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Deconstruction and Subaltern Studies, or, a Wrench in the Latin Americanist Assembly Line.

Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated.

(Jacques Derrida)

It is essential to fight the tendential reduction of thinking to the condition of a means for the technical reproduction of what there is.

(Alberto Moreiras)

Deconstruction has been practiced in Latin American studies only on the rarest of occasions.

(Brett Levinson)

Preliminary Remarks

Hernán Vidal has asked me to provide an account of the relation between deconstruction and Latin Americanism, taking into particular consideration some of the points of contact

between deconstruction, the phenomenon of Latin American Subaltern Studies in the 1990s, and the role of so-called nihilism in the Subaltern Studies project. In this essay, then, I do not examine or define deconstruction as a particular approach to, or as a predefined set of coordinates within, the history of philosophy in its own right. In other words, I do not discuss the specifics of any of Jacques Derrida's particular readings of, for example, Rousseau, Saussure, Husserl, Nietzsche, Hegel, Heidegger, or a myriad of other philosophers, novelists, poets and painters. Nor will I discuss the propriety of any of the specific aforementioned readings for the field of Latin Americanism. It is the job of the reader to do that for him or herself, if interested. Rather, I approach 'deconstruction' as the name of a theoretical demand for the rethinking and potential transfiguration of Latin Americanism, which I understand as "the set or sum total of engaged representations providing a viable knowledge of the Latin American object of enunciation" (Moreiras, 2001, 32). As such, in this limited intervention I am interested in the (im)propriety of deconstruction as a potential discourse in, and as a critique of, the Latin Americanist critical repertoire as it has been constituted historically.

However, my ultimate interest in these pages is to insist on the Latin Americanist's intellectual, practical and theoretical *responsibility to Latin America and to Latin American truth*, rather than to promote a specific program for so-called "needed work in the discipline". The last twenty years have coincided with the full-blown consolidation of the neoliberal corporate university in the United States and beyond. In this time I have been struck by the way U.S.-based Latin Americanism has succumbed increasingly to the false authority of phrases such as "what we need to do . . ." or "what should be done is . . ." which are repeated with disconcerting ease in both writings and professional meetings alike. Of course, what these sentences generally

do is function as stand-ins for actual conceptual labor, and it is perfectly understandable that Latin Americanists based in Latin America, for example, should take umbrage at such phrases since they are by no means completely disconnected from the far reaching babble of contemporary corporate arrogance. Of course, intellectuals throughout Latin America, the U.S. and elsewhere are already engaged in badly needed work, with greater or lesser degrees of success, and my intention in these pages is not to insinuate that they are doing something wrong, or that what they do is somehow less fundamental than the conceptual register that this particular essay develops, or that my own work in general might be considered to try to sustain. In other words, I do not write these pages in order to tell anyone they should be doing things differently. I certainly do not write to tell anyone they should be doing “deconstruction”, as if it were a means of achieving instant happiness and personal superiority. We all know this is certainly not the case. However, Hernán Vidal’s commission to account for the relation between deconstruction and Latin American Subaltern Studies, an invitation that has come to me as a result of my (albeit brief) involvement in the project of subaltern studies in the 1990s, is immediately problematic, since it puts me in a position I do not wish, indeed, that I refuse, to occupy (you will understand the significance of this as you read on). I say this because I think the commission, while without doubt completely valid and well intentioned, also misses what I consider to be the point of what is truly important. I do not feel the need to justify the use-value of deconstruction for the field of contemporary Latin Americanism. I, like many of the people I discuss in the following pages, have never been a member of a particular school of thought. I have never identified myself as a “deconstructionist”, and, indeed, I think that what passes for

deconstruction in the field of Latin Americanism is actually far removed from the deconstruction apparatus in general. So I withdraw from my commission, as it currently stands.

As my epigraph from Brett Levinson puts it, “Deconstruction has been practiced in Latin American studies only on the rarest of occasions” (2001, 190). This, however, does not mean it might not be central to the questioning of Latin Americanism as the truth of Latin America materialized as a knowledge institution in the United States, Europe, Latin America and elsewhere. For if Latin Americanism is the set or sum total of materialized truth (of institutionalized instrumental reason) relating to Latin America, then by definition, in the current power/knowledge configurations of late capitalism, the university discourse of Latin Americanism is hegemonic knowledge exercised and institutionalized at the service of dominant ideology (the ideology of global capital, that is). This is very simple: the university exists in modern (post-Kantian) as well as in postmodern (neoliberal) times for, and on account of, the valorization of capital in its distinct forms and cultural-national assemblages.¹ Within this context, what is truly at stake for me is not the existence or inexistence of deconstruction per se in the field of Latin Americanism, or in relation to Latin American Subaltern Studies, but the general possibility for radical theoretical reflection under contemporary conditions. In my view this possibility is marked in generational terms, for myself and others, as a political and philosophical relation to the legacies of post-structuralism and post-phenomenology, in which the work of Jacques Derrida is certainly fundamental, but no less fundamental than the thinkers he and others claim as their legacy, including, of course, the Marxist and psychoanalytic

¹ In other words, “capitalism . . . subsumes intellectual labor into the process of valorization of capital, so that intellectual labor is [now] conjured into existence by the production process that produces it” (William Thayer; quoted in Moreiras, 2001, 94). The underlying question is, therefore, for whom are you really working when you practice your field of reflection?

traditions. In recent years we could also add to this list of inheritances the most productive and conceptually sophisticated forms of postcolonial critique, such as those to be found in the tradition of South Asian Subaltern Studies. In other words I view the possibility of radical theoretical reflection under contemporary conditions, on one hand, to be directly connected to the exhaustion of Eurocentrism's metaphysical discourse of the subject, and, on the other, to be central to an absolutely necessary and long overdue response to a Latin Americanist disciplinary apparatus that historically has positioned the Latin Americanist in a position of inferiority to theoretical reflection. Florencia Mallon's critique of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group's literary-theoretical bent, in contrast to the historical approach to Subaltern Studies, could be construed as an attempt to secure the Latin Americanist's position of necessary inferiority to theory, in order to privilege the disciplinary language of the Latin Americanist historian as the only "true" discourse for subaltern studies. This kind of disciplinary policing of the theoretical is, of course, typical of much of the Latin Americanist social sciences, as daily interactions between social scientists and humanists in Latin American Studies programs around the country invariably demonstrate. However, within the emergent Latin American cultural studies paradigm, in which the social sciences seem to be moving more and more in the direction of "culture critique" (in spite of often dubious understandings of what the term 'culture' denotes), while humanistic approaches appear to be moving more and more toward areas that used to fall under the exclusive purview of the social sciences, the securing of Latin Americanism's position of inferiority to the theoretical is becoming increasingly typical of the Latin Americanist humanities as well. In contrast to what I consider to be equally insidious forms of anchoring our thought as a necessary relation of inferiority to theory, in both the social

sciences and the humanities, I am interested in the possibility of an intergenerational theoretical articulation capable of actively refusing such historically constituted positionalities, and of utilizing that refusal as the grounds for a reflection that is capable of transforming the state of affairs in contemporary thought and its relation to, its complicity with, the institutional practices of the corporate university.²

The fundamental question, then, is the following: “Can [we] start to provide the elements for a new practice of critical reason in late capitalist times? Can [we] provide for . . . a new Latin Americanist theoretical practice that could not be considered neoimperial?” (Moreiras, 2001, 102-3). This is very simple, and the relation between deconstruction and Latin Americanism lies at the heart of both questions. It is the possible practical and theoretical answers to these questions that I am interested in approaching in the pages that follow. The reader will note that there is actually nothing new in what I say. Rather, these pages draw very much on pre-existing arguments that, once again, it is the job of the reader to take stock of, and, if interested, question and strive to advance. This, let us say, is the underlying wager of the pages that follow.

² I first joined the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group in 1996 because I, and others who joined with me, believed it had the potential for such an intergenerational theoretical and practical articulation. In 1995, at the age of thirty-two, I wrote a critique of the “Founding Statement” of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, which had been published in *boundary 2* in 1993. As far as I know, this was the first critical evaluation of the Group’s project (see Williams, 1996). I was then invited to join the Group on the basis of this critique. There have been other critiques of the Group’s project (see, for example, Moraña, Achúgar). As John Beverley (1999, 171, n. 26) points out, however, these do not alter or advance the conceptual stakes developed in my essay. As I will show in these pages, the possibility of a substantive intergenerational theoretical and practical articulation through the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group fell far short of the mark, even though the thought of subaltern studies has advanced considerably since the mid-1990s thanks to a number of fundamental works.

The End of Latin American Subaltern Studies

To provide the reader with the appropriate historical context for such a wager, or for the possibility of an approach to the relation between deconstruction and Latin Americanism in the wake of Subaltern Studies, I will begin with some brief comments on the phenomenon and experience of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, which was formed in the early 1990s by a small group of Latin Americanists who were trying to grapple with the realities of an emergent post-Soviet order and the consequences of that order for intellectual work on Latin America from within the U.S. In its first phase the Group was an affinity-based reading group that would meet informally once a year, in a private conclave, to discuss work and share ideas. In its second phase, it began to have potential for broader practical and theoretical engagements. However, that potential was never allowed to coalesce and as a consequence the Group split and never regrouped.³

³ I have never written anything about the experience, demise or potential legacy of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. There is no mystery or drama in this. For example, I did not participate in Gustavo Verdesio's recent *Dispositio/n* volume on "Latin American Subaltern Studies Revisited" because, like Alberto Moreiras (who was also invited and did not participate) I was doing other things at the time that I considered to be more pressing. Verdesio puts our non-participation in the following terms: "Although they were invited to contribute a piece to this volume, they decided not to do so. This brings us to another issue: the meaning of silence. Theirs—Moreiras's and Williams's—is symptomatic: the two so-called deconstructionist or theoretical members of the group decide not to talk about the deceased collective. This should be telling us something, but what? I honestly do not know for sure" (14). It beats me too. Verdesio's text adds cloak-and-dagger flare to the return to the end of Latin American Subaltern Studies. But it belies academia's seemingly endless need for the whiff of a scandal or potential conspiracy, the inkling perhaps of a surreptitious injustice, or maybe even suspicion of political malfeasance committed by "the two so-called deconstructionist or theoretical members of the

I should say at this point that I do not consider the demise of the Group to be a bad thing. The fact that it fell apart and never reemerged with a new form or principle of structuration over the course of the last decade is probably a sign that it fell apart for good reason. In other words, I do not consider the existence or non-existence of the Group to be something worthy of nostalgia. Nostalgia is always metaphysical, and I believe we must strive to think about what we do outside the entrapments of “the myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost native country of thought”. In contrast, we must affirm the possibility of an outside to this metaphysics with “laughter and a certain step of the dance” (Derrida, “Différance”, 27).⁴

I was invited to join the group in 1996 along with Alberto Moreiras, John Kraniauskas, and others. We announced our departure after the ‘Cross-Genealogies’ Conference of October 1998 after it became clear there were so many unproductive tensions in the Group—tensions that became accusations and open animosities in that meeting—that it was not worth continuing. Furthermore, it came to light shortly after the 1998 meeting that members of the Group who were more interested in questions of ‘coloniality’ than in notions of subalternity, or in the historical and theoretical critique of *hegemony*-thinking, had begun organizing meetings with members of the South Asian Subaltern Studies Group without informing colleagues from the Latin American Group.⁵ This represented the effective disintegration of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group that had met for the last time at Duke University in October 1998.

group” who, for reasons only known to them, chose not to even talk about “the deceased collective”.

