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*Alberto MOREIRAS: Pastiche Identity,
and Allegory of Allegory.*

HISPANIC ISSUES
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LATIN AMERICAN IDENTITY AND
CONSTRUCTIONS OF DIFFERENCE

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◆ Afterword

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Alberto Moreiras

Identity has been a pervasive theme in Latin American critical reflection since Independence. In the old days it constituted a basic motif of organicist ideology—Latin Americans, it was argued, should develop an autochthonous culture, whereupon Latin Americans would finally come into their own, and establish their claim to property of the land on a firm foundation. In early postcolonial times identity was the battle cry of bourgeois foundationalism, without which the process of nation building could not properly take place. The more identity the Latin Americans managed to find, understood as the sum of cultural marks of differentiation with respect to metropolitan societies, the less precarious their young social constructions would seem. Given the weak state of civil society in most Latin American post-Independence states, it was important to develop a cohesive ideology that would at the same time orient social and political development and contain the potentially disaggregating tendencies of the vast mestizo and indigenous classes, as well as of the remaining procolonialist sectors within the leading class.

This ideology of cultural/political identity took on a life of its own and in time became a mark of itself. Supposing you were a

member of the cultural elite, you could only call yourself an authentic Latin American if you were willing to swear on Latin American identity. But identity was never here, only always ahead, always deferred to some future time when the perpetually unfinished identity projects would finally reach completion.¹ Many discussions concerning Latin American identity today still bear the traces of that essentialist, and essentially Romantic, heritage. Traditional identity-ism is no longer intrinsically linked to criollo anti-imperialist nationalism, but it still fulfills the basic compensatory function of middle-class ideology: it is used as a rhetorical war machine to persuade the generality of the citizens of the overall preferability of the local ruling elite. Identity-ism is still an ideology of containment. It attempts to regulate thought by channeling it into the deadening waters of tradition, understood normatively, not hermeneutically. "A thought of our own, a culture of our own" ("un pensamiento propio, una cultura propia") are never too far from being a thought of the proper, and a culture of propriety.

I would like to center my epilodal contribution to this volume by taking a critical position concerning identity, but one that will at the same time attempt to counter a quasi-automatic recourse to difference, which seems in most discussions to mark the complementary, but not opposed, "other" side of the rhetorical spectrum. As the title of this volume confirms, critical discourse has tended to compensate for the politically dubious overtones of the proidentity theory by emphasizing difference. But difference, in most critical formulations, is not quite understood as resistance to identity; only as its underside. A fallen but very powerful dialectic seems to be operating here, organizing a swampy discursive field within which any substantive positing of identity is constantly undermined by a necessary appeal to identity as difference (i.e., postcolonial identity as difference from the metropolis); and within which any radical appeal to difference is immediately overturned by the necessary co-positing of difference as identity (postcolonial difference as identity against the metropolis).²

As you will see, I eventually make my argument hinge upon a partial analysis of Jorge Luis Borges's short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius." There seem to be obvious reasons to insist upon

the fact that a critique of the premises of traditional Latin American identity doctrine is to be found within the Latin American tradition itself. Borges is a substantive part of that tradition. His unfortunate political comments on the side of cruelty and ignominy should be no obstacle to the recognition that in his textual work a momentous confrontation with historical-political issues of first importance takes place.

I will first attempt an analysis of the diverse positions on identity included in this collection. Starting from the assumption that the notion of cultural identity interrogates the possible equation between meaning and being, I will locate three fundamental positions, which I will call modern or symbolic, post-modern or allegorical, and skeptical. The skeptical position will constitute a good transition to the study of yet another position, which I will be calling the postsymbolic, and which I find exemplified in Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

I

Imagine a world where identity has been accomplished, where things, individuals, and communities have come to rest within themselves: wouldn't it be the worst of nightmares? It would probably be worse than that, because the very possibility of a nightmare would have been blocked by definition. In that world, the dark horses of repressed desire would no longer have any cause to stir, as desire would have been liberated by and in total self-recognition. The final definition of identity would arrest and bring to a halt any possibility of symbolic expression, precisely because the symbol would have been consummated once and for all. What, however, remains after the symbol is complete, its parts matched in seamless (self-)encounter? Let me risk a hypothesis: on the one hand, the systematic working-through of a totalizing aesthetics, that is, the mere implementation of a comprehensive logical mandate. As implementation of a given identity's mandate to reduce to itself anything beyond itself, it assumes a technical nature.³ Accomplished identity opens into a temporal horizon where the technological drive to exhaust itself is all there is. But, on the other hand, reflectively, no less systematically, although not dialectically, a counterim-

pulse arises to the systematic working-itself-through of a totalizing, technological aesthetics of identity. This counterimpulse cannot be understood solely on the basis of a theory of difference. It is not difference, but the material resistance of the real that opposes the systematic work of the identity movement with increasing strength as the system approaches final completion.⁴ As Drucilla Cornell puts it, "The very establishment of the system as a system implies a *beyond* to it, precisely by virtue of what it excludes" (1; emphasis in the original). The *beyond* never ceases to expand, in endless and silent work of negation, in the unworking of the identity work, which, at the limit, at the point of maximum resistance, will necessarily precipitate a world conflagration. As we imagine that impossible world, such a conflagration would reduce the very notions of self and community to ashes.

When we propose, for well-intended reasons, the coincidence of a group with itself, we choose to forget that nothing can come closer to collective death than self-coincidence. Communal self-coincidence brings us into the disastrous actuality of the death of politics, because politics is the negotiation of difference. As the recent example of Yugoslavia and the tragic antics of neo-Nazi Germans make abundantly clear, the negotiation of difference by recourse to identity can only organize political abjection.

In an article dealing mainly with potential abuses of the term "post-colonial" in contemporary cultural studies, Ella Shohat points out that the current practice of substituting terms such as "hybridity" and "syncretism" for older, rather monolithic notions of identity carries its own risks: "At times, the anti-essentialist emphasis on hybrid identities comes dangerously close to dismissing all searches for communitarian origins as an archaeological excavation of an idealized, irretrievable past" (109). As Shohat says, some sense of collective identity remains a crucial political necessity for social groups whose communal life has been exposed to serious rupture—let alone for those groups whose very survival may be threatened. Shohat makes a strong case regarding what she calls the "problematic" political agency of "post-colonial hybridity" (110). I recognize the political expediency and even the occasional existential urge for a reified,

more or less utopian notion of personal/communal identity; however, the ongoing celebration of hybridity and multiculturalism in the Latin American context can be just as politically paralyzing as it is emotionally comforting. Claims to multicultural identity seem at times to be closer to technological reification than older, more purist notions ever were. My point throughout this essay is not at all to question the force of political resistance or affirmation that identity claims may have. It may be necessary to state explicitly that technological reification in the global scale always already dictates for us a particular identity adscription that we may or may not be in a position to resist actively. *That* technological reification, which is another name for what David Harvey calls capitalism of flexible accumulation, is certainly politically powerful (see Harvey 189-97).

Oppositional identities, or rather, oppositional identity formulations, are often caught up in an ideological, transferential web of interests that in my opinion tends to void beforehand the pretensions of emancipatory counterdiscourse that those formulations customarily adopt. I have no objections to Shohat's assertion that the really significant question for any critical analysis of identity theory is: "Who is mobilizing what in the articulation of the past, developing what identities, identifications and representations, and in the name of what political vision and goals?" (110). The need for a radical identity critique is then, paradoxically, a constitutive part of identity thinking in contemporary times.

