating the connection between the Socialist utopia and the aesthetic vanguardism of the first half of this century and that of the Boom fiction —already underway in work such as Nelson Osorio's and Guido Podestá's— should be deepened. We need to understand better how Socialist symbolic capital circulates among Christians, producing such syncretisms as Liberation Theology. The poetics of Liberation Theology still remain to be decoded. The defense of Human Rights movement is rapidly moving to a position parallel to Socialism with the concept of Basic Needs in the United Nations discussion of new strategies of development the protection of Human Rights is better assured by styles of development carried out in an autonomous, global, integral way, based on the internal needs of each society, with the initiative residing in the social base and not in the State bureaucracy. This kind of convergence makes the Human Rights movement suspect of being a Communist front of those who believe in the Doctrine of National Security.

Finally, let me move towards a conclusion by trying to profile the consequences of my arguments for Latin American cultural hermeneutics. I do not think one can proceed to apply the anthropological notion of Otherness —as it has been done in some recent approaches to Colonial literature— without first filtering it through the present condition of most Latin American societies, that of being dependent national cultures, with a combined and uneven economic and cultural development. Otherwise, literary critics would be playing the fiction of observing the Conquest of America with total proximity, either with the wonder of the conqueror or the horror of the conquered, which is a strange, romantic, and perhaps perverse way of freezing history. Our situation in contemporary reality shows, quite the contrary, that the Other —ethnic heterogeneity within the national cultures— must be understood within the still mostly unresolved task of building autonomous, sovereign national States, with the free capacity to decide on the appropriate style and the desired system of social and economic development,

based on the recognition and most ample implementation of Human Rights. The very fact that we can use the notion of Otherness within the framework of the Latin American national cultures —either directly, as in the Liberal project, or displacing it to the discussion of popular culture, as in the revolutionary Socialist project— attests to the unfinished task of a cultural synthesis necessary for the new autonomous national States. It appears to me that this is the vertebrating factor of the Latin American cultural evolution. In these conditions, then, discussing Otherness turns out to be not a romantic freezing of time, but some sort of contemporary archeology: we can witness in the here and now a trauma similar to that of the original Conquest with the periodic reconstructions of dependency, with new actors, new cycles in the expansion and modernization of capitalism, yet with the same application of military violence, and the same gross violations of Human Rights.

Nevertheless, on the positive side this contemporary archeology also shows that the resistance to the periodic traumas of dependency has grown in an ascending spiral of complexity. Hundreds of years ago it was the suicide of indians and black slaves as rebellion against forced labor and deportation; it was *cimarronaje*; it was indian malones and wars; it was also spontaneous or planned revolts led by figures like Tupac Amaru; it was *bandidaje*, smuggling, and *caudillismo*, it was peasant uprisings. Then, in a crucial qualitative advance, it was artisans' mutual aid societies, positivist Socialist parties, anarchist groups, the rise of democratic middle class parties, the organization of trade unions, the Mexican revolution, the accreditation of Communist parties, then the rise of Socialist parties, the organization of huge labor confederations, the Cuban revolution, the Popular Unity in Chile, the Nicaraguan, and Salvadoran revolutions. Socialism became a viable, concrete possibility. Enzo Faletto¹³ argues that the entire modern Latin American social history makes sense only if we consider that the Socialist utopia ceases being the working classes exclusive social project and gradually becomes a national project. Only then Socialism becomes an axis generating struggles for or against such a possibility. Thus the various forms of populism emerging in the first half of the 20th century —*varguismo*, *cardenismo*, *peronismo*, *ibañismo*— must be dialectically considered both as an effort to preserve capitalism by derailing certain sectors of the working class away from Socialism and into supraclass, personalistic ideologies and movements, and at the same time as a kind of mobilization that could have taken place only because the masses were enticed by disfigured Socialist aspirations. Reformist movements such as the Christian Democracy could only come to the fore because they promised to partially fulfill the contents of a radical Socialist program —the agrarian reform, for example— with a massive influx of financial aid from the United States. Conservatives and militarized Liberals discredit the Christian Democracy alleging that its

reforms simply generate a stronger impetus towards Socialism. In their minds the last resort is the use of military force, which paradoxically brings on both a defeat of Socialism and another confirmation of the potency of its utopia in Latin America.