⁴ For the most significant work related to the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, see Beverley (1999), Moreiras (2001), Williams (2002), plus the edited volumes by Rabasa, Sanjinés & Carr, and Rodríguez.

⁵ Basically we can understand hegemony to be the fabrication of a power (a language, an institution, a social configuration etc) that is built on, and that is only made possible through, its

In reality, it must be said that the Group was never such a thing. Rather, it was a confluence of disparate and, to a large extent, incompatible interests, forms, levels and types of engagement. It certainly had potential. But it shied away from realizing that potential precisely when it was presented with the possibility of a principle of structuration, and therefore with a potential intellectual engagement, that would have transcended the static paternalism of a collective structure in which there were “Founding members”, non-“Founding members” who were invited to join by the “Founding members” (often for reasons that remained unclear), together with a plethora of Latin Americanists who, for reasons never truly clarified, were not invited to contribute to the Group’s discussions or projects.⁶ In spite of Ileana Rodríguez’s claim that “together, we were, simply, a formidable group” (2005, 59), the group’s inability to embrace a principle of structuration other than that of the self-proclaimed paternalism of its “Founding members” meant that it quickly became a symptom of individualist careerism rather than an agent for thought and/or action. I should clarify, however, that, contrary to claims that were

relation to a subaltern ‘other’ that is the exclusion or negation of that power and of its ideological presuppositions.

⁶ By “Founding members” I refer mainly, though not exclusively, to John Beverley and Ileana Rodríguez because they have been the members of the group who have used that nomenclature most often and with greatest ease in their writings and in professional meetings such as the Latin American Studies Association International Congress. From my observations it should be clear that I disagree with Ileana Rodríguez when she says: “One thing is certain, and that was that no one wanted to organize the group on the basis of exclusions because exclusions reeked of party politics and all of us were sick of that” (2005, 58). On the contrary, exclusion was always central to the existence of the Group, as the organizational insistence on “Founding members” and non-“Founding members” clearly demonstrated to many of us in the Group, as well as to those outside who wondered about what it took to be invited in the first place.

made after the demise of the collective, the Group did not become a symptom of the careerism of those of us who joined in 1996.⁷

⁷ John Beverley has offered a version of the break up of the Group that is tied directly to the question of careerism: “I know the moment things came into crisis for the Subaltern Studies group. This happened at a Duke University conference in 1998” (2005, 357). In its first phase the Group had been institutionally marginal, even though, as Beverley puts it, “we had the aim of projecting ourselves into institutionality” (2005, 358). The problem, however, was that “there were famous post-colonialists like Spivak, or Rolena Adorno and Walter Mignolo who circulated in Ivy-League places, but we were not part of that . . . Nobody wanted to give us fellowships. We applied to the Rockefeller Foundation and nothing” (2005, 358). Beverley then transfigures this tale of professional marginalization into the narrative of a group of academic ‘*desperados*’ struggling in the name of subaltern salvation: “That was good because it allowed us to be *francotiradores* [snipers] in a sense. We had nothing to lose. We were a group of more or less twelve, like the Apostles” (2005, 358). Beverley then narrates the Duke University conference of 1998 as if it had hijacked the Group’s marginal status as *francotiradores*: “Mignolo and Alberto Moreiras joined. And Duke comes into the picture with its great resources, and there is this big conference. Lots of money. Big names. MLA-style. Whereas our previous meetings had been very informal, low-budget affairs. We would sit down for a weekend at someone’s campus and talk like you and I are doing now. Nobody gave papers. Audiences were not invited to come or anything like that. So the Duke thing was much more dramatic and ambitious . . . And then your former Dean of Humanities, Cathy Davidson, says at the conference something like ‘Subaltern Studies will be the model for the Humanities at Duke University’ . . .” (2005, 358). In other words, in Beverley’s narrative institutional recognition itself (hegemony) brought about the crisis of Latin American subaltern studies. But this narrative is in need of considerable clarification. As Walter Mignolo observes, the 1998 meeting at Duke University had actually been planned since the Group’s second meeting at Ohio State University in early 1994 (1). Indeed, the 1998 meeting was organized and coordinated by Walter Mignolo and Alberto Moreiras in full accord with all members of the Group, including the Founding members. We were all aware that there were profound intellectual differences in the collective, and both conference organizers could easily have put together separate meetings of similar dimensions and significance, inviting people representing only their personal intellectual interests and commitments within the overall rubric of subaltern studies. However, this did not happen. On the contrary, it was clear the conference was organized for the benefit of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group as a whole. It is erroneous, in my opinion, to suggest that the Group’s original project was hijacked by wealth and prestige. However, in what appears to be little more than a mechanical inversion of Country Club mentality, Robert Carr complains with sad passion: “We were political people within the university system, not university people batting about ideas of politics. Once the Group began to gain notoriety it began to attract new kinds of members. For some of these their main concern was their career advancement . . . Two streams of Subaltern Studies emerged: one political, the other concerned with academic cache” (12). My recollection is that the purpose of the Duke conference was, precisely, to have a major meeting

In the end the Group was actually not an agent at all. It disbanded before any significant agency could be claimed or any concrete collective project configured. As I have already noted, the only true, substantive problem with The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group—the abyss that was internal to it—was a structure built on exclusion that always contradicted its very name and its desired purpose. In one of her numerous essays dealing with the demise and potential

with highly distinguished international guests and prominent members of the university administration, as a means of bringing Latin American Subaltern Studies out of the professional and institutional darkness that had characterized its first phase. In this sense alone, and as the people who attended that meeting can attest, the 1998 “Cross-Genealogies” conference was an act of generosity rather than a careerist hijack. The fact that this generosity—the emergent promise and success of the project as a collective institutional-political project—was later given an ungenerous spin, and that the end of the conference became mired by accusations from the Group’s Founding members of careerism and project-theft, marked the real crisis of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, because those accusations essentially put an end to the possibility of a theoretical articulation capable of transcending the Group’s cult-like image. It is true that there were already enough theoretical and political divisions to have justified the group’s demise. According to Walter D. Mignolo, what happened at the “Cross-Genealogies” conference was that those divisions became more acute as two distinct intellectual understandings of the Subaltern Studies project achieved overwhelming predominance in the discussion, thereby displacing the centrality of the Group’s project as it had originally been conceived and coordinated. Mignolo puts it in the following terms: “Toward the end of the workshop it was clear that two complementary, although somewhat conflicting, discourses were taking place. One discourse evolved around the concept of hegemony and posthegemony, the necessary thinking of a possible extension of the political field beyond hegemonic articulations; the other developed around the concepts of coloniality, peripheral modernities, and decolonization” (4). Mignolo, however, exaggerates the division of the conference into two complementary discourses, because, in reality, over the course of the three day meeting it was actually the first discourse that defined the conceptual framework, internal dynamic and development of the debate, rather than the second. The so-called “complementarity” of these discourses within the context of “Cross Genealogies” is questionable. Nevertheless, Mignolo is right to point out that the internal dynamic of the conference triggered a discussion that for many marked the beginning of the end of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. In other words, rather than being a problem of institutionalization and wealth, it was the existence of a discussion that transcended and displaced the Group’s original understanding of itself, the reaction to this discussion by some founding members, and the withdrawal of the members interested in notions of ‘coloniality’, that signaled the Group’s demise.

legacy of the Group (in what appears to have become a kind of Latin Americanist cottage industry built on the eternal return to the “end of Subaltern Studies”) Ileana Rodríguez tells her readers that the Group could have been structured differently:

One of the structures that I saw we could have adopted was a mixture of a movement and a group. That is, to have a core group of people interested in carrying out on a rotating basis the bureaucratic functions of the group and in identifying the issues around which research was necessary, and then inviting people to participate in it. This makes the situation very clear to the profession and gives the collective the structure of a think-tank. The easiest way would be for each scholar to continue his or her own work while engaging with and organizing panels with other scholars working on compatible approaches. (2005, 59)

I agree that the Group could have been structured differently and that the particular principle of structuration outlined above by Ileana Rodríguez could have breathed years of life into the collective. This principle of structuration could have allowed the Group to become more than a Group: that is, a creative space, or “spacing”, in which people could feel free to invite anyone they wanted, to contribute to a flexible, broad-based editorial consortium capable of fleshing out all the lines of possibility, theoretical and practical, within the overarching rubric of “Subaltern Studies”. It could have been an open and inclusive configuration without property rights, gurus, mothers and fathers, members (“Founders” or not) and non-members; a configuration based on the circulation and sharing of ideas, concepts and actions in which all participants worked and thought on an equal footing with everybody else.

However, when the principle of structuration highlighted above by Rodríguez was actually presented as a possibility to the Group, by Alberto Moreiras, John Kraniuskas, myself

and others in the wake of the meeting of October 1998, it was met with vehement hostility.⁸ After hours of discussion and weeks of e-mails that were met with silence, we decided to part ways.⁹ In 2000, however, at a conference at Columbia University organized by Gayatri Spivak under the title “Subaltern Studies at Large”, where many of the most senior figures of South Asian Subalternism were present, and to which Alberto Moreiras and John Kraniauskas had been invited as participants, John Beverley and Ileana Rodríguez, who attended the occasion, invited Alberto Moreiras to revamp Latin American subaltern studies, resurrect the Group, and take over its leadership. Moreiras declined. He, Kraniauskas and I decided it would be more productive to steer clear of resurrecting that lost country of thought (that metaphysics of nostalgia structured by predominantly maternal or paternal language) in order to affirm something other than personal and collective mystification as the ground for a practical and theoretical intervention into the cultural politics of Latin Americanism.¹⁰

⁸ Rodríguez says the Group ceased to exist because “masculine protocols were coming back into fashion” (2005, 58). In reality, the Group ceased to exist because the “Founding members” were unwilling to embrace the possibility of a principle of structuration that transcended individual property rights and promised to bury the Group’s cult-like character and reputation forever. It had nothing to do with “masculine protocols” and everything to do with unwillingness to adapt to changing circumstances and to sacrifice paternity/maternity rights in the name of a wider, freer, more inclusive theoretical and political assemblage. The fact that Rodríguez now presents as a possibility the structure she rejected indicates that she has obviously changed her mind since first opposing it, and its main proponents, in 1998.

⁹ By this time the only people who were still trying to sustain a language of practical and theoretical promise were those who had joined during the 1996 meeting in Puerto Rico. As already mentioned, those interested in questions of coloniality, peripheral modernities, and decolonization had already branched out, and the Founding members did not respond to e-mails. As such, these forces brought the Group to its point of self-immolation.

¹⁰ It was not long after that I received a similar offer, which I also declined. Here I will state the obvious: “careerists” or opportunists who reject opportunities are neither careerist nor interested in so-called academic cache.