Within the mainstream tradition of Latin Americanist criticism, identity has for a long time been taken for granted, in the sense of having been used and abused as a singularly de-ideologized concept. In other words, although identity has long been recognized as a philosopheme, its parallel quality of ideologeme has tended to be dismissed, or even worse, suppressed. Thus reified, identity has often acted as a true schizomachine, truly the last, or the first, of the insidiously destructive mechanisms that constitute the legacy of colonialism. Identity, de-ideologized, is a technical concept that has reached the mantra-like quality of all technicisms. Within mainstream Latin Americanist critical discourse, we now have the technique of identity, to be used and abused upon any and all texts, even if human texts.⁵

The fact that nothing is ever critically proved concerning identity, as identity is not to be proved but only assertively handled, is only more wood for the fire, more grease for the engine. It allows for the perpetuation of the question: the question concerning identity, a sure way to emancipation, the categorical imperative, the pastiche that every postcolonial Latin Americanist critic has for breakfast: "Think so that your way of thinking must be shared by everybody who does not want to occupy a position of infamy: think identity! Repeat identity! Proliferate identity! Don't ever let go!" But the more self-righteous we are on reified identity, the more dangerously deranged we are.

From a battle cry against colonial dependency, identity has come to figure as the primary signifier of another resilient form of dependency: emancipatory ideology. I do not say emancipation, but emancipatory ideology. It may not be the worst kind of ideology, but it is still an obstacle for thought, and it has the peculiar characteristic of being an obstacle against itself. As ideology, it cannot be emancipatory; as a thinking of emancipation, it cannot allow itself to remain within ideology. And yet it does; and the infernal entanglements that it gets itself into, as identity thinking convolutes itself in order to milk out of itself the blatant contradiction that constitutes it, are coresponsible for the condition in which we, as Latin Americanist critics, find ourselves today. The symptom has become the disease.

For emancipatory ideology, there has been only one question: to assert identity. One does not "have" identity by firmly establishing difference, because difference can never be firmly established, but by reducing difference to the imperatives of identity, and most notoriously when the ideologues pretend specifically not to do so. Latin American cultural criticism has come at times dangerously close to being reduced to the question of identity. It has often been suggested that the reasons for that have to do with origins, and that origins determine destiny. In the same breath, then, the emancipatory ideologue argues for and against emancipation. It is the Latin American destiny, we hear, to be forever questing for identity; those are our chains, which are at the same time the mark of our freedom.

Can one break away? Is it possible to think outside emancipatory ideology, and yet think emancipatorily? Without think-

ing infamy? Can identity, or a critique of identity, still be the way to go? Does it have a positive, usable side? Properly posed, in my opinion, the question reads: Can we have a critical-political thinking on identity that is not a part of the current technologization of politics, and which indeed resists and thinks itself against said technologization?⁶

Identity has always been political. To the extent that identity is always political, an ideology of identity can function, if partially, as a critique of ideology. Identity thinking can conceivably be put to work against all opposed and/or totalizing presumptions of identity. In other words, identity thinking can function homeopathically. A spoonful of identity could possibly arrest identity. Identity could be used as a purely tactical notion. Given today's planetary dominance of transnational capitalism, identity could put a stop to global homogenization, if only in the negative sense of offering itself as pure resistance.

II

The essays in this volume understand themselves as a political intervention in the terrain of culture. They focus directly on the necessity to respond to the overwhelming division of the cultural field between interpreters and interpreted, colonizers and colonized; most of them see themselves as resisting, or attempting to resist, what used to be called first-world cultural imperialism. In this sense, the collection's underlying moment of truth is the realization that Latin American cultural histories withhold differences that global cultural homogenization should not be allowed to suffocate entirely. These differences, which, as historically motivated, can only be understood dynamically, and therefore not essentially, are the negative impulse whence a possible contestation of the globality of Western cultural hegemony can and should arise. The collection tries to engage the task through specific historical analyses of elements of Latin American cultural production that are seen to embody this possibility of resistance. Yet it is obvious that such overall merit stands as purely negative, insofar as it does not depend on a production of real, substantive identity, but on a sort of partial counteridentity arresting global hegemonics. The positive con-

tribution of the collection as such hangs on the individual qualities of the specific articles, as well as on their interrelationship. This is what I will now examine critically and selectively, as I would like to carry the discussion to where I think it is most decisive. I will not engage all of the texts presented in this volume, and of those that I will engage, let me say that I will not necessarily do so at the point in which they seem most, or even least, productive. I would rather focus on some paradigmatic moments, because through them we might attempt to understand the current predicament of Latin Americanist identity theory, and this volume's contribution to it.⁷

I will start with a commentary on Fernando Aínsa's and the first of Enrique Dussel's essays, because I think they are exemplary of a certain kind of Latin Americanist critical discourse. Within their own parameters, they are both in my opinion masterful pieces. I will attempt to critique their ideological underpinnings by pointing out what I consider to be textual inconsistencies. Such inconsistencies are not to be seen as the product of carelessness, but are an intrinsic part of the authors' argumentation. What we could call the essays' ethical tones depend on these inconsistencies, and therefore they are not to be eliminated by mere rhetorical cleansing. In other words, the following critique affects ideological positionings, not rhetorical inadequacies.

Fernando Aínsa begins "The Antinomies of Latin American Discourses of Identity and Their Fictional Representation" with a vague description of Latin America as a continent with "traumatic and fragmentary [historical] experiences, far removed from any gradual and smooth historical evolution." He proceeds to set up and discuss a list of what he calls antinomic constants, which in his opinion polarize cultural alternatives. Latin America would be "without 'intermediate terms,' without moderation or ambiguity." The antinomies that Aínsa points out (civilization and barbarism, country and city, center and periphery, tradition and modernity) "structure a large proportion of contemporary Latin American discourses of identity." His conclusion is that narrative fiction succeeds in the integration of those antinomies even when they do coexist in irresolvable tension, and even when they take the texts that embody them to an

impasse in which no set of antinomies seems to be able to take priority. This tense and even paradoxical conciliation of opposites within the literary text finally consecrates what Aínsa considers the "universal vision of what it is to be Latin American." Following Aínsa's logic, it is to be deduced that narrative fiction is the privileged cultural discourse that, by its ability to sustain contradiction without collapsing, can make Latin America "finally feel in charge of its own identity, that is to say, of its long-awaited historical maturity, beyond the antinomies with which the vicissitudes of history are characterized."

I take this position to be in fact the hegemonic position within the Latin Americanist tradition. Aínsa is to a great extent right precisely in view of the historical importance of his ideologemes: a large part of Latin American cultural production, and particularly literary production, has understood itself enmeshed in the antinomies that Aínsa points out. It is also true that most cultural producers who have undertaken conciliatory or integrating tasks regarding those polarities have in many cases failed to accomplish their task despite their best efforts. Likewise, the vindication of precisely such impossibilities of conciliation has been a crucial aspect of Latin American literary ideology.

But Aínsa's logic seems inconsistent on several counts. First, he wavers between a structural and a dialectical presentation, without wanting to take the steps that either one or the other model rigorously requires. Thus, his structuralism is limited and even voided by his constant recourse to historical modifications. But his dialecticism is also voided by the fact that he cannot find mediation between dialectical opposites. Second, in his presentation of fiction as privileged cultural discourse he wavers between a paradigm of revelation and a paradigm of construction, that is, he manages to say at one and the same time, and therefore contradictorily, that literature constructs reality and that literature reveals preexisting reality. Third, his privileging of fiction, and of fiction's defining power vis-à-vis the Latin American cultural predicament, never goes beyond description to a critique of literature as ideology, which leads the reader to confront the sorry conclusion that Latin American cultural authenticity is just the ideological nightmare of irreconcilable antinomies he describes.