To conclude, my arguments point to a hermeneutic procedure; from the perspective of a socio-historical literary criticism and discourse analysis, cultural analysis and interpretation must proceed by detecting the contradictory axes of articulation —the equality of contradictory terms— that generate the production of symbolic forms within social formations as an index of the class struggle. In Alain Touraine's terms, these axes constitute the historicity of societies by revealing the ideological discursive production of organized social sectors vying for control of the cultural models that orient the process of economic surplus accumulation— conceptions of "the good life," of the ideal human being produced by the good society, and of the knowledge necessary to produce both. In this procedure it is imperative that cultural analysts direct their gaze at the central contradictions generated by such conflictive axes because "the truth" as social production cannot be located within any of the discourses vying for control of the cultural model of a society but in the total ensemble of these discourses. In my arguments I have designated that axis as the successive attempts to produce a cultural synthesis of dependent, capitalist combined and uneven development by Spanish and Portuguese imperial mercantilism, Liberalism in the 19th century, and neo-Liberalism and Socialism in the 20th century. In no way does it mean that understanding the logic of the ensemble of cultural discourses gyrating around such axis would force cultural analysts to pretend they are dispassionate observers hovering above and beyond human folly —although technocratic personalities might tend to take such a stance. It is indispensable, though, to find a long duration synchronic normative base permitting the interpretive imputations addressed onto the shorter duration, diachronic events being analyzed. I have found that synchronic base in the Human Rights movement The United Nations Declarations of Human Rights and its complementary Covenants contain all the rights accumulated by the human species through revolutionary struggle: the Civil and Political rights specified in the Magna Carta of 1215, and those created by the American and French revolutions; the Social, Economic, and Cultural rights created by the Mexican and the Soviet revolutions, and all the 20th century anticolonial movements. They serve as a critical base to address the violations of Human Rights committed both by Liberalism and Socialism. In the end the hermeneutic procedure described posits a firm paradigm for the study of symbolic forms in the historicity of social formations. It also erases the interpretive boundaries between most of the social sciences, literary criticism and discourse analysis. I suggest, then, we may as

well take a higher, vaster ground of endeavour and proclaim literary criticism as a discipline within symbolic anthropology.

NOTES

- ¹ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970).
- ² Stanley R. Barrett, *The Rebirth of Anthropological Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Marc Augé, *The Anthropological Circle. Symbol, Function, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- ³ Alain Touraine, "Historicity." *The Self-Production of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).
- ⁴ George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique. An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).
- ⁵ Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other. How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
- ⁶ Julio Cotler, "The Mechanics of Internal Domination and Social Change in Peru." Irving Louis Horowitz, ed., *Masses in Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- ⁷ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Tensions in the Bureaucratic-Authoritarian State and the Question of Democracy." David Collier, ed., *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).
- ⁸ As an index see multiple ideological perspectives in Hernán Godoy Urzúa, coordinador, *Chile en el ámbito de la cultura occidental* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1987).
- ⁹ Joaquín Lavín, *Chile: la revolución silenciosa* (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Zig-Zag, 1988).
- ¹⁰ See Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism. A Critical Survey* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980); Ronald H. Chilcote, *Theories of Development and Underdevelopment* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984).
- ¹¹ Nestor García Canclini, *Las culturas populares en el capitalismo* (La Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1981).
- ¹² José Joaquín Brunner, "Notas Sobre Cultura Popular, Industria Cultural y Modernidad." *Materiales de Discusión. Programa FLACSO, Santiago de Chile, No. 70, junio 1985.*
- ¹³ Enzo Faletto, "Estilos Alternativos de Desarrollo y Opciones Políticas. Papel del Movimiento Popular." *Documento de Trabajo. Programa FLACSO, Santiago de Chile, No. 118, julio 1981.*