Deconstruction and the Eternal Return of the End

Since the Group's effective demise its history and legacy has been recorded largely (though by no means exclusively) by Ileana Rodríguez in a collection of brief texts designed to resurrect the intellectual and political credentials of the original project and its participants. These texts are invariably grounded in a facile opposition between theory and the political in which the former is considered careerist and a-political, while the latter is considered to be genuine, "the real thing". In spite of the fact that both Lenin and Trotsky were fully aware that there can be no revolution without theory, or, as Althusser observed, that theoretical reflection is by no means disconnected from the prevalent conditions of class struggle and emancipation (that is, that philosophy is class struggle at the theoretical level), Rodríguez equates theory with little more than careerist sophism and a concomitant lack of commitment to the political. Even though the distinction between theory and the political is always false, examples abound in a series of writings that seem to indicate faith in the intellectual's ability to practice one while not doing the other. Following are just a few examples:

In a market place that privileges theory, theory is the language of prestige and power, the dialect to speak power in the profession . . . In this sense, the subaltern was used as exchange value and we cashed [in] on it. For others, subalternity was a real and not only a discursive condition of subordination . . . Those subalternists who are less politically or historically inclined tend to dismiss as mere 'activism' the tendencies implicit in those more historically or politically oriented, while the latter, in turn, tend to see the work of those theoretically inclined as 'careerist', or mere academic exercises, mere academicism . . . So while some scholars were

concentrating on the *deconstruction* of ideas and epistemes, others were still interested in subaltern consciousness and agency. (2002, 14-15; italics mine)

In reality, “theory” per se is not the problem here. Rather, it is a certain kind of theory loosely termed “deconstruction” which is treated with a sense of distrust and suspicion that disallows meaningful conversation beyond the mere staking out of empty positionalities: an insistence on an apparently eternal return to the reification of the Group’s project into two fields with opposing and incompatible interests; a reification that amounts to the reduction of thought to a conflict between theory versus politics, in which “theory” is unrelated to reality while “politics” is the real understood as agency.¹¹ Needless to say, this is a false presentation of a misconceived debate (ideology, after all, is the imaginary resolution of real contradictions), since the real task of the dialectic is not to affirm theory or the political, either one field over and against the other. Dialectical thinking (and action, of course) is not about establishing and affirming the image of polar opposites for you to then choose which one works better for you. Market forces do that (Pepsi versus Coke, theory versus politics). Christianity also does that (the natural versus the supernatural, heaven versus hell, good versus evil). In other words, the history of Western metaphysics does that.¹²

¹¹ A good deal of distrust and suspicion toward deconstruction comes from the fact that it is perceived to be a French phenomenon, and therefore just one more alien imposition in a long history of alien impositions. But if we simply consider that “there is no *auto-* without an *alter* that always already crosses it” and that Latin America is historically that painful fact in practice and historical formation, then “Latin Americanism ought not complain that Europe or the West always already falsely conceives it via self-serving speculations, but embrace the fact that Latin America is just that theory, now theorized and theorizing” (Levinson, 2007, 82).

¹² For the definition of metaphysics, see for example William Spanos’ reading of Heidegger: “To think meta-physically is thus to think backward. This means *retro-spectively* or *circularly*, for the purpose of accommodating difference to a preconceived end or of reducing the differential force of time to a self-identical, objectified, timeless presence, while preserving the

On the contrary, the real task of dialectic thinking is, as Althusser would say, to come to grips with the articulation of theory and politics in the imperfection of their suture. It is the imperfection (or incommensurability) of the suture that unites and separates theory to and from the political, which makes the passage from one to the other, their resolution or transcendence,

appearance of the temporality of time” (9). The so-called split in the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group between ‘theory’ and ‘politics’ has been generated and sustained mainly by Ileana Rodríguez and John Beverley. However, the Group has also been characterized in relation to a second split. But the way this second split has been conceived is as problematic as the first. In the first issue of *Nepantla* Walter D. Mignolo uses John Beverley and José Oviedo’s 1993 special issue of *boundary 2* (“The Postmodernism Debate in Latin America”) to classify the relation between, and to position, the volume’s contributors in the field of Latin Americanism. This classification and positioning is used to establish a division between so-called postmoderns and postcolonials: “Xavier Albo . . . Anibal Quijano . . . Enrique Dussel . . . are closer to the postcolonial than to the postmodern” (3). In the meantime, asserts Mignolo, Néstor García Canclini, José Joaquín Brunner, Norbert Lechner, Martín Hopenhayn, Nelly Richard, Raquel Olea, Beatriz Sarlo, Silviano Santiago and Roberto Schwarz “may be associated with postmodern, rather than with postcolonial, concerns” (3). This assertion of discrete locations in the field is a rehearsal for the difference—“the irreducible difference” no less—between “the intellectual projects that emerged [in the Subaltern Studies Group] during the [October 1998] workshop under the names of ‘posthegemony’ and ‘decolonization’” (5). Presumably, posthegemony is to the postmodern what decolonization is to ‘postcolonial’ concerns, and never the twain shall meet. Without going into genealogical or conceptual details about the relation between the postmodern and the origins of postcolonial critique (their common legacy in relation to post-structuralism, post-phenomenology, and the exhaustion of the Eurocentric metaphysical subject in deconstruction, for example), Mignolo affirms an absolute intellectual demarcation and re-territorialization of the field based on an irreducible incompatibility between postmodern theory and the decolonized subject. The affirmation of “irreducible difference” in this case belies a competition that imposes the logic of market forces at the heart of disciplinary reflection (posthegemony versus decolonization; Pepsi versus Coke). But such examples of boundary building within the field are little more than disciplinary episodes in the anthropological subjectivism of Western metaphysics (that is, the forced accommodation of very real contradictions to a preconceived end, or the reduction of differential force to the self-identical). The identity-difference relation is, after all, the very ground and origin of Western thought and its concomitant Eurocentrism. It is also the ground for the bourgeois conception of history. As such, I consider this account of the second split within the group to be very problematic indeed, both conceptually and ideologically.

utterly inconceivable in both theory and practice.¹³ For Jacques Derrida “coming to grips” with the theory-politics relation implies trying to think from within their ‘irreducibility’ to each other, from within what he calls their ‘double-bind’ to each other.¹⁴ This irreducibility of the politics-theory relation means that it is impossible to choose one over and against the other, and the impossibility to decide for one over and against the other is the ground of their *aporetic* relation. *Aporia*—the experience of undecidability—is, however, the power of their imperfectly sutured and irreducible relation, since it is in the *aporia* that the *necessity of judgment* and the *promise of the future* reside. But what does this mean? As already mentioned, since theory and politics are irreducible to each other one cannot decide for one, or to do one, over and against the other, as if one were superior and the other inferior, one authentic and the other an impostor, one forgettable precisely by practicing the other. This is a false decision (and a false dialectic) grounded in a leap of faith and the end of thought (ideology, in other words). This is why, in “Signature Event Context”, Derrida observes that deconstruction does not consist “in passing from one concept to another”.¹⁵

¹³ It is for this reason that Althusser, in his Introduction to *For Marx*, observes that the problem of the Left is a problem *within theory* (26). As Bruno Bosteels observes: “I do not think that it is a matter of choosing, say, in favor of ‘good’ historical work over and against too much ‘evil’ deconstruction”. The proper articulation of the two main strands of subaltern thought, he continues, “allows the critic in new and unheard-of ways not only to theorize the demise of revolutionary politics, but also to politicize the theory of difference and the deconstruction of metaphysics. The most thorough-going passage through this double movement is in my eyes not only useful but absolutely indispensable for anyone who is critically engaged today with questions of literature, culture, and politics in Latin America as much as elsewhere” (150).

¹⁴ As such, Derrida uses the term ‘irreducibility’ in strict opposition to the way it is used by Mignolo (see note 12). In Derrida it is a name for the need for thought. In Mignolo it is the name for ideologically driven territorial demarcation, academic marketing and metaphysical closure.

¹⁵ True thought, in other words, is to be found in the relation of withdrawal from such binary conceptual passages and ideological leaps of faith into the metaphysical. This withdrawal from

However, in the face of the double bind of theory and the political one cannot *not* decide and, as such, remain passive (embrace the end of thought) in the face of the irreducibility of theory and the political. On the contrary, aporia—the experience of the undecidable—always demands a decision (even if it’s a decision for the non-decision). One simply cannot remain within an aporia (undecidability) because to do so is akin to death. As a result, when one does decide, that decision is only ever contingent and simply marks a new episode in the history and conceptual conditions of the irreducibility of theory to politics and vice versa. The contingency of the decision—this or that particular way of coming to grips with the articulation of theory-politics as a result of the internal imperfection of their suture (which, of course, is different from simply ignoring such questions in the ideological quest for ‘true’ politics or the ‘real’ people)—means that the decision *can* and *will* be made again in the same or in a different way, according to the circumstances governing the second situation; that is, in its repetition as difference.¹⁶

false conceptualization offers the contours of a third space. The third space is an open ground upon which, and against which, binary conceptualizations and ideological fictions are erected. The deconstructive dismantling of the passage of binaries is carried out not just in the name of dismantling any one particular set of binaries. It is carried out in the name of withdrawing from the conceptual system that allows for, and requires, binaries and ideological foreclosure in the first place. That conceptual system is Western metaphysics. The dismantling of this is the engine of deconstruction’s decision and *promise*, and it is far from being synonymous with depoliticization, lack of commitment, nihilism or anarchism. Rather, it is the precondition for a practice grounded in something other than what there is, given, in the metaphysical ordering of the world at any one time, in any given constellation of forces, or in any specific textual configuration. The reader should refer to Alberto Moreiras’ *Tercer espacio: Literatura y duelo en América Latina* for the most important theorization of the third space in relation to Latin American literary modernity and postmodernity.

¹⁶ For an excellent introduction to and overview of Derrida’s thought in relation to the political, the reader should consult Richard Beardsworth’s *Derrida and the Political*. The decision is also central to the notion of justice developed by Derrida in *Specters of Marx*. As Levinson puts it: “Undecidability is the condition of decision; and decision is the condition of undecidability. And the one permeates the other; in rendering a decision one must always decide between decision and undecidability themselves” (2001, 186). It is important to point out that there is a

Therefore, the irreducibility of theory and politics— theory-politics in its/their imperfect suture or ‘double-bind’—actually allows for the promise of the future (indeed, as Derrida would say, it allows that there be a future).¹⁷ This allows for sustained reflection on the practice of theory and on the theory of practice without presenting them falsely as opposing and mutually exclusive camps or competing commodities in the market of university discourse (and, let’s be honest, Latin American Subaltern Studies was only ever university discourse). Rather, it allows for the practice of theory and for the theory of practice in their relation of unharmonious immanence to each other.

With the convenient yet problematic demarcation of the field into opposing and mutually exclusive camps, or the division of the field’s languages into competing commodities in the market of university discourse, little substantive room has been left for thought on the relation

fundamental distinction between deconstruction’s understanding of the decision and the decision as represented in Rodríguez’s statements about the demise of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. In the latter, as in John Beverley’s discussion of the decision in *Subalternity and Representation*, which is discussed most effectively by Levinson in *The Ends of Literature* (185-6), the decision is a *moral* (and essentially Christian) decision for activism (the Good). As Levinson points out, however, deconstruction’s “*must decide . . . is a logical must*” (2001, 186). This *must* is the proper terrain of the political, “in the sense that a decision imposes ‘an arbitrary closure’ in knowledge for the sake of political action” (Moreiras, 2001, 261). This is no more or less Eurocentric, elitist or nihilist than the aforementioned moral or Christian *must*. The only difference is that this is a *must* based in something other than an ideological leap of faith, dogma, or the populist metaphysics of passion and salvation.