At the symptomatic point where Aínsa must admit that in many of the texts he describes the structural polarities would open into blatant contradictions, he eludes the charge that his analysis might be overtly reductive by accusing those texts themselves of being simplistic. There is never a consideration of the possibility that alternative accounts of the antinomies Aínsa identifies, that is, accounts coming from indigenous communities, for example, would immediately inaugurate a possibility of understanding the ideological functioning of those apparently stable polarities that Aínsa's parameters could simply not comprehend.

Aínsa's essay can be taken as an example of a long-standing literary-critical ideology that, by erasing internal contradictions within its own discourse, as well as all thought of the possibility of an opening to perspectives that this ideology is trying to repress, presents itself as able to mediate the antinomies in the literary-aesthetic imaginary. Pretending to privilege literature by praising its way of assuming both sides of a given polarity, Aínsa is in fact privileging the ability of the hegemonic literary critic to mediate those polarities through an act of reading that is understood to be identity-producing. Aínsa's sleight of hand is clear enough: only literary criticism, that is, the literary critic, can reveal the structure that enables Latin Americans to transcend "the vicissitudes of history" and to reach the teleological end of history in historical maturity. By thus secretly privileging literary-critical discourse as the final purveyor of identity, Aínsa is more obviously concerned with critical power than with a historical situation that, in his hands, becomes food for critical processing. Aínsa's optimistic vision of critical mediation is substantial with his suggestion that identity is what critics can give, thereby revealing what some had always suspected: the ideology of cultural identity is, at least partially, a weapon in the cultural elite's quest for power.

Dussel's first essay in this volume, although coming from a more agonizing reflection on the universality of thinking as well as from what I believe to be a very different political position, shares some characteristics with Aínsa's contribution. In "Leopoldo Zea's Project of a Philosophy of Latin American History," Dussel sharply establishes the presence of four different

directions in Leopoldo Zea's work, with the intention of focusing upon the fourth: the "definition of a problematic horizon" that would attempt to follow a "path of universality" within a Latin American philosophy of history. Dussel gives us a clear and precise definition when he locates this aspect of Zea's work in the tradition of historical hermeneutics. I think Dussel is quite right when he affirms that Zea's programmatic intentions, for many years contested and rejected by dominant trends such as historical positivism, analytical philosophy, and Marxism, are in fact very close to positions taken by many influential Euro-North American philosophers today, and can thus be accepted with ease by the Western (hegemonic) philosophical community.

Dussel takes issue with Zea, however, by rejecting the possibility that a Latin American philosophy of history in Zea's sense can come to be accepted as philosophy "in the restricted sense," that is, what he would call normalized philosophy within the hegemonic philosophical tradition. For Dussel, Zea's hermeneutics refers to a preontological, *Lebenswelt*, everyday understanding "from which the work of philosophy itself 'in a restricted sense' can start." It is at this critical point that the discussion becomes in my opinion rather Byzantine, and that Dussel opens himself to criticism. Dussel argues in favor of his own (and Salazar Bondy's) previously held position in order to reaffirm, against Zea, that Latin America does not yet have a philosophy that Latin Americans can claim *as their own*. It therefore remains necessary, according to Dussel, for Latin American philosophers "to construct a Latin American philosophy orchestrated with the language and the discursivity of the hegemonic philosophical community." The reason is the following: it is the Latin American philosophers' mission to force the hegemonic community not to go on ignoring the work of Latin American philosophers.

It seems to me that discussions as to whether or not philosophy can be possessed by this or that social group on the one hand prematurely reduce philosophy to the status of ideology, and, on the other hand, dependent as they are on some reformulation of Diltheyan historicism, are singularly outdated from the perspective of what Dussel calls the "hegemonic philosoph-

ical community." Isn't Dussel's insistence on and will to integration within the hegemonic philosophical community itself a symptomatic remnant of a barely suppressed colonial mentality, held against all conscious expectations? Why is it ever so important to "make it" at the metropolitan level? When, in a note to his concluding remarks, Dussel formulates his own programmatic project of a "philosophy of liberation," and equates its fundamental philosophical categories with categories that attempt to resist oppression and undo exclusion, he seems blind to the fact that, by definition, an antihegemonic philosophy cannot be at the same time hegemonic. Is it possible to claim oppression and exclusion as fundamental philosophical categories with a view to be included as something other than the oppressed and the excluded within the hegemonic philosophical community? If there is a way out of this double bind, Dussel is not telling us.

I think Dussel's book *Filosofía de la liberación* is one of the best philosophical productions ever to come out of Latin America. His second contribution to this volume is also proof that his present work holds extreme promise and interest. The point is that in the essay under review Dussel's programmatic impulse gets out of hand, into what I earlier called a systematics of technological expansion, the goal of which is nothing but the colonization of the real. If the guiding principle of Latin American philosophy must be, as Dussel thinks, to achieve something like universal recognition, and if that will to universal recognition is not to give up its Latin Americanness, then I think Dussel's project reveals a close dependency on a metaphysics of the will, based upon the notion that the very identity of the philosophical subject is a product of the reduction to itself of all that resists it. I believe the same could be said of Fernando Aínsa's quasi-structural/dialectical objectification of the literary.

Three of the essays in the collection are radically concerned with the status of identity theory in postmodernity: those by Amaryll Chanady, Françoise Perus, and Zilá Bernd. Each one tries to think through the predicament succinctly formulated by Fredric Jameson in his much-maligned article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism": "One cannot acknowledge the justice of the general poststructuralist assault on

the so-called 'centered subject,' the old unified ego of bourgeois individualism, and then resuscitate this same ideological mirage of psychic unification on the collective level in the form of a doctrine of collective identity" (78).

Jameson's reflection attempts to pull out of this impasse by appealing to the notion of allegory. What is at stake in Jameson's article is precisely a dismantling of the philosophically naive identity doctrines projected upon postcolonial texts while preserving these texts' force as embodiments of oppositional discourse—in other words, as resistance literature. In Jameson's formulation: "All third-world texts are necessarily . . . allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (69; emphasis in the original). He continues: "Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69).

Jameson's article has been accused of unwittingly proposing a paternalistic, that is, ultimately colonial vision of third-world literature by virtue of being reductive in its sweeping determination of that literature as *necessarily* national-allegorical. In my opinion, however, Jameson is being more synthetic than reductive. The real difference between third-world and first-world texts is not that the former are national-allegorical and the latter are not, but that the former are self-conscious about it, and the latter are not:

Such allegorical structures . . . are not so much absent from first-world cultural texts as they are *unconscious*, and therefore they must be deciphered by interpretative mechanisms that necessarily entail a whole social and historical critique of our current first-world situation. The point here is that, in distinction to the unconscious allegories of our own cultural texts, third-world national allegories are conscious and overt: they imply a radically

different and objective relationship of politics to libidinal dynamics. (79-80; emphasis in the original)

Now, it is precisely because third-world literary texts are overtly concerned with a definition of community that it remains quite difficult for the third-world critic to remain unconcerned by identity theory. First-world critics can assume the unconscious crypt transmitted to them by the more or less traditional lack of overt political reference to community construction, and can generally afford to ignore it should they wish to. Jameson's argument in his article is that, far from attempting to erase elements in the third-world texts that are not exhaustively contained by the national allegory idea, first-world critics should concern themselves with learning about their own historical determinations from the third-world text. In other words, it could be said that the third-world text is not just a national allegory, but also embodies an allegory of the first world. "A study of third-world culture necessarily entails a new view of ourselves, from the outside, insofar as we ourselves are (perhaps without fully knowing it) constitutive forces at work on the remains of older cultures in our general world capitalist system" (68).⁸ Although Chanady, Perus, and Bernd do not directly engage with Jameson's article, I believe that some of its ideas will prove helpful to understand their position in the Latin American identity debate.

In "Latin American Imagined Communities and the Postmodern Challenge," Chanady focuses on Homi Bhabha's ideas on dissemiNation and on his critique of Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" in order to set up the two opposite but parallel limits within which her own reflection is to be framed. Identity has been, she says, problematized as a legitimate concept in postmodern times. This delegitimation erodes the basis of identity as the ground for national or subcontinental "imagined communities." But the overthrow of identity also implies the difficulty of difference. Her solution is an appeal to a notion of plural hybridization, which she presents as a heterology. With it, Latin American culture resists all politics of identity based on what would be a rather simplistic differentiation with respect to a colonizing other. But, just as drastically, it also re-

sists any and all politics of "pure miscegenation," understood as the exclusive defense of mestizaje, because the championing of mestizaje necessarily threatens nonintegrated, therefore marginalized, groups (i.e., indigenous groups, for instance, but by extension also immigrant groups, and so on). What Chanady calls the "radical questioning of the very concept of distinction between identity and alterity" is the basis of her attack on monolithic identity ideologies and of her defense of radical cultural plurality and hybridity.

Chanady's leading essay actively frames the rest. Reading it back from the perspective of the essays that follow it, Chanady's enframing has precise allegorical effects, in the following sense: Chanady's proposal for cultural hybridity within the radical questioning of the identity/alterity distinction forcefully expresses her desire to go *beyond* any positive formulation to be found in the collected texts, which are brought together in a volume on cultural identity/alterity. Those texts are allegorized in advance by Chanady's postmodern challenge, which relativizes all internal positionings in the collection by setting a limit to the validity of any stable positioning. In this sense, Chanady's introduction re-describes the postmodern along the lines suggested by the already-quoted Drucilla Cornell: "the 'postmodern' should be understood as an allegory" representing "an ethical insistence on the limit to 'positive' descriptions of the principles of modernity" (11), subjective identity being of course a classical one since René Descartes. It seems to me that this is the basis of Chanady's obvious sympathy for deconstructive positions such as that of Bhabha.

A rearticulation of Jameson's position on national allegory with Cornell's definition of the postmodern allegory might help critical reflection pull out of the impasse detected by Jameson, when he mentions the difficulty of rejecting bourgeois individualism while attempting to keep some notion of collective identity. This rearticulating move is explicit in Chanady's essay from its first lines. Blanca de Arancibia's warning against thinking identity as closure or nostalgia, reaffirmed by Chanady, organizes one of the introduction's most important dimensions, which is also brilliantly developed along different lines by both Perus and Bernd in their own essays.

Perus's "Modernity, Postmodernity, and Novelistic Form in Latin America" is basically concerned with fictional discourse and with the way the figurative nature of our apprehension of the real through the novel is of essential importance to detect and understand cultural/historical determinations of a given society. Everything in Perus's text hinges upon a definition of postmodernity as a crisis within modernity; that is, postmodernity is "modernity's turning upon itself" once the defining notions of modernity run their course and become exhausted. Perus examines aspects of the Latin American narrative tradition from the assumption that postcolonial Latin America, taking off from an epistemological problematic proper to itself *as* postcolonial Latin America, must figuratively, that is, allegorically question the epistemic notions of modernity, and that it has been doing so since long before that questioning became explicit under the name of postmodernity. Perus's reflection is not limited to the tiresome issue of whether or not there is a real postmodernity in Latin America, or of whether or not the Latin Americans are postmoderns *avant la lettre*. Her crucial contribution has to do with the following consideration, which is of course of global interest: "whether postmodernity does not run the risk of relegating political discourse, and politics itself, to pure fiction (in the traditional sense of the term), thus returning to a magical-mythical conception of language."

The reason why postcolonial Latin America's figurative self-representation is, like it or not, a critique of modernity is that modern Western civilization "constructed an image of itself that affirmed its destiny to become universalized as civilization by antonomasia, exclusion, or abasement of what remained outside its orbit, or resisted absorption." For Latin American foundational texts, such as Sarmiento's *Facundo*, which were being written with a fierce anticolonialist spirit, but also following metropolitan Enlightened models, the universalizing drive of European modernity became a double bind that made Latin Americans constitute themselves as split and unstable, even at the level of the subject of enunciation. Because the subject is unstable, it cannot assume the teleological, rational linearity of European Enlightened historiography and sociopolitical discourse, but it cannot turn its back on them either. Postcolonial Latin

American discourse has the characteristics of what Perus calls "peripheral transition":

By "peripheral transition" I mean the constitution or reconstitution of national culture and literature around a double dialogue, tense and conflicting, and between spheres of culture: "universal" culture on the one hand (or, that of the various metropolises, past and present, that can in no way be considered homogeneous), and "autochthonous" culture, mainly oral and popular, although not homogeneous either, on the other.

This dialogic conflict makes it impossible for Latin American narrative to represent that which it aims to represent: the historical/progressive time of the center, transplanted. Transplantation proves more complex than bargained for.

Historically, the way Latin American narrative attempts to solve the conflict takes the shape of a reformulation of progressive time in terms of a return to the origin, implying therefore the negation or reversal of progressive time. As "return to the origin" tries to eliminate cultural disjunction, it will come face to face with myth, as Perus describes:

Latin American fiction tends above all to reactivate, apply to its own context, and confront with its own traditions, the mythological beliefs and practices that enlightened rationalism claims to have left behind, and the myths that this same rationalism created in order to distinguish itself from its origins or to represent its own periphery.

Narration then leads to a "conjunction of diverse historical and mythical temporalities, which the narrator structures around a zone of contact with a present whose becoming always remains uncertain." It is in precisely this sense that Perus can say that "the pre-Hispanic cultural heritage . . . establishes the basis for a questioning of modern Western civilization."

For Perus, identity is always a suppressed possibility, and that is why its search takes violent and erratic forms. However, by dismantling all critical recourse to essentializing, or fictionalizing, Latin American cultural conflicts, Perus can effectively read the narrative tradition from a historical/political perspective

that is as Latin American-specific as it is also of global import. Thus, Perus proves that it is not the postmodern, as she understands it, that will fictionalize politics. On the contrary, modernity, by presenting itself as the myth of the termination of myths, was responsible for a technologizing conception of language whose magico-mythical horizon was all the more powerful for being hidden from view under the disguise of Enlightened universality. The implication is, naturally, that identity doctrines, by being fully contained within the positivity of modernity, do not escape the teleological linearity of symbolic, that is, nonallegoric, fulfillment.

Zilá Bernd begins her essay, "The Construction and Deconstruction of Identity in Brazilian Literature," by stating that the main preoccupation of emergent and peripheral literature "frequently is to provide an explicit or implicit definition of its communities in its narrative." Although Bernd's formulation is clearly more cautious than Jameson's, it does carry a family resemblance. The main difference revolves around Bernd's use of the word "definition." If Bernd were to mean by it that peripheral literatures implement a representation of their communities in the classical sense, i.e., representation as the pull for maximum concordance between meaning and being, then her position would be quite different from Jameson's. But, in fact, she does not mean that. In Bernd's usage, definition equals mimetic translation. By arguing in favor of what I interpret as a translative adjustment between peripheral literatures and their communities, Bernd is opening her text to a reading in the allegorical key.