¹⁷ Marx was very much aware that Revolution is never the same thing twice, and that when it does come about in all its singularity it generally comes about as a messy multiplicity of disparate forces. As Althusser observes in his critique of Hegel (100-01), whereas in the Hegelian idea of ‘contradiction’ we are dealing with the desire for the inevitable (for Revolution preordained from within the system and structure of dialectical unfolding, in which there are, in the end, no exceptional circumstances), in Marx *nothing* is preordained. Like Derrida’s thought, Marx’s thought is the thought of historical contingency; the recognition that we are always living exceptional circumstances. This, however, does not mean that Marx and Derrida are reducible to each other. They inhabit the imperfect suture or the irreducibility of the theory-politics relation in different ways and with different though by no means unrelated effects, which are always worthy of further consideration.

between reflection and practice, on the *necessity of judgment* and the *promise of the future*, in the wake of Latin American Subaltern Studies.¹⁸ Latin Americanism has bought wholesale into the conservative, Catholic jurist and philosopher Carl Schmitt's definition of the political: "The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (27) (the word "reduced" here is fundamental). However, Latin Americanism has also bought wholesale into what Schmitt considered to be the end of the political: that is, the intensification of plurality, multiplicity and liberal competition. Within this conceptually, politically, and professionally unsustainable context, the Latin Americanist field of reflection has become inexorably weakened, and it is increasingly difficult for graduate students and junior colleagues to profess an investment in theory, critical theory, or just philosophical rigor without becoming the object of anti-theory reaction on the grounds that their writing is opaque or unclear; that they are somehow disrespectful of "the tradition"; that they are politically suspect because they "do theory" and therefore "don't care about real people"; that, since they "do theory", they are not "doing literature"; or that they are just not "good citizens".

Unfortunately, it is the so-called 'Left' that administers reductionism within Latin Americanist thought, as it reacts against (rather than thinks its relation to) "theory" (in this particular case,

¹⁸ At the Latin American Studies Association International Conference that took place in Washington D.C. in early September 2001, Néstor García Canclini announced the "end of the alliance" between the varying strands contained within the Latin American cultural studies paradigm. I do not mean he inaugurated the end of that alliance. I think he was merely responding to the fact that university discourse on Latin America, in all its distinct registers and *loci of enunciation*, had definitively succumbed to the corporate logics of market forces; that is, that Latin Americanism had embraced the commodity fetishism of its own thought and language, without further ado, and had become nothing more than market force and competition in action. Needless to say, without a commitment to collective theoretical reflection this situation will not improve, because the alternative is that prospective students to Ph.D. programs who ask questions such as "Does your department do postcolonial theory?" will be perfectly justified in reproducing the banal competition of the Latin Americanist assembly line.

deconstruction) in order to privilege the ideological (moral) restoration of transparency and the immediacy of social relations to the world, over and beyond the opacity that emerges as soon as we recognize the imperfections in the suture of politics to philosophy and of both to the world.¹⁹ Why is this important? Because if we give no credence to this imperfect suture then we are left with nothing more than the academic's personal opinion, or even the subject's (false) consciousness as the affirmation of self-presence, or 'the Good' beyond negativity and, indeed, beyond thought. And that is just self-affirmative intellectual authoritarianism, in which the affirmation of self-presence renders subjectivity, consciousness and knowledge one and the same.

The intellectual, in other words, presents him or herself as a sovereign will-to-power morally endowed with the obligation to police the limits between the proper and the improper, and to decide on the division of the field of the political into friends and enemies. And when this happens the field of Latin Americanism becomes little more than a moralistic desire for the future presence of a united kingdom: that is, for the transparent representation of a presence (for example, Latin America in the immediacy of all its reality and social relations) constituted in an ideological system (Latin Americanism) governed and legislated by its master (the sovereign Latin Americanist) who decides on and legislates the limits between what is acceptable and what is not, between what is 'good' Latin Americanism and what is not.

How, though, to transform the way we think rigorously and irreversibly within Latin Americanism without recurring to overgeneralization and basic misconceptions about the relation between theory and the political, or between Latin Americanism and Latin America? To

¹⁹ Obviously, my intention in these pages is to both draw attention to this insidious situation, and, needless to say, to invite good faith counter reflections.

reiterate: “Can [we] start to provide the elements for a new practice of critical reason in late capitalist times? Can [we] provide for . . . a new Latin Americanist theoretical practice that could not be considered neoimperial?” (Moreiras, 2001, 102-3). Before tackling this question, we should look at the place assigned historically to deconstruction—which I understand to be one of the most significant accounts of the philosophical and political conditions of decision and action in the post-1968 world—within the field of Latin Americanism. By highlighting the juncture of the 1960s I do not wish to imply that deconstruction pertains exclusively to the post-1968 world. Rather, I view deconstruction as a fundamental critique of dogmatism, sentimentalism, voluntarism, spontaneity, sacrifice, populism and intellectual accommodationism. In other words, even though deconstruction emerged in the general context of the sociopolitical juncture of the 1960s, it cannot be reduced to it.

The historical juncture loosely termed the 1960s marked, on an international scale, the opening up of a challenge to, and of a possible escape from, the theoretical and practical impasse of the bourgeois conception of history.²⁰ To the extent that ‘the Left’, in its most valuable contributions, represents the history of the non-metaphysical thought of temporality, 1968 in particular marked the opportunity for the non-metaphysical confrontation with, and critique of, a human geography that was operating increasingly from within the framework of a metaphysics of capital on an international scale (it should be noted that the Stalinist inheritance was by no means a stranger to this framework). To think metaphysically is to think in the service of domesticating time and the human experience of history for preconceived ends (such as accommodating difference to a preordained order or reducing the idea of time to an objectified

²⁰ For the question of the periodization of the 1960s, see Jameson.

timeless presence; for example, the absolute time of capital, ‘the Nation’, or the bureaucratic time of ‘Actually Existing Socialism’). Within this domestication *identity* and *subjectivity* generally become the lingua franca of ideological capture. As Althusser put it in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)” the subject is always the constitutive category of all ideology. Humanism, as the historically organized, institutionalized structure and reproduction of knowledge on culture pertaining to the bourgeois mode of production, is central to the domestication of human experience, since it centers the subject as the source, origin and finality of all human knowledge. All of this goes to show that the uncritical endorsement of Anthropology’s compromised (that is, imperial) past—an uncritical endorsement that is still dominant in contemporary Latin Americanism—and, by extension, most contemporary politics of identity, represent distinct crystallizations of bourgeois ideology in their institutionalized materialization.

In Humanism the subject is the truth of history and life, and reason is the truth of the subject. The theoretical and practical configuration of ’68, however, questioned the centrality of the relation between the subject and the truth, or of the subject itself, as the sole engine of history and of human existence. Why? Because it was becoming increasingly clear that the notion of ‘the Truth’ (the Western imperial inheritance of the Latin-Romanic notion of *veritas*) could not be disassociated from the essence and law of domination on an international scale. To the extent that Humanism is the establishment of a vantage point from which to judge and distribute what it means to be human (the *truth*, that is, of what it means to be human), a non- or a-humanist political act would require, but would not be reduced to, opening up a breach in (or displacing the law of) the symbolic order (the language) that guarantees the reproduction of Humanism and

the instrumentality of its reason throughout history. It was in the name of such a possibility, of such a possible event in theory and practice, that the University and university discourse became themselves objects of critique and places from which to generate thought on the limits of social life and on the opening of potential alternatives.

Analogous to the way Marx displaced his relation to Feuerbach's 'communist' humanism (which was his moment of recognition of Humanism as an extension of bourgeois ideology in *The German Ideology*)—as a result of which he affirmed in the 1879-1880 period that “my analytical method does not start from man but from the economically given social period” (quoted in Althusser, *For Marx*, 219)—Althusser, Debord, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze and others embarked on a critique of Humanism (philosophy, politics, writing, linguistics, literature, historicity, the subject's relation to Hegelianism etc.) in a context in which the centralization of the subject as the truth of human history had grown increasingly synonymous with the 'cult of personality'.²¹ As such, 1968 included, but cannot be reduced to, the unleashing of a fundamental disquiet in the relation between subjectivity, culture, reason and the history of

²¹ The 'cult of personality' signaled the effective reduction of the political, including the idea of Revolution itself, to the affirmation and channeling of an individual's sovereign will (including, of course, the affirmation of proto-Christian sacrifice as revolutionary action). It was the reduction of the political to subjective self-affirmation and that affirmation materialized as a party-state. In “The Cultural Revolution: The Last Revolution?” Alain Badiou notes that, “without the saturation of the sixties and seventies, nothing would be as yet thinkable, outside the specter of the party-state, or the parties-state” (482-3). Latin America is by no means disconnected from such political and philosophical concerns. As José Revueltas wrote in his letter to the French revolutionaries, independent Marxists, workers, students and intellectuals of May 1968: “Será preciso despojarnos de las viejas ideas esquemáticas y de los supuestos teóricos del pasado . . . Las formas genocidas de la guerra despliegan el problema de la revolución socialista en términos nuevos, más audaces y más radicales” (29-30). Revueltas considered '68 to be a theoretical act that inaugurated a “trastorno de la realidad interna” within society. He remained, however, close to the young Marx's communitarian anthropology: the idea of communist revolution as the overcoming of alienation and the re-appropriation of human essence.

Western order and domination. It marked the revelation of a profound crisis in the order of instrumental reason itself, in which the recognition of the tactical need to combat and transform the ideological relation between reason and domination required philosophical strategy. And there is, of course, no strategy without theory. One of those strategic theorizations became the (always incomplete) deconstruction of the humanist (subjectivist) legacy upon which the history of Western metaphysics (including, of course, the West's Latin American colonial and imperial cultural histories) is construed. The alternative to the deconstruction of this legacy is the eternal reproduction of our submission to the notions of identity and difference: our subjection to the centrality of the subject (no matter how marginalized or down trodden) as the ruling ideology and constitutive category of the contemporary mode of production and its institutional forms, language, and reason. It is perfectly understandable, then, that deconstruction should place language itself at the center of its inquiries, for language inscribes possibilities relative to impossibilities and always exists in an apparatus (a field or institution) endowed with material existence (for example, the University). Deconstruction is, in this sense, crucial, whether we want to recognize it or not, to our practice as critical and self-critical producers of university language. It is crucial to establishing the ground of our critical responsibility to Latin America and to Latin American truth in increasingly corporate times. Needless to say, university language *is* just one more social language in its particular forms of materialization. For this reason the myth of the university as an ivory tower is just that: a myth, and a conservative one at that. With this in mind, we should now look at the place assigned historically to deconstruction in Latin Americanism.

Deconstruction and Latin Americanism (I)

The first critical foray into the question of the place and validity of deconstruction in Latin American literary and cultural studies is to be found in Román de la Campa's 1999 book, *Latin Americanism*. In this work de la Campa describes deconstruction in a variety of ways, none of which are the result of a substantive discussion of the imperfect suture of philosophy to the political, or of deconstruction to the theoretical practice of Latin Americanism.²²

Deconstruction for de la Campa is the "lingua franca of globalization" (2) (though what this actually means remains unexplained). However, it is also, he asserts, unconnected to "the real". It is, then, a lingua franca of globalization that is "a utopian poststructuralist critical practice whose link with the life-world and other forms of culture remains quite distant, if not wholly unreconciled" (4). It is, as far as de la Campa is concerned, essentially the privileged domain of nerdy academics and ivory towers: "a hermetic domain of privileged literary/grammatological discourse" (17-18); "a celebration of a discursive performance that mimics epistemic negation as literary prowess" (19); "a necessary yet insufficient level of analysis" (23) that "posits historical understanding and literary appreciation, often without distinguishing between the two, as an ongoing process of designification, particularly available when applied to major literary and philosophical texts" (129).