Both Jameson and Bernd may have a common source in *Le discours antillais* by Edouard Glissant, from whom Bernd also takes the basic frame for her critical development. According to Glissant, literature has a "desacralizing" function, which is demystifying and deconstructive, and a "sacralizing" function, "which reassembles the community around its myths, its beliefs, its imaginary, and its ideology" (quoted by Bernd).

For Bernd, literature's sacralizing function in terms of foundational myths leads to discursive homogenization and therefore to a system of exclusion or misrepresentation of that which resists being homogenized. In the Brazilian case, from origins

through the romantic period, sacralization took the summary form of "textualization of American space as mythical and marvelous; the conception of time based on a nostalgic attitude toward the past; and the construction of an exclusive discourse, based on a misrepresentation of the Indian."

But in sacralization the desacralizing function lies only half-dormant. As specific sacralizing ideologemes come to exhaustion, their desacralizing negative, always working them over in secrecy, comes gradually to light. The always-specific sacralizing/desacralizing tension within the literary work ends up by changing signs. In Brazil, this happens with the advent of Brazilian *modernismo*, which "initiated the process of destabilizing a homogenizing perspective that had become consolidated." Within the desacralization, however, a new sacralization also lurks.

Bernd thinks that the Brazilian process of democratization, after 1980, is accompanied by a new period that self-consciously embraces or attempts a synthesis of the sacralizing/desacralizing poles. "Contemporary Brazilian literature sees the emergence of texts that associate the recuperation of myths with their constant demythologization, and the rediscovery of collective memory with its continuous rewriting, implying an incessant questioning of oneself." Bernd concludes by associating this synthetic stage to marvelous realism.

Bernd's dialectic model does not therefore culminate in an apotheosis of self-recognition. Meaning and being are held apart by the impossibility of stasis between sacralization and desacralization. In the synthetic mode, which is always to some extent involved, community definition poses itself as its own undermining. The translative endeavor that rules over the interplay of homogenization and heterogenization within a given community's cultural production, as a translation of itself, preempts the possibility of a fixation of identity. But it does so not in recourse to difference. The incessant work of community translation in "continuous rewriting" is in fact simultaneously the radical unworking of identity *and* of difference. What remains is nothing like the original, but, precisely, its allegorical subversion.

I started my critique of the essays in this collection by referring to what we could now call the technological approach to

identity, which I found exemplified in Aínsa and Dussel. According to this approach, cultural identity exhausts the determination of a community's being, and therefore it remains a task that must be systematically carried out into completion if that community is to achieve historical maturity in universal recognition. This is the approach that I would like to call "modern," meaning that it is radically caught up within the parameters of modernity.

The postmodern approach, exemplified by Chanady, Perus, and Bernd, follows the notion that identity can only be understood in the allegorical mode, which is to say that identity has no end as it continuously opens itself up to its own undoing. Within this frame, identity has no substantive determination, for it only indicates the set of mechanisms and countermechanisms by which a given cultural community represents itself historically and politically. In other words, identity does not here primarily fulfill an epistemological function, but an ethical function in the critical sense.

Another approach is also to be found within this volume. I want to call it skeptical, because its practitioners seem to be committed to the notion that identity is nothing but a discursive position. For José Rabasa and Pierre Beaucage, if I understand correctly, identity has both epistemological and ethical functions, but only derivatively. Mainly, it is a cultural work, within the historical possibilities of a given social discourse, whose ultimate nature is not structural, but merely superstructural.

In "On Writing Back: Alternative Historiography in *La Florida del Inca*," Rabasa wants to examine "the conditions of possibility of the colonial (colonized) subject to constitute himself or herself as an author and develop a discursive alternative to the West." He briefly but decisively focuses on Fernández de Oviedo and Sahagún to show how their historiography helped establish a disciplinary field within which the parameters of the writing of colonial history were first developed as discursive construction. Within this discursive construction, Rabasa shows that ideological polarities such as that between the colonized and the colonizer, or civilization and barbarism, were actually only the extreme ideological simplification of a much more complex disciplinary web. He then presents Las Casas's and Inca Garcilá-

so's representations of the noble savage as a case in point: "The noble savage in their discourse is not the opposite of barbarism, but rather simultaneously includes and denies both terms of the opposition." For both of those historiographers something more than a mere inversion of values was at stake. Because Garcilaso wrote from the perspective of an Indian author, his discourse will go so far as to "dismantle and render absurd the categories that inform the prescription that Indians cannot write history." Garcilaso's is then an alternative history made possible by the disciplinary web that it does not so much subvert as expand. Alternative practices within a given disciplinary field, Rabasa seems to be saying, exist only because the disciplinary field does not just operate according to a polarized logic of exclusion: within it, cultural particulars can develop that, even if tendentially they might threaten the stability of the constituted field, in practice they do not. Rabasa's essay documents the presence of alternative colonial history as made possible by the fact that a particular perspectival dominance is always being enacted within the field. Thus, alternative history does not develop against the field, only against one or another of its particulars. It actually contributes to the field's sedimentation.

I am not quite sure whether Rabasa would accept my interpretation of his position as involving a radical critique of the emancipatory possibilities of alternative identities. Granted, oppositional subject-effects are produced by nontraditional historiography. Those subject-effects, however, by contributing to the stability of the discursive field, make hegemonic positions within it all the more dominant. Alternative identities, in that sense, would have a merely compensatory virtue. They would be comforting to the individual able to express them, and to the community able to recognize itself in them. But their epistemological or ethical value would be limited to that of providing internal critiques of representational excesses within the hegemonic discourse. If this position could actually be read in Rabasa's essay, he does not explicitly develop it.

Beaucage's "The Opossum and the Coyote: Ethnic Identity and Ethnohistory in the Sierra Norte de Puebla (Mexico)" begins by tracing the history of the identity question for ethnographic and ethnohistorical studies, and continues by establishing some

theoretical propositions that will frame the results of his field investigation. He distinguishes ethnic identity from culture, providing an important definition:

Ethnic identity or ethnicity . . . designs the symbolic array by which a human group . . . defines itself by its culture, which, in turn, means an explicit or implicit relationship/distinction with (an)other culture(s). For there is no "ethnic phenomenon" without interethnicity, without a relationship (of whatever kind) with the Other. It follows that, in the context of the Americas, Indianity or Indianness, as an identity, is necessarily a postconquest phenomenon. (Beaucage's emphasis)

Ethnicity is then not culture, but a "work on culture" whose result is "to break the continuum of society at a given point" in order to create ethnic frontiers through specific assignments of identity and difference. Another important corollary of Beaucage's explanation is that ethnic markers must be simple in order to be effective, and therefore they "tend to become stereotypes." Of decisive importance for a theory of identity developed from critical reflection on literary and philosophical production is the following: "If this 'ethnic work on culture' is to be efficient in building identity, it must remain largely unconscious. Culture modified as ethnicity has to be considered *the real culture* even if the gap with observable reality is evident to the members of another cultural group and to internal dissidents" (Beaucage's emphasis).

The next step in Beaucage's careful argumentation is to state that only a historical perspective can help us understand construction of ethnic identity, not only because the ethnic group is "materially, a product of History" but also because "ethnic ideology also re-creates History so as to give consistency and meaning to a concrete situation and political projects." Beaucage's position is in counterdistinction to the functionalists and the Marxists for whom identity is only "a[n] [ideological] sign of a hidden, more important reality," and thus false consciousness, and to the partisans of an essentialist cultural hermeneutics, for whom ethnic identity is only superficially affected by social and

economic changes. For Beaucage ethnic identity is "the result of an (unconscious) process of *constructing difference*" (his emphasis) and can only be properly studied through the integration of "economic, political, and ethnocultural dimensions into a historical perspective."

Beaucage's account is of critical importance, in my opinion, and not least for its vitriolic corollary that identity must be unconscious in order to be effective, which would seem to dismantle some of the political pretensions of collections such as this one. Critical analyses, in effect, void identity markers instead of giving them ground, and do reveal them, from the point of view of the critic, as ultimately arbitrary although historically conditioned constructions that, once perceived as such, cannot be kept except in bad faith. Thus, critical discourse develops a theoretical dimension within which identity must renounce both epistemological and ethical pretensions. Although unconscious identity is still perceived by Beaucage as an important cultural marker, it can have no proper emancipatory value, because its virtue depends on uncritical preservation.

Only one objection: when Beaucage is talking about the religious structure of the Sierra Norte indigenous groups, he concedes that "this is the deepest level of Indian identity, one to which the individual is slowly introduced by his or her elders, as he or she grows, and which may be only partly revealed to foreigners, after years of relationship." I would suggest that this single insight has the potential to throw Beaucage's theory of ethnic identity as historical construction into serious difficulties. If indeed domestic religion is the deepest level of Indian identity, and if this deepest level may be a secret kept from the foreigner, then it seems to me that the foreigner does not have a ground to claim explication of identity from an external, historical perspective. If religious ritual is the deepest level, it is because religious ritual is conceivably understood as the essence of ethnic identity. But this essence is necessarily left out of account by outsiders, necessarily out of reach of outsiders, whether they are intent on explaining it as a mere historical construct or willing to believe that it hides a secret whose brilliance, as Borges would say, could well arrest our thought or destroy our world.

III

I now turn to Borges, as I promised. If all third-world texts are necessarily allegorical, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" will be too. In this case, however, the national allegory runs into its own impossibility. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" allegorizes the national allegory. That it also resists modernity by delimiting its mythological presuppositions goes without saying. Borges inaugurates in this short story what I would call a postsymbolic approach to identity. We will see that Borges's beyond-the-symbolic does not fall into allegorical procedures, but questions them from the point of view of the void that the allegory always tries to hide—or to shelter—within itself. Borges does not argue for hybridity against identity, or for difference against mere plurality, and he is equally far from multiculturalism. He does not even concern himself, in my opinion, with skepticism. His melancholy construction moves toward an intensely libidinal perception of history, any history, as symptomatic of the rare but always pending disease of disaster. Whether or not his position is nihilistic, I will not try to decide. Theodor Adorno said, "What would happiness be that was not measured by the immeasurable grief at what is" (Adorno 200; quoted by Cornell 17). Borges's position may well hide a utopian impulse. Its analysis seems fitting as conclusion to a collection of essays that, insofar as I can see, have all assumed a recognition of the end of utopia. As the last of my epilogue, this analysis is also meant to reframe the volume's introduction, and therefore, inevitably, everything in between. To Shohat's advice that, before every analysis of identity, it would be well to ask who is asking what questions, and in the name of what political visions and goals, let me now add that a critical understanding of identity must find its intellectual weapons wherever it can. Borges's critique remains, in my opinion, extraordinarily powerful, and certainly not to be canceled by ad hominem argumentation.

The narrator of "Tlön," Borges, pretends that his reaction to the invasion of our world by Tlön is just to go on quietly with his "undecisive" translation of Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*—a study on epitaphs. But in fact his reaction is to write "Tlön," which is primarily to translate the Tlönian disjunction of his/our

world, as epitaphs translate death and in so doing articulate a kind of survival. Borges responds, in and with his act of translation, to Tlön's universal, totalizing writing, to Tlön's "hyper-mnesiac interiority" (Derrida, *Ulysse* 104), which is, at the time of the narrator's writing, in the process of self-constitution.

Let me assume, if only for the sake of argument, but following the Jamesonian idea that postmodern writing is the allegorical representation of the unrepresentable movement of transnational capitalism, that the relationship between Tlön and our world is a figure of the relationship obtaining between local societies and the global system. Even within this figure—a markedly allegorical figure, a representation of the unrepresentable—the implications of the narrator's performative are far from easily thinkable. To translate a universal translation machine . . . from what side or what fissure can one contemplate such a task? And what is the status of the paradoxical confirmation "Borges" gives to the power of Tlön at the same time that he announces his unconditional opposition to it?

"Tlön," the text, as countersignature and abyssal legitimation of Tlön's world, is not only an epitaph or postscriptum, but also a prologue to the immense labor of translation in progress. As you may remember, Tlön's translation of our world will mean the universal instauration of "Tlön's (conjectural) 'primitive tongue' [idioma primitivo]" (424). With it, "French, English, and mere Spanish will disappear from the planet. The world will be Tlön" (424; my translations of Borges throughout). The multiplicity of languages, of tongues, of idioms, will yield to an only tongue, which will inevitably retrace, translate, but inversely, the process narrated in the biblical story of the Tower of Babel.

According to the biblical book of Genesis, when there was only one language in all the earth, Shem's children, who had left their place of origin, decided to settle down and build a city and a tower whose summit would touch the heavens. They wanted, the text says, "to make a name for themselves," to make themselves unique within the common indistinctiveness, and thus to abandon their errancy, and not to be scattered across the earth. But God, offended, "confuses their tongues." He proclaims His name in the city, Babel, meaning "confusion," and He con-

demns the Shemites to disseminate across the face of all the earth (cf. Derrida, "Tours" 209-18).

God's war, by the act of giving His name to the Shemites, takes away their name (the name they wanted to make for themselves) and substitutes an idiom, or multiple idioms, for it. God's name is at once for and against dissemination. God's war is a terrible act of paternal love. With his Babelic name, Confusion, God provides untranslatability. But, in so doing, he also gives the possibility of translation. The untranslatable, that is, the properly idiomatic that refuses to let itself be made common possession, is the necessary and perhaps sufficient condition for the task of the translator.

Like the Babelic project, Tlön's creation is a political act. The politics implied are strictly antipaternal, atheist, antitheological. Tlön is nothing in principle but resistance to the Babelic loss of the name, to the Babelic gain of the idiom. From its origins in Idealist circles of Enlightened England, the society whose strange goal is to create an autonomous world goes underground until its resurgence two centuries later in Memphis, Tennessee. Its project is a transcendental project. It seeks the immanentization of transcendence. It wants to create God's kingdom on earth. It is a cosmopolitan project that, upon its resurgence, becomes a curiously American project. It emerges in Memphis, Tennessee, a nominal translation of the site of the pyramids, the pharaonic eskathon, the tomb of logos, and therefore the center of Transcendental signification. In Memphis, a millionaire called Buckley sponsors the publication of a so-called Tlön Encyclopedia.⁹ Mr. Buckley, the narrator says, "wants to demonstrate to the nonexistent God that mortal men are able to build a world" (421). Notice the strange structure of that appeal, the hole in the center of the sentence. Did Buckley know that the conception of a world by mortals was also for essential reasons the destruction of the world? The narrator knows it, as his melancholy depends on that knowledge. But Buckley—is he a lucid, active nihilist, or a merely reactive one?