De la Campa equates deconstructive critical practices in Latin American literary studies with the incorporation, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, of a critical vocabulary that is synonymous with the presence and intellectual influence of Paul de Man:

²² For the most substantive reading of de la Campa's approach to deconstruction, see Levinson (2001, 169-91).

In the influential work of Djelal Kadir and Roberto González Echevarría, for example, the force of Paul de Man's method of close readings has been brought to bear on major authors such as Alejo Carpentier, Carlos Fuentes, Octavio Paz, and Jorge Luis Borges. Such a critical program has also inspired new and often innovative readings of nineteenth-century and colonial times, indeed, the entire field of Latin American and Caribbean literature. By now it stands as an important, if not dominant, alternative to earlier structuralist, nationalist, and dependency-theory approaches to Latin American literature, particularly in the United States. (14)

De la Campa, however, makes an important qualification in relation to the emergence of this new critical vocabulary: "This strand of deconstructive Latin Americanism remains closely bound to a literary form of epistemology that is far removed even from the cultural politics implicit in its own epistemological challenges to modernity" (14-5). In other words, this is the incorporation into Latin Americanist philological practice of a critical vocabulary that is certainly informed by the vocabulary of deconstruction, but that steers clear of the latter's full theoretical and political implications for the field, for university thinking, and for the conceptual and ideological order of modernity.

Recently John Beverley, in an attempt to legislate the different methodological and ideological strands of the field over the course of the last two decades, repeats de la Campa's befuddled formulations regarding the emergence and place of deconstruction in Latin Americanism:

Broadly speaking—this is of course a gross over-generalization—there have been two major tendencies in Latin American literary criticism since the early 1980s. One might be defined as the "social criticism of literature," that follows parallel to

or in the wake of, principally, Angel Rama's work, and especially his *La ciudad letrada* of 1984. This tendency is associated both politically and methodologically with a socialist Marxist or post-Marxist left. The other tendency involves the incorporation of French theory, especially Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida, to a previous philological model of Latin American literary studies. It is represented most influentially, although not exclusively, by Roberto González Echevarría at Yale, and his network of protégés and like-minded colleagues.

(2007, n.p.)

Beverley then echoes de la Campa's reservations regarding this initial incorporation of so-called deconstruction into Latin Americanist reading strategies: "While, as noted, it is dependent on French theory, in general it tends to distance itself from the political implications of French theory and its political stance is either anti-leftist or skeptical of the claims of the left" (n.p.).²³

However, I would take the discussion one step further and suggest that this initial incorporation of deconstructive reading strategies into the Latin Americanist humanities in the 1980s is not really deconstruction at all, since there is no challenge to, never mind an overturning or displacing of, a conceptual order or a conceptual relation between Latin Americanism and Latin America in these writings. They are certainly competent, innovative and valuable readings

²³ This is indeed an over-generalization of a complex field, since Beverley makes no substantive distinction between this brand of what he calls deconstruction and the work of colleagues in the field such as Nelly Richard, Alberto Moreiras, Josefina Ludmer, myself, and others. For Beverley these are all different forms and examples of the same thing ("deconstruction"). However, it should be noted that such an over-generalization is tactical, rather than real. It highlights the way in which equating "deconstruction" with a generalized lack of 'commitment to the Left', and this without further consideration, has become the lingua franca of Latin Americanist populism in recent years.

and re-readings of Latin American literary texts, genealogies and archives.²⁴ But they are philological humanism with a new vocabulary, the language of which, as de la Campa and Beverley seem to be suggesting, remains firmly grounded in the aesthetic ideology of Romanticism (and of Schiller in particular).

I agree that they remain for the most part essentially disconnected from the critique of the institution of literary humanism as an apparatus endowed with material institutional existence. They remain separated therefore from the possibility of questioning the relation between the power/knowledge configuration of capital and its perpetuation of the subject as the sole condition of any political thought and action. However, I would also say that the critique of these works on the grounds that they are deconstructive and, therefore, removed from the sociological realities of literature or from any kind of commitment to ‘the Left’, is profoundly misconstrued. I should explain what I mean. In *Latin Americanism* de la Campa recuperates one of Roberto González Echevarría’s principle theses in his influential book, *Myth and Archive*: A sort of deconstructive master narrative begins to reveal itself. In his *Myth and Archive*, a book that begins with an impressive charting of Latin American discursive theory, González Echevarría concludes with an analogous conflation of all of Latin America’s textuality as an archive governed by a Borgesian master code of all possible fictions, “the major figure in modern Latin American fiction, or repository of stories and myths, one of which is the story about collecting those stories and myths”. As a “founding negativity”, the archive is said to contain, at its core, the “heterogeneity of cultures, languages, sources, beginnings”, a totalizing figure of narrative recombinations meant to stand for Latin American history as such, including

²⁴ Examples can be found in Kadir, González Echevarría, and Alonso.

earlier archives organized along legal, scientific and anthropological discursive formations. (19-20)

De la Campa then begins his precipitous interpretation:

Mirroring the reading/writing construction of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* set forth by Melquiádes, myths of beginning are conflated with those of modern history into the ultimate archive of postmodern writing as literary celebration, a newly configured all-encompassing myth of writing that always already subsumes earlier forms of discursive formation—legal, scientific, and anthropological. Thus, colonial America is at one with postmodern Latin America, and history, particularly that which tells the story of independence and revolutionary wars, is integrated in this repository of literariness through deconstruction and critical performance. (20)

As Brett Levinson reminds us, however, de la Campa, “never tackles the topic of deconstruction, even as he avows to be doing so” (2001, 175). The result is that we face two narratives, one primary, one secondary, neither of which, however, is deconstructive. The first is González Echevarría’s notion of the archive as the repository for, and point of infinite mediation between, the heterogeneity of cultures, languages, sources and beginnings. This brings his work considerably closer to the metaphysics of philological humanism in Alfonso Reyes, for example, than it does to the critique (or deconstruction) of metaphysics and its conceptual *imperium* in Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Nancy or others. González Echevarría’s notions of myth and archive modernize Latin American aesthetic ideology but do little to challenge the basic premises of philological mediation between cultural traditions, literatures and languages throughout human

history. Rather, his work preserves literary humanism in its essence (with a new vocabulary, without doubt) and maintains Latin American literature firmly within its Hispanic *imperium*.

As Martin Heidegger notes in his “Letter on Humanism” (241), any one form of thinking achieves its limit, or comes to an end, only when it is obliged to slip out of its element. But González Echevarría’s approach to the literary archive is a process of deliberation in almost exclusive service to the doing and making of philology’s archive fever, rather than to the limit or finitude of its creole genealogies. In other words, there is in *Myth and Archive* no attempt to have the archive—the repository of a specifically Latin American ontology—slip out of its element. There is no overturning or displacing of the archive’s conceptual order. That is simply not its purpose. As such, the book provides a philological master narrative based on the relation between Truth and place (Latin America), in which the philological method (no matter how renewed it might be by its gestures to the vocabulary of deconstruction) actually impedes any question for the limits of philology, or for the limits of the archive, simply because the question for the limit of humanism can be neither recognized nor understood when thought is always already surrendered to its philological repositories.²⁵

The other, secondary (dependent and, therefore, enslaved) narrative is de la Campa’s critique, precisely because his sociological approach to the primary master narrative inscribed in *Myth and Archive* does not actually tackle the topic of deconstruction or its genealogical relation

²⁵ Lacan took the notion of the ‘master signifier’ from Hegel. As Moreiras points out: “The master’s discourse is the discourse of the non-sensical signifier: It does not have to explain itself, it simply is, and it is ‘because’. Faced with the master’s discourse, we are all slaves . . . It is the discourse of the principle of reason. University discourse is little more than a legitimation or rationalization of the master’s will as master. Philosophy serves the master” (2001, 81-2). As Althusser was fully aware, however, the challenge is to create a viable (anti-)philosophy that does not serve the master. This initial deconstructive vocabulary in Latin Americanism does not create such a thing since it is always already surrendered to humanist philology.

to the critique of humanism. De la Campa's reading therefore acquiesces before, rather than contests, the fact that the question for the limit of humanism is always already surrendered to philology in González Echevarría's reading of Latin American literature. As such, de la Campa's critique of so-called deconstruction is actually a misconceived assumption of philological humanism as master narrative. In *Myth and Archive* we have appropriation of deconstructive language in order to affirm and extend philological humanism, while in de la Campa there is no substantive expropriation of González Echevarría's appropriation. The work of critique, however, would be to overturn and displace the relation between appropriation and expropriation in order to affirm the possibility of a thought that is neither philological humanism nor its (in this case, enslaved) sociological shadow. But de la Campa's discourse is captured by a master signifier that remains unrecognized, and, as a result, is all the more powerful for it. What we face, in other words, is not a critique of Latin Americanist deconstruction—not the overturning and displacing of a conceptual order in González Echevarría, and not its effective overturning and displacement in de la Campa—but an affirmation of philological, anthropological subjectivism as the source, origin, and finality of human knowledge (both philological and sociological) related to, and originating in, Latin America.²⁶

²⁶ This might explain the ease with which John Beverley equates deconstruction not with the critique of humanist metaphysics but with its consolidation and extension: “There is a specific operativity in Renaissance Humanism for reading secular texts and talking about or even ‘deconstructing’ them. I do not see deconstruction in essence moving out of that framework. So in effect deconstruction becomes for me the ideology of the literary at a moment when the literary itself has come into crisis. Deconstruction offers itself as a way of saving the essential impulse in literary criticism and therefore redeeming the role of intellectuals” (2005, 354). However, as we will see, this judgment is profoundly flawed.

Deconstruction and Latin Americanism (II)

I begin this section with a friendly joke (for A and B) about the relation between truth and location: “Two Jews met in a railway carriage at a station in Galicia. ‘Where are you going?’ asked one. ‘To Cracow’, was the answer. ‘What a liar you are!’ broke out the other. ‘If you say you’re going to Cracow, you want me to believe you’re going to Lemberg. But I know that in fact you’re going to Cracow. So why are you lying to me?’” In his evaluation of the joke’s absurdity the narrator, Sigmund Freud, makes the following observation: “The second Jew is reproached for lying because he says he is going to Cracow, which is in fact his destination! But the powerful technical method of absurdity is here linked with another technique, representation by the opposite, for, according to the uncontradicted assertion of the first Jew, the second is lying when he tells the truth and is telling the truth by means of a lie” (138). Freud then goes on to note that the most serious substance of the joke is related to what determines the truth:

The joke is pointing to a problem and is making use of the uncertainty of one of our commonest concepts. Is it the truth if we describe things as they are without troubling to consider how our hearer will understand what we say? Or is this only jesuitical truth, and does not genuine truth consist in taking the hearer into account and giving him a faithful picture of our own knowledge? I think that jokes of this kind are sufficiently different from the rest to be given a special position. What they are attacking is not a person or an institution but the certainty of our knowledge itself, one of our speculative possessions. (138)

Freud's final comment is important for students of Latin America who are concerned with the politics of their practice; that is, with their role as geocultural mediators striving for a conceptual engagement that is commensurate to their responsibility toward a region that has been captured by an institutionally materialized field of reflection grounded in imperial relations (that is, "Latin Americanism").²⁷ While it is true that the joke is perhaps, in its original intention, attacking "not a person or an institution but the certainty of our knowledge itself", the certainty of knowledge itself, the place of *certitudo* in the institutional history and expansion of the West, cannot be separated from the university as the institutional capture and sanctioned place for the reproduction of Latin-Romanic, and therefore Christian, truth.²⁸ It is not by chance, after all, that this is a joke told by a Jew about two Jews traveling to Cracow who, through their brief interaction, undermine any faith in any kind of transparent relation in the world between the holy trinity of truth (certainty), subjectivity and location.

It is certainly a joke about knowledge and is therefore about the relationship between reason and its representational forms and content. But ultimately, it can only be read as a joke about the slippery relation between truth and the discourse of location, for what this interaction between travelers seems to highlight, in spite of, or, rather, thanks to, its absurdity, is that while it is philosophically legitimate to recognize that there are truths, it is philosophically illegitimate to state that there is a single locus of enunciation of the truth. Latin Americanism, however, (understood "as the sum total of academic discourse on Latin America", as Alberto Moreiras calls it) *is* the institutionalized idea that the truth of Latin America, and by extension the truth of

²⁷ For the most significant discussion of the field's imperial ground and genealogy, in relation to the social sciences in the United States in particular, see Berger.

²⁸ See Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*.

the Latin American ‘subject’ or, for that matter, the truth of ‘Latin Americanism’ itself, is to be found *in* Latin America as well as *in* analogous categories such as ‘Latin American thought’ or ‘Latin American literature’. As a result, university discourse on Latin America asserts a dogmatic philosophical and political imposture grounded in the affirmation of location as truth. Of course, there are truths in Latin America and there are truths that are Latin American. Nobody in his or her right mind can possibly doubt that. However, that is *very* different from installing Latin America, or any geographical region or locale, for that matter, at the heart of university discourse as the origin upon which, and the *imperium* within which, truth comes into its own.²⁹

The following question, then, emerges: when a place—“Latin America”—is the speculative possession of an institutionalized field of knowledge (Latin Americanism), what kind of double register is required to, as Freud puts it, consider how the hearer will understand what is said? In other words, can “Latin Americanism”—as an institutionalized university discourse that presents itself as the truth of Latin America and of Latin America as a manifestation of truth (in the U.S. *and* Latin America)—produce a knowledge no longer grounded in, for example, the metaphysical appropriations of philological humanism or the (bourgeois ideological) positivity of location as the truth of the subject, and of the subject as exclusive truth?

²⁹ Truth for Freud can never be assigned a specific, discrete location or single locus of enunciation. Truth as the enunciation of location, or location as the enunciation of truth (as the truth of the subject, for example), allows for no counter truth or negation other than that of another location that one can only recuperate and articulate over and against that of the first location. The dialectics of location only produces more of itself. Truth, however, in Freud’s formulation, is to be elucidated only in the interstices of a double consciousness, in the inscription of the exhaustion of the thought of location as the single place and repository of truth. For an excellent discussion of such questions in relation to Latin Americanism, see Kate Jenckes’ article, “The ‘New Latin Americanism,’ or the End of Regionalist Thinking?” Also, see Johnson.

What, I wonder, is the conceptual ground from which a response to these questions can be formulated? Certainly, a conceptually and politically rigorous response to these questions can be formulated by sustaining, as many people have been doing for years, a creative and productive critical relation between culture, the claims of critical theory, and the genealogies of political philosophy in all its modulations, including deconstruction, of course (to name just a few possibilities). But I think the ground for a potential response is inadequately represented by the kind of ‘de Manian’ deconstruction that first left its mark in the field in the 1980s and early 90s.³⁰ Neither do I think the sociological critique of this kind of disciplinary work can provide the conditions for a meaningful conversation at this time, since those critiques generally bypass deconstruction’s conceptual drive, terrain, and political potentiality, and thereby only close as many conceptual and methodological doors as they say they strive to open. As such, I think the conditions for sustained theoretical debate, if, indeed, there is such a possibility, are to be found elsewhere.

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, there is nothing new in what I am proposing here. In the following pages, I draw on the work of a number of people who have already engaged in different degrees of meta-critical debate and (sometimes quite unintentional) polemic. Their work, however, is by no means reducible to mere meta-critique, which is often what Latin Americanists based in Latin America consider to be the main drive of U.S.-based Latin Americanism. But one thing should be made clear: this is not a discussion about the destiny or use-value of specific ideas, or the names of the people who wrote them down. I would like to think that the question of our practical and theoretical *responsibility to Latin America and to*

³⁰ To be fair, it simply was not the purpose of this initial form of Latin Americanist deconstruction to establish the conditions for such a debate.

Latin American truth, in the wake of the relation between deconstruction and subaltern studies, is more far-reaching and potentially significant for the field than the perpetuation of my or anybody else's signature. So, in the pages that follow, in which I establish a relation between two chapters of Alberto Moreiras' *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*, I do so because they provide me with a kind of short hand that, I hope, will enable me to shed light on possible developments in the future. Any possible future development, however—that is, any future orientation for the work of Latin Americanism—depends as much on the field's recent generations and on the generation's to come (and on the readings those generation's can create for themselves) as it does on work whose real time—the time of actual conceptual formulation and writing; the time of intellectual urgency and greatest creative intensity—always belongs to a previous context.

With this in mind, from the many ways of approaching *The Exhaustion of Difference* I take the relation between Chapter Three, "Theoretical Fictions and Fatal Conceits" and the book's final section, "Hybridity and Double Consciousness". This is not to suggest, however, that the book's argument can be reduced to this relation, but I am particularly interested in the question that opens the third chapter and its relation to the book's final propositions. The question is as follows: "Is it possible to salvage some kind of anti-systemic productivity in our transitional times for a mode of knowledge that would seem to depend almost entirely on epistemological models bequeathed by modernity at the very moment in which modernity becomes a thing of the past?" (76). In other words, in an era in which capital appears to have no exteriority and no real alternative, and in which the nation-state system has been captured by the subsumption of labor to capital on a global scale, is there a viable mode of knowledge from

which to think something other than the technical reproduction of what there is, when “what there is” is the end of one way of doing and thinking things (the historical coordinates of modernity), but without inaugurating any true difference in postmodernity?

This is, of course, quite a question, since it asks: what are the chances of forging an intellectual network capable of transforming university discourse on Latin America, rigorously and irreversibly, and therefore of truly challenging a system of domination based on colonial and imperial reasons? Are we able to cease lagging behind in our thought and in the relation between thought, capital, and action? Can we transform Latin Americanist thought, from being a “panoptic search and capture of ‘positions, fixed points, identities’” (45), into a viable *preparation for something other* than the vociferous conformism of the contemporary cultural studies paradigm?³¹

³¹ “Whether our questioning can be radical enough, or whether we are always destined to discover that our presumed deconstructions, far from destabilizing ‘an inegalitarian system’, can end up reinforcing it, thus perpetuating the crisis—that is indeed the question of transition in epistemological terms” (Moreiras, 2001, 80). In the recent period of transition into global neoliberalism the ‘Left’ (or at least a certain kind of neo-populist ‘Left’) has once again taken state power in many regions of Latin America. This ‘Left’ is internal to a capital that appears to have no exteriority and no real alternative. The ‘Left’ currently in state power in many areas can certainly legislate wealth and capital more justly than their neoliberal counterparts. Nobody is suggesting it cannot do that. But to the extent that it is exclusively internal to the extension of capital without exteriority, it is an episode in its contemporary unfolding on a continental scale. When the EZLN rejects an invitation extended by President Hugo Chávez to join him and other leaders of the Latin American ‘Left’ in their proposed reorganization of capital, and when they reject the politics of Manuel Andrés López Obrador for being just more of the same, what is at stake is the very meaning of the idea of the ‘Left’ itself in its relation to concepts such as hegemony (in this case, state-led neo-populism) and post-hegemony (the EZLN’s critique of state hegemony in both neoliberal and neo-populist forms). Whole sectors of the working class obviously recognize in Hugo Chávez’s rhetoric of the ‘Bolivarian Revolution’ a vital role for themselves as actors in a public sphere that has excluded them historically. But this does not close, solve or render mute the theoretical question for the Left. On the contrary, it keeps that question open and absolutely necessary.

In order to approach these questions, Moreiras makes a fundamental distinction between different modalities of, and within, the field of Latin Americanism:

1. “Latin Americanism” refers to a university discourse theorized first by Kant and later by Humboldt, that is “radically dependent on a notion of national culture as the site where knowledge and power, that is, reason and the state, could be unified” (83) (the Area Studies paradigm is a clear example of this university discourse). In the humanities this is a Latin Americanism grounded in mainly Romantic aesthetic ideology, largely vacuous anthropological subjectivism, and philological humanism. However, this modality is in profound crisis since, in neoliberal globalization, the nation is no longer the site where knowledge and power coincide. In other words, subject-centered (identity) discourse (national, regional, local etc) can no longer sustain or operate the link between culture and the nation-state, because the modern disciplinary subject (even as an ideal) is no longer the privileged site for the expression of social value (86). Within the contemporary order of finance capitalism on a global scale that centrality has been handed over to the consumer, and no discourse of ethnic identity or difference can alter that fact. It can assert claims of recognition and inclusion. But it cannot and does not stake out an exteriority to the given world (capital).³²

³² “The managers of this world situation themselves concede that they . . . now have the power to appropriate the local for the global, to admit different cultures into the realm of capital . . . and even to reconstitute subjectivities across national boundaries to create producers and consumers more responsive to the operation of capital. Those who do not respond . . . need not be colonized, they are simply marginalized” (Arif Dirlik, cited in Moreiras, 297).

2. The new order, which is dominated by the spectacle of finance capitalism, consumerism, and the abject poverty of those who cannot consume, has produced a boom in university discourse built on the reformulation of modernity's discourses of identity and difference (for example, the re-centering of the subject through the politics of micro-identity, the local versus the global etc). This neo-populist reformulation of a compromised, if not defunct, link between subjectivity, knowledge and power, between reason and the state, goes by the name "cultural studies". This is the modality of "Neo-Latin Americanism", which, under the geocultural conditions of globalization, strives to keep alive the Romantic paradigm of Latin Americanism and its Kantian genealogy. However, its new master is no longer the disciplinary relation between power, humanistic knowledge and the nation-state. It is the transnational order wrought by the "universal subsumption of knowledges into the global standard" (46). In Neo-Latin Americanism "historically constituted Latin Americanism seeks to reformulate itself at the service of the new paradigm of rule" (46). It is this new avatar of Latin Americanism, whose direct genealogy is historical Latin Americanism, which appears today "as the real enemy of critical thinking and of any possibility for counterhegemonic action from the academic institution or through university discourse" (46). "Cultural Studies", in other words, is a conformist desire on two levels: it is a desire to conform to historically constituted Latin Americanism (to be a good, faithful Latin Americanist, capable of still imagining culture as the site where knowledge and power, that is, reason

and the state, can be unified) and, at the same time, to conform to the new paradigm of rule (the universal subsumption of knowledges into the global standard). The latter, however, is rapidly exhausting the ground of the former. In this sense, rather than salvaging some kind of anti-systemic productivity, Neo-Latin Americanism is a schizophrenic practice that reasserts neo-humanist protocols in a geocultural context that has already undermined them.