Buckley cuts a melancholy figure too, in perpetual confrontation with a nonexistent God, but a God who makes Himself felt nevertheless, perhaps because of His nonexistence, because of that non-, that deprivation whose gift is the ineludible necessity

of a new alliance in the symbolic order, but this time a radically post-Babelic one. It is yet again not just possible but imperative "to make a name for oneself." Following the imperative, Buckley, whether he knows it or not, lucid or blind, also follows the principles of mournful introjection. Buckley's new world has the status of a fetish. Buckley is the prototype of the melancholy artist, whom Julia Kristeva introduces in *The Black Sun*: "The artist consumed by melancholy is at the same time the most relentless in his struggle against the symbolic abdication that blankets him" (9).

The project of creating a new world in open challenge to the essential colonizing power, a paternal God who is perhaps already dead, but whose law posthumously imposes the need for gifts and sacrifice: that project obeys the laws of mourning, the psychic requirement to project onto the symbolic order, as defensive introjection, the decisive loss of the primary object. Borges is staging nothing less than the basic paradigm for the Latin American quest for identity, for all identity quests, in fact, as the postcolonial quest is only a particular case of a universal historical compulsion.

But the primary object is not the paternal object. The loss of God, which in my opinion counts here as the loss of metropolitan "love" and of its sheltering cloak, is a substitute loss, a loss of a second order. How is "Tlön" a reference to primary object loss? The lucidity of "Tlön" is precisely not to posit a symbolic identity as the substitute for another symbolic identity. "Tlön" is postulating a postsymbolic identity, which is, as such, based in an idiomatic, idiotic, post-Babelic acquisition, but not in the acquisition of a new proper name, which could not but function as the sign of a renewed symbolic alliance at the point in which such alliances are no longer possible.

In "Sign and Symbol in Hegel's *Aesthetics*," Paul de Man defines the Hegelian symbol as "the mediation between the mind and the physical world of which art manifestly partakes" (763). Through this mediation, art has the function of conciliating consciousness and world. Consciousness shows itself to be "organic," that is, unifiable with phenomenal reality in and through symbolic processes. The Kantian distinction between experience and representation comes to meet its cancelation in

the Hegelian aesthetic symbol. For Hegel, art's function is utopian and messianic, in the sense that in art spirit and nature respond to each other, that is, find their correspondence. The coincidence of meaning and being is thus made ultimately possible. This is the radical way in which the symbol comes to displace allegory as the privileged trope of aesthetic representation. With "Tlön," though, the thought of a correspondence between spirit and nature, between experience and representation, between meaning and being, is destroyed, at least in its traditional sense.

The new conception of the world that "Tlön" announces as about to replace that which is still ours is antitheological, because it is based on the loss of God's name, even if that name is Babel, Confusion. Tlön loses Babel, loses all names, all substantive, proper names where God could have ciphered the law of the humans' eternal confusion: "There are no substantives in Tlön's conjectural *Ursprache*" (414). This is a crucial datum: it is because Tlön refuses all substantivation that Tlön must postulate a world that is necessarily to be understood antirepresentationally and antisymbolically. Tlön then appears as a radical attempt at approaching, i.e., creating, a pre-objectual world, which is what Kristeva calls "la Chose": "Let me posit the 'Thing' as the real that does not lend itself to signification, the center of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated" (13). It is because the object of desire in this world is the world itself, rather than any intraworldly object, that is, any object in the proper sense, that for Tlön's inhabitants, as Borges says, "the world . . . is not a concourse of objects in space; it is a heterogeneous series of independent acts" (414). In Borges's sentence, heterogeneity posits the primary real, which is unsignifiable and therefore unorganizable.

Borges's text, like mom's body, the thing in itself, or the death of a loved one, takes us to a region of thought where reason suffers paralysis and becomes catastrophic. It requires to be thought, but it makes itself unthinkable. It requires to be thought on the very basis of its unthinkability. The conflict is absolute and un-symbolizable. Borges's text inhabits an aberrant mourning, a scandal, a disaster of a magnitude similar to the one that takes

the Peruvian José María Arguedas to inscribe the final period of his writing upon his forehead, with a revolver; similar to the one that takes Rigoberta Menchú to the painful decision of not having children; to the one that takes Luisa Valenzuela to hand her signature over to the brujo López Rega in *Cola de lagartija*; or to the one that takes Alejandra Vidal, in Ernesto Sábato's *Sobre héroes y tumbas*, to throw gasoline around her bedroom and burn herself up next to her mad father's corpse.

The site of these disasters is the site of the necessity to postulate a project. To posit heterogeneity is to homogenize it; to project the unrepresentable is to represent it. To allegorize is then to authorize. To realize this, and to keep enough lucidity to inhabit its light, to be able to write it in its forced and forceful duplicity, makes the Borgesian text active not reactive, historical not antihistorical, melancholy and joyful, nihilistic but also preparatory. Everything depends on the distance that Borges takes concerning Buckley's project at the same moment in which he repeats it, and precisely through repeating it, that is, through writing it. In that distance we have an absolute critique of identity.

The fundamental act of "Tlön" is narrating the Tlönian project. The narrator says, "There are no substantives in Tlön's conjectural *Ursprache*" (414). But to mention this *Ursprache*, to conjecture it, to posit it is already to substantivize the lack of proper names. In the same way, and certainly not casually, we learn that, within Tlön's language, "the fact that nobody believes in the substantive paradoxically makes their number interminable" (415). In other words, if every idiomatic act creates its own object, as happens by definition in Tlön, then every idiomatic act constructs a new proper name. A totally constructed language, that is, a language that has purposefully abandoned all moorings in the referential real, is the most totalizing, substantive act the human imagination can conceivably think, and do. Idealism then becomes the most terrible of materialisms, because it drives itself to its own absolute negation.

The loss of the common names of things in the Babelic fall is the loss of symbolic capacity. Afterward, meaning and being no longer coincide. Post-Babelic times are idiomatic times, which is to say, asymbolic times, because the capacity to produce the

symbol has been destroyed by confusion. When the asymbolic knows itself, and makes itself an explicit project of world formation, the asymbolic actively becomes antisymbolic. Borges radically exploits Tlön's antisymbolic strength, which is the antisymbolic strength of all idealisms. All idealisms, one can say, lack substantives. In 1940, the ominous war year in which the short story is dated, Borges situates the realization of the paradoxically antisymbolic strength of all totalitarian systems, a force that necessarily breaks through the possible unity of spirit and nature, abandoning the pre-objectual world, the real, for its own self-generative capacity.

Borges perceives and resists that, but not in an anachronic or reactionary return to the symbolic. He does it through the mere constation, and its complex translation into writing, of the fact that the antisymbolic as such is, at the limit, at the point of totalization, the most violent substantivization of the lack of the substantive. The so-called *hrönir*, the Tlönian objects that are starting to make their appearance and insidiously colonize our world, are the sinister proofs of the destructive return of the substantive.

"Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," as an artwork postulating the antisymbolic, as giving name to Tlön's heterotopic project, would also be one of those *hrönir*, except that in "Tlön" it is said that everything depends on surviving them, on translating them, on resisting their damaging substantivation. Because "Tlön" translates the absolute machine of universal translation, "Tlön" postulates its own posthumous, postsymbolic character.

The resistance to Tlön in the Borgesian writing, although it does allegorize the need for postcolonial resistance to the metropolitan symbolic, is primarily a resistance to any postulation in the symbolic order, including, then, eminently, any postulation concerning cultural identity. This postsymbolic writing, because it would rather embrace the loss of the primary object, is a depressive, melancholy writing. The measure of its lucidity is given in the way in which it can maintain itself as writing. If all writing is a symbol, if all writing is a failed symbol that must construct itself as allegory, then postsymbolic writing lives in self-mourning. It survives in an undecisive labor of translation whose precariousness, however, shelters the uncompromising

joy of knowing itself faithful to itself, following its own law. Its survival attests to a difficult possibility: national allegories, cultural searches for social identity, may not be the ultimate destiny of postcolonial, Latin American writing.