3. “Second-order Latin Americanism” is the name for the deconstruction of the relation between historically constituted Latin Americanism (the field’s historically grounded theoretical fictions in all their ideological formations) and the contemporary avatar of Neo-Latin Americanism (the field’s “fatal conceit”, since cultural studies and its mantra of interdisciplinarity sell themselves vociferously as new and innovative, when really they are the affirmation and celebration of humanist subjectivism under the expanded *imperium* of capital, now on a global scale). Second-order Latin Americanism, however, is *genealogical deconstruction* (and, as such, it is systematic in its questioning of the fictions and ideological resolutions by which we Latin Americanists have lived until now).³³ Furthermore, second-order Latin Americanism is carried out in the name, and as the promise, of the possibility of an *other* politics (for example, a politics other than that of the subjectivist division of the field of the political into

³³ Latin American Subaltern Studies, in this respect, was an initial opening for the disciplinary critique of, for example, ‘*la ciudad letrada*’, transculturation, *mestizaje*, heterogeneity, hybridity, national-popular state and culture formation, *testimonio*, magical realism, *indigeneity*, the politics of memory, and more. As mentioned at the beginning of this essay, that potential was truncated for reasons other than the project itself.

friends and enemies, as Carl Schmitt defined it). As such, it is an “engaged withdrawal” or conceptual exodus from the politics of subjectivity, when the politics of the subject is understood to be the truth of his or her locus of enunciation, or identity.³⁴

But what does this open up? It uncovers the possibility of an opening in the imperfect, historically constituted suture of theory and politics in the field of Latin Americanism. Moreiras presents second-order Latin Americanism as the possibility of a subalternist code for Latin Americanist knowledge, and he provides an episode from Latin American revolutionary history as an allegory by which to comprehend the workings of that code, together with its possible significance for the relation between thought and action. Drawing on the episode “Zapatistas en palacio” from Martín Luis Guzmán’s *El águila y la serpiente*, in which Zapata’s troops mysteriously abandon the Presidential Palace after having occupied it in December 1914, Moreiras (121-6) describes the scene in which the peasant foot soldiers from Morelos are told by the incoming President (the *villista*, Eulalio Gutiérrez) that they will never accede to sovereign power. Zapata’s men say nothing in response, but renounce the space of sovereign power, depart the capital city and return to Morelos. Moreiras reads this mysterious moment in revolutionary history as a subaltern negation of the hegemonic interpellation of the sovereign: it is the materialization of a subaltern consciousness and freedom exercised as the abandonment of the political, when the political is understood exclusively as the capture of the sovereign domain; that is, as the capture of a State that has only ever, and will only ever, signify the domination of

³⁴ For the notions of engaged withdrawal and the retreat of the political, see Virno’s “Virtuosity and Revolution” and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s *Retreating the Political*.

the sovereign and the hegemony of his master signifiers. Moreiras posits the following important question:

What if, for the Zapatistas at the palace, the apparent abandonment of the political had been nothing but an alternative understanding of the political, a radicalization of subaltern negation in a final “non serviam”—“I will not be as you say”—conducive to a secret triumphant redemption? Zapatista atopics: I will not be where you place me, in a context in which hegemonic thinking can only at most place everything, place obsessively, and find itself exhausted in a thinking of the place . . . If subaltern negation is a simple refusal to submit to hegemonic interpellation, an exodus from hegemony, is that not a new assumption of political freedom that remains barred to any and all thinking of hegemony, to any and all thinking of location? What do the Zapatistas retreat from if not sovereignty? (126)³⁵

In other words, Zapatista atopics (I will not be where you place me) shows, as Marx was fully aware, that the politics of subjectivity (understood as anthropological humanism) does not exhaust politics. Indeed, it demonstrates that the politics of subjectivity (or at least the politics of the subject as the truth of his or her locus of enunciation, which is very different from the political subject in Althusser, for example) is the closure of politics. It is the policing of politics in the name of its necessary closure around an unproblematic notion of subjective agency and plenitude.

³⁵ The EZLN’s current “Otra Campaña” is by no means removed from these theoretical and practical considerations. For further discussion of this relation, see Williams (2007). I also take up the implications of the 1914 Zapatista revolutionary sequence in Williams (2005).

What is at stake, however, is a concept of the political that (even when exercised from within the heart of sovereign power such as a Presidential Palace or a university) exceeds the capture of hegemony and its drive to administer the propriety and place to be assigned to specific concepts, words, actions, or social groups. Working, living, and thinking from within, yet simultaneously in excess of (or in a relation of ‘engaged withdrawal’ from), hegemony’s allocation of institutional value and social reproduction, requires thinking as an interruptive *practice* of “subalternism in double articulation” (Moreiras, 268); that is, thought as both university discourse production and university discourse’s interruption simultaneously.

But what can be understood by this double articulation of second-order Latin Americanism? The double articulation of second-order Latin Americanism is a thought that deconstructs any given hegemonic relation (for example, the hegemony-subalternity relation in a given moment, text, social movement, event or historical constellation). It does so as a means of shedding light on the incompatibility between the cultural politics of hegemony and the site of subaltern exclusion.³⁶ Since hegemonic politics “can always abolish some subalternities but can never abolish them all—it needs them as that on which it constitutes itself” (285), the idea is to convert the inevitable incompleteness and imperfection of hegemonic interpellation into the basic code for an opening, within theory and practice, to alternative articulations (‘worldings’ or experiences) of the political. It is therefore a wager for the transfiguration of the relation between the political and the articulation of the university (and therefore the field’s) power/knowledge configuration.

³⁶ “Subalternism finds its field of incidence in the study of the cultural or experiential formations that are excluded from any given hegemonic relation at any particular moment of its own history. There would seem to be a basic theoretical incompatibility between any cultural politics aiming at hegemonic articulation and a subalternist politics” (Moreiras, 280).

In *Subalternity and Representation* John Beverley says that “what is at stake in Moreiras’ sense of the incommensurability of the hegemonic and the subaltern is the pertinence of deconstruction as a model for new forms of political imagination and practice” (97-8). But this misses the point of what is really at stake, because deconstruction can never be a model for, and it certainly is never pertinent to, anything in particular. It is an impertinent means for creating the conditions, and the demand, for a fully contingent decision. As such, it is nothing more than conceptual preparation for the proper terrain of the political: the conceptual work that has to be done in order to consider the possibility of new forms of political imagination and practice. Beverley criticizes deconstruction because it “is always bound to interrupt the constitution of the subaltern as a subject of history” (1999, 102). But again this misses the point, because in order to become a “subject of history” the subaltern, who is so because she is positioned as such by hegemony, has to internalize the interpellation of, and thereby enter, become, hegemony. She has to internalize hegemony, as the location and essence of her own being, in the same way the heart of the factory worker, as Marx pointed out, is forced to beat from within the chest of the capitalist. By definition the subaltern cannot be a subject of history understood in the sense suggested by Beverley. That is, she can never be an autonomous plenitude (at least not from within Laclau’s theory of hegemony).

On the contrary, the whole point of subalternist deconstruction is to interrupt the constitution of hegemony (not that of the subaltern) in the name of a politics that is *other than* that of a hegemony-subalternity relation built for the sole purpose of subordination (in other words, the problem is ‘hegemony’ when it is taken to be the sole ground of the political). Subalternist deconstruction is a wager that politics does not have to exhaust itself within a

hegemony-subalternity relation that always works against the subaltern. In this sense, deconstruction is active solidarity with subalternity as a result of the negative work it carries out against hegemony. This is deconstruction's *affirmation* and insistence, as well as being the ground of its double articulation. Beverley, on the other hand, views the political as the *positive* closure of thought and action around the hegemony-subalternity dyad: "The question is . . . whether subaltern studies can contribute to organizing a new form of hegemony from below—what Guha calls a 'politics of the people'" (1999, 104). In such positivity there is no possible exteriority to, and no substantive transfiguration of, a political power/knowledge relation that is always already established by hegemony. As a result, within this positive closure of thought and action there is no possibility of "a radical negativity within academic disciplinarity" (Beverley, 2005, 355). The latter is utterly incompatible with the former.

There is a fundamental distinction between *affirmation* and *positivity*. Hegemonic politics is a politics of the positive, over and above what it negates (which is subalternity). The politics of affirmation is the action of hegemony's constitutive outside, acting in the name of liberation, or of an engaged withdrawal from hegemony's positivity.³⁷ Deconstructive affirmation is the negation of hegemony's positivity, which negates. The negation of that negation is political affirmation. There is no anarchic nihilism here at all. However, there is a fundamental contradiction that lies at the heart of a dogmatic politics of hegemonic positivity that is espoused in the name of a subaltern politics. After all, this kind of politics is grounded, in

³⁷ For this reason we can take the distinction between positivity and affirmation as being the ground for the fundamental distinction between Hugo Chávez, or López Obrador, and the EZLN.

spite of itself, in an “always already internalized agreement to the rules of the hegemonic game” (Moreiras, 283).³⁸

This prepares the terrain for our further understanding of the double articulation of second-order Latin Americanism. In his final chapter Moreiras examines Néstor García Canclini’s notion of cultural hybridity, recognizing from the outset that the political force of this concept, which has been so central to the (Neo-)Latin Americanist repertoire since the late 1980s, “remains to a large extent contained within hegemonic politics” (264).³⁹ This means that the notion of hybridity has become something like a code word for an entire political program for Neo-Latin Americanist cultural studies, in which it is celebrated as a “fluid enough politics of identity/difference that might warrant the cultural redemption of the subaltern” (264). This code

³⁸ There has been a tendency to write off deconstructive subalternism as either nihilist or anarchist, or both, because it insists on theorizing the possibility of an outside to the positivity and conceptual closure of the hegemony-subalternity, or of the hegemony/counter-hegemony, relation. However, this tendency is an imposition of ideological dogma regarding the notion and work of the political. It misconceives nihilism as just bad, or wrong (whereas nihilism in Nietzsche is an interim thought of affirmative preparation for a future transfiguration). It then passes to a historically untenable conflation of nihilism to the history of anarchism, without going into the conceptual specificities or constitutive genealogies of either one. It utilizes this initial (historically and conceptually grave) conflation, and compounds it by then applying it wholesale and without proper consideration to a complex political history that includes the ideas and actions of revolutionaries such as Buenaventura Durruti, Ricardo Flores Magón, or Emiliano Zapata, the critique of Western metaphysics and the quest for a philosophy of justice in Derrida and others, and academics trying to create the conceptual conditions for a transfiguration in the field of the political in U.S. university discourse on Latin America. Just for these reasons, labeling Latin Americanist deconstruction as either nihilist, anarchist or both is unjustified in both theoretical and practical terms, since in the end it takes neither genealogical reflection nor the complex history of popular political traditions seriously. I thank the Latin American labor historian, Daniel James, for his important insights in this regard.

³⁹ John Kraniauskas was the first to provide a substantive critique of the notion of ‘cultural hybridity’ in García Canclini’s work and in the field of Latin American cultural studies. The critique of hybridity in subaltern studies, as seen in Moreiras (2001) and Williams (2002), for example, is directly indebted to the ground and development of Kraniauskas’ critique. See his essay, “Hybridity in a Transnational Frame: Latin Americanist and Postcolonial Perspectives on Cultural Studies”.

is built on the celebration of an intensified identity/difference dialectic “across borders”, as the imaginary basis for the reconstitution and re-suturing of culture and subjectivity (now ‘post-national’ or ‘diasporic’) to the current regime and operation of transnational capital.