Borges's rigorous theoretical investigation of the cultural identity problematic is among the absent, and among the most incisively critical, in a volume that has also failed to concern itself with at least two other major positions on the subject. I can only mention them now: José María Arguedas's final word in *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, and the ongoing theorization undertaken under the misleadingly unified name of liberation theology. I suspect that analysis would show them, in spite of appearances, to be closer to the Borgesian postsymbolic than to the other positions brilliantly represented in this collection.

Let me end with a nagging doubt, much more than an afterthought, but a thought that I have had to keep at bay lest I could not write the essay you have just read: identity is Europe's thought, Europe's most proper thought. Can we think postcolonial identity without occidentalizing, and thus recolonializing, the subject of inquiry? What is identity for the Quechua language? How does a speaker of Yucatec Maya relate to identity thinking? In the endless circulation of signs and concepts that organizes the possibility of cultural production today we are still not hybrid enough, not multicultural enough. Our hegemony, the one that lives through us, is the one that dictates hybridity and multiculturalism, any and all thoughts of counterhegemonic plurality as a means to keep the night of the world in place. The task of critical thinking has barely started.¹⁰

Notes

1. The Introduction to *On Edge: The Crisis of Contemporary Latin American Culture*, George Yúdice et al., editors, states: "The master discourses of the nation and hispanicity [have] fallen on hard times and no longer [project] the new horizon for the Latin American masses" (xiii). In his own contribution to the volume Yúdice writes: "There have been many different projects for cultural hegemony in the twenty-odd Latin American nations, but they all have one feature in common: its yet-unattained status" (10). Yúdice refuses to talk in terms of identity, and chooses the less-ambiguous term "democratization." I think Yúdice's choice is an admirably effective way of cutting through the sedimented layers of ideology attaching to identity discourse in order to get to the bottom line, which

is simply sociopolitical emancipation, and the ways of furthering it through work in the cultural sphere. For Yúdice, the way to accomplish that is by establishing what he calls rearticulatory practices with alternative traditions—whether those traditions come from Latin American history or from metropolitan developments is not in any case the main issue. That rearticulation, which in Latin America necessarily implies a critique of modernity in the interest of democratization, will follow what Yúdice, adopting a term from Silviano Santiago, calls pastiche. My title for the present essay is meant as recognition of my indebtedness to Yúdice's essay, and to the constellation of critics he mentions, such as Silviano Santiago, Nelly Richard, Néstor García Canclini, and Ticio Escobar.

2. Even extremely clever investigations of the field, such as María Luisa Puga's novel *Pánico o peligro*, fall prey to its demonic predeterminations. Thus, the end of Puga's book does not just represent a conventional, flat ending, but is, rigorously enough, the necessary distillation of Susana's radical quest within the parameters she has made available to herself. A lifelong search for personal identity in dialogic difference terminates in the poignant reaffirmation of a logical impasse: my difference is your identity, your identity is my difference, but please let's not make it antagonistic. My point is that the identity/difference dialectic is secretly a totalizing monology. To be sure, Puga understands that, which is what makes her novel one of the best contemporary interventions in the debate.

3. Readers who are already familiar with it will recognize in my appeal to technology a reference to the work of Martin Heidegger in "The Question Concerning Technology." Although I cannot now comment on it, let me refer to the best explication I know of the Heideggerian concept of technology, Zimmerman's *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*.

4. On these issues, see Clark and Cornell, and their discussions of the anti-Hegelian trend in contemporary philosophy, from Heidegger, Adorno, and Blanchot to Levinas and Derrida. See also the forthcoming collection of essays by Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*.

5. The question of the conflicting values of identity as a philosophical or as an ideological concept is of course quite complicated. In some metropolitan accounts, identity is the foremost concept of Western philosophy. For others, identity is the foremost concept of Western metaphysics. In the latter interpretation, identity presupposes the active forgetting of the difference between being and beings. For the former, there is no such difference; or rather, such a difference is a pseudoproblem, because identity has already dealt with it effectively by postulating that the sum of beings equals being. If we grant that metaphysics is a philosophical ideology, then the truly critical project concerning identity is to disentangle it from its privileged position, in order to show that identity is not beyond ideology, but, on the contrary, that its ascent as an ideological sign marks the beginning of the historical enterprise of concealment undertaken by the Greeks, and partially assumed by Judeo-Christian culture, and that it is therefore the very logos of ideology. There is no naive use of the concept of identity, because identity is not the bottom line of all there is to think—at least not for any thinking that wants to present itself as critical thinking.

6. This essay certainly does not mean to condemn, but only to critique, the important Latin American tradition of identity thinking. This is the tradition that

has managed to keep alive, in philosophical terms, the crucial point that being from Latin America should have a decisive effect on how one thinks. All thinking is of course historically and socially rooted. From Andrés Bello and José Martí through José Carlos Mariátegui, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Reyes, and Samuel Ramos to Leopoldo Zea, Angel Rama, Antonio Cornejo Polar, and Enrique Dussel, to name just a few contributors, Latin American identity thinking has been a stimulating source of intellectual energy and a repository of anticolonialist suspicion. Let me also recognize a personal debt by mentioning José Luis Gómez Martínez's book *Bolivia: Un pueblo en busca de su identidad* and Djelal Kadir's radically different *Questing Fictions*. Another personal debt, one of the more radical recent interventions in the identity debate, is Carlos Alonso's *The Spanish American Regional Novel: Modernity and Autochthony*.

7. I will not directly engage the essays by Arancibia and Zavala, or the second contribution by Enrique Dussel. My reasons for not doing so can be summarized in the following sense: I have not found a way to make them fit into my own narrative. I have not purposefully wanted to avoid them or to silence the recognition of their contribution.

8. The article initiating the controversy on Jameson's position is Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory.'" See Madhava Prasad, "On the Question of a Theory of (Third World) Literature" for an update of the issues and a bibliographical summary. See also, as directly relevant to the Latin American case and an excellent reflection on the Jamesonian predicament, Santiago Colás, "The Third World in Jameson's *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*." Yúdice, "Postmodernity and Transnational Capitalism in Latin America," also critiques Jameson.

9. Buckley has a homonymous character in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: an Irish soldier quite concerned with Irish nationalism, who will or will not shoot a certain Russian general. The correspondence between the two Buckylys should, I think, be studied, not just because both are pharmakic, sacrificial figures (with a goat in their name, and the law therein inscribed); also because in both *Finnegans Wake* and "Tlön" Buckley barely conceals a reference to Bishop Berkeley, the Idealist philosopher, whose function in *Finnegans Wake* as co(de)-constructor, together with Saint Patrick, of some motifs of Irish national identity is well known to Joyceans. On top of that, *Finnegans Wake* places the conversation between the pidgin fella Bilkilly-Belkelly-Balkally and the patfella Same Patholick under the mood of anxious melancholy. See *Finnegans Wake* 611, *passim*.

10. Three recent books must be cited here, as they are important enough to redirect the totality of the identity debate from a radical historiographic perspective: Gruzinski's *La colonización de lo imaginario*, Lienhard's *La voz y su huella*, and Mignolo's *The Darker Side of the European Renaissance*.

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