Moreiras, however, makes an important point. Hybrid subjectivity does not consist in just passing from one concept or subjective form to another, according to individual or collective need, will, or desire as it appears in mainstream cultural studies. Rather, it consists in overturning and displacing the conceptual order of the identity/difference dialectic itself.⁴⁰ Hybrid subjectivity, qua hybrid, and, therefore, at its limit, “does not some times allow for subjectivity and some times for difference, but rather simultaneously undermines both identitarian and differential positions, which are driven into aporia” (291). Hybridity, as aporia, is beyond all difference and all identity, and therefore remains beyond hegemonic closure, for it is an “abyssal foundation” for subjective constitution, and, as such, cannot provide a location either for the politics of location or for the politics of subjectivity (in either their hegemonic or counter-hegemonic modalities). In other words, it is the “savage” other side of the hegemonic relation in general: “not so much a locus of enunciation as it is an atopic site”; “the negation of what hegemony negates [that is, the negation of the subaltern’s location in her relation of inferiority to hegemony] and thus the possibility of an *other* history”, of an *alternative* historical

⁴⁰ Hybridity, “not only when seen as normative or prescriptive but perhaps even from a purely, if disingenuously, descriptive or phenomenological point of view, remains suspiciously close to the much older modernizing ideological projects that were aimed at forging an all-inclusive national or even continental identity, based on the overcoming of differences. In sharp contrast, the notion of the subaltern, following its historico-political inflection, is inseparable from the basic fact of antagonistic social relations and the unequal division of labor and power, while, following its more strictly deconstructive orientation, the subaltern is in fact precisely that which always already resists sublation in any process of hybridism, whether cultural or otherwise” (Bosteels, 151).

memory grounded in the critical intuition that “things could be, and could have been, other than what they are” (297). It is, then, the glimpse of an *other side* to the bourgeois conception of history and subjectivity, which remains in a potential relation of uncompromised insurrection against imperial conceptions of intellectual and political practice. If considered in all its possibilities, it marks potentially the site for a preparatory clearing of the disciplinary way, a clearing that pushes “the institutional limits of disciplinary thinking, as much as we are able to do, in order to see what happens then” (300). This still, and perhaps always, unaccomplished deconstruction is, concludes Moreiras, “our final responsibility, as Latin Americanists, toward Latin America” (300).

So where to now? How can we further conceptualize this responsibility? I began this reflection with a couple of questions lifted from *The Exhaustion of Difference*: “Can [we] start to provide the elements for a new practice of critical reason in late capitalist times? Can [we] provide for . . . a new Latin Americanist theoretical practice that could not be considered neoimperial?” (Moreiras, 102-3). Perhaps the answer is that that start is only just being announced as a question, or glimpsed as a possibility, in the wake of subaltern studies’ relation to genealogical deconstruction in its many possible forms. Bruno Bosteels observes that the relation between Latin American subaltern studies, deconstruction, and the conceptual inheritance of Marx functions in a double register. Within the conceptual horizon of the double register, a functional concept of the political is central to our ability to entertain an insurrectional outside to hegemony-subalternity and hegemony/counter-hegemony relations. It is also fundamental to our

ability to elucidate a notion of Latin Americanist responsibility.⁴¹ The question, of course, is how to consider politics from beyond its reduction to commodity fetishism and the conflict between friends and enemies.

Drawing on the legacies of Michel Foucault and Alain Badiou, among others, in *Dis-agreement* Jacques Rancière makes an important distinction between the notion of the *police* and the democratic question of *the political*: “Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I propose to call it *the police*” (28). *The police* refers to the *calculations* of a power that lays claim continually to the notion of the political as the *management* of abundance and consent: “The police is first an order of bodies that *defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying*, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task” (29; italics mine).

⁴¹ In what is certainly one of the most significant evaluations of the theoretical legacy of Latin American subaltern studies in recent years, Bosteels notes 1. That subaltern studies “signals the need to register the structural inadequacy of the discourses and practices of university knowledge, precisely by teaching and learning, as much as by unlearning, from the absence, the vanishing presence, of the subaltern”, and 2. That subaltern studies “no longer projects the nostalgia for past dreams onto the future but rather raises the question whether an as yet undreamt-of politics of the post-hegemonic, or infra-hegemonic, can be conceived at all” (156). This then produces the following question: “Is there, in other words, a retreat from the double bind of hegemony and the subaltern—a withdrawal that would not be an escape but rather an exodus, and thus the promise of a new beginning?” (156). Bosteels proposes three possible areas for further theoretical and practical development in relation to this question: “1. Unsuture art and politics, without simply falling back on their institutional autonomy which is itself of course a historical and not a structural condition. 2. Reconfigure art and politics, as well as their possible suturing as singular thought procedures, according to their specific consequences, concepts, and theories. 3. Revisit the problem of the presentation and transmission of these forms of thought, if not by remaining outside, which is of course impossible, then at very least by adamantly going against the constraints of purely academic power” (158).

Hegemony is, of course, another name for the police as materialized administration and force. Hegemony thinking, in this context, *is* police thought even when it presents itself as oppositional or counter-hegemonic, precisely because it does not inaugurate the conceptual overturning of the hegemony-subaltern conceptual apparatus.

In light of Rancière's distinction we can say that within the modalities of our disciplinary practice both modern Latin Americanism and contemporary Neo-Latin Americanism are, for the most part, distinct though intimately related manifestations of the police as conceptual and materialized force; that is, as the university administration of *ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying*. Second-order Latin Americanism, however, pertains to a different, though not unrelated, order since it exists in a relation of *dis-agreement* with the grounds and goals of *police thought*. Dis-agreement "occurs whenever contention over what speaking means constitutes the very rationality of the speech situation. The interlocutors both understand and do not understand the same thing by the same words" (xi).⁴²

The democratic notion of the political in Rancière is the opposite of *the police*, while remaining at all times bound up with it. As Rancière puts it, in order for politics to occur "there must be a meeting point between police logic and egalitarian logic" (34). For the author, democracy—egalitarian logic—is the disruptive appearance of a part of those who exist in the whole, have been assigned no part in that whole, but who nevertheless lay claim to the whole. The worker's movement consisted in claiming that a common, egalitarian world existed; that the status common to the speaking being in general and to the laborer employed in his or her specific

⁴² This means that: "B can always grasp a situation or speech act differently from A. B understands A and A understands that B possesses understanding. But B on occasion disagrees with A's understanding. A cannot understand how B understands as B does; that is why there is disagreement and not the simple domination of one party by the other" (Levinson, 2004, 69).

function, existed; and that this common status was common to employers and workers alike and that it consisted of their belonging in equal footing in the social sphere as a whole (51-2). The worker's movement is the part of those who have no part claiming their place in the heart of the whole, indeed, their place *as* the whole. As such, democratic egalitarian logic exceeds police calculation, and is a wrench in the works of the injustice of its distributions: "Democracy is more precisely the name of a *singular disruption* of this order of distribution of bodies as a community that we propose to conceptualize in the broader concept of the police. It is *the name of what comes and interrupts* the smooth working of this order through a *singular mechanism of subjectification*" (99; italics mine). 'Subjectification' here should not be confused with the subject. The subject is the result of police thought's calculated management and distribution of places, powers, functions, locations and *loci of enunciation*. It is therefore always a question of *identification* with a whole, and with the smooth functioning of that whole, without remainders, leftovers, or residues. As Rancière puts it: "From Athens in the fifth century B.C. up until our own governments, the party of the rich has only ever said one thing, which is most precisely the negation of politics: there is no part of those who have no part" (14). 'Subjectification', on the other hand, is not about *identification* and the effective establishment of the coordinates of the whole. Rather, it is a singular event of *disidentification* in relation to police language and distributions. It is the contingent deconstruction of, or exodus from, the coordinates of the whole in the name of alternatives, because the distributions of the whole are unjust (and therefore wrong). Democracy—the disruptive subjectification of the part of those who have no part—"is whatever *shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination*. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only

place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise” (30; italics mine).

In *Rogues* Jacques Derrida affirms that: “There is no sovereignty without force, without the force of the strongest, whose reason—the reason of the strongest—is to win over everything” (101). The sovereign reason of the strongest (materialized as the force of *the police*) characterizes those included under the banner of their own exclusion (the subaltern) as mere noise, as the murmurs of the incomprehensible, spontaneous, or irrational within the ordered field of the political. In contrast, *democracy* brings forth the language of *something other than* the mere organization and reproduction of bodies in a fully subjected (that is, fully scripted and consensual) community. It announces something *other than the order of a citizenry located within the calculated management and proportioning of places, powers, and functions*. It brings forth onto the terrain of *police* a language not set up in advance, precisely at that place where mere noise was audible before. It is therefore an affirmative insurrection of language against the positivity of the police: the coming into being of a language *that dis-agrees with the police order* and that the police order, in order to maintain its hegemonic location and its discourse of location as hegemony, can only try to classify as incomprehensible claptrap, gobbledygook, double-Dutch, mumbo-jumbo, nihilism, anarchism, or just a ‘lack of commitment’ to the ‘right way’ of doing things, which in police thought can end up meaning just about anything.

The problem, however, is that *the police* cannot fulfill its silencing because it is confronted by *a language of rational dis-agreement, within theory and practice*, rather than with the emergence of mere noise or spontaneous incomprehensibility. It is an interruptive language that has the capacity for historical duration (for persistence throughout history). It thereby has

the capacity to announce its emergence as the advent of a historical event in theory and practice. And as Alain Badiou observes in his work on the Paris Commune: “There is no stronger a transcendental consequence than that of making something appear in a world which had not existed before” (147).

In conclusion, I do not present Rancière’s notion of democracy as a celebration of the incomprehensible, spontaneous, or irrational within the field of the political. Rather, like second-order Latin Americanism’s proposed genealogical deconstruction of its own constitutive histories, Rancière’s notion of dis-agreement in the name of democracy characterizes philosophical reflection not as careerist sophism but as a manifestation, at the theoretical level, of the struggle for emancipation that sides with the part of those who have no part. He positions it, in other words, as a preparatory site for a coming event. And second-order Latin Americanism occupies exactly the same conceptual and practical terrain.

Dear reader, that is, dear non-friend, it is up to all of us to assume responsibility for, or to turn our backs on, the practical and theoretical decision for the struggle of the part of those who have no part (and, therefore, for philosophy as class struggle at the theoretical level). We can decide for the positivity of the police or decide for affirmative political subjectification. Make no mistake, it is a vital decision, a decision for vitality, or not, in which the future lasts forever with or without us. The decision for the future, indeed, the decision that there be a future for the democratic practice of a theoretical politics of culture in Latin Americanism, is, in this regard, yours, ours, for the taking. That decision for the future, within the context of the corporate police university, is a decision for real philosophical and political responsibility toward Latin America and its truth, in theory and in practice. It is a decision for something other than the

reduction of thought to the technical reproduction of our corporate police order and its ideas.

But if, however, in the end you cannot decide, do not fret. There will always be others who can, already are, and have been doing so for years.

In the meantime, perhaps this discussion of the relation between deconstruction and Latin American Subaltern Studies as both promise and experience, a discussion whose ultimate goal is neither defensive nor aggressive, can enable current and coming generations to realize that there can be thought, and freedom to think even in, and often times in spite of, an institutional, social and disciplinary configuration in which the policing of others, and even the policing of oneself, has come to be considered the only pre-requisite for entrance into the neoliberal marketplace of university discourse. In this context, the Latin Americanist's intellectual, practical and theoretical *responsibility to Latin America and to Latin American truth* is to affirm a creative and productive relation of political and philosophical *dis-agreement* with the police.

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