



**POSTMODERNITY IN LATIN AMERICA**

**The  
Argentine  
Paradigm**

**Santiago  
Colás**

## Postmodernity in Latin America

**Post-Contemporary**

**Interventions**

Series Editors: Stanley Fish and

Fredric Jameson

# POSTMODERNITY IN LATIN AMERICA



The

Argentine

Paradigm

Santiago

Colás

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For Emily

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It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.

¿Como podríamos soportar el presente, el horror del presente, me dijo la última noche el Profesor, si no supiéramos que se trata de un presente histórico. Quiero decir, me dijo esa noche, porque vemos cómo va a ser y en qué se va a convertir podemos soportar el presente.



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## Preface and Acknowledgments

Tired of postmodernism already? The term seems to have lost whatever meaning it once had when MTV launched—already several years ago—its special program, “Postmodern MTV.” Consider the introduction, in the pages of *Vogue* (in early 1988), of the “postmodern ski jacket”: What was the “modern ski jacket”? Was there a “realist ski jacket”? Surely *this* dissolved the critical significance of the term for observers of contemporary culture. Why, then, would I write another book about postmodernism? And if we think *we* are tired of postmodernism, why then, especially, would I write a book that dumps the concept—like so much First-World toxic waste—onto Latin America?

Probably the criteria most often agreed upon for distinguishing between the modern and postmodern cultural sensibilities is their respective attitudes toward mass culture. Modernism defined itself in opposition to mass culture. Postmodernism embraces its forms and contents, incorporating them within new artifacts that blur the distinction between high and low culture. If so, then only as modernists would we discard the term *postmodernism* solely on account of its migration into seemingly banal mass cultural arenas. By contrast, this very migration is sufficient cause for postmodernists to continue critical discussion of the term. Many postmodernists no longer believe in a pure modernist or avant-garde locus of consciousness outside the range of mass culture. Yet such a space was a precondition for the modernist rejection of mass culture. Therefore, postmodernists conclude that although critical analysis of mass culture is still possible, provided one attends to one’s own enmeshment in the phenomena, rejection from without is certainly not. We may attempt to forget or ignore mass culture, but it will neither forget nor ignore us.

Of course we feel tempted to walk away from a term that has lent itself so easily to commercial and imperialist abuse. But perhaps *because* the term has come to occupy a central position—however nebulous or vague—in our social and cultural vocabulary (unlike, by the way, so many of the more specialized terms of our profession), we should invest more energy in shaping its meaning and function. This seems not only useful but also a matter of strategic necessity, especially if the debate over postmodernity in culture

and politics is really about “new ways of thinking or imagining democracy.”<sup>1</sup> If so, and if “‘liberal democracy’ is being touted as the *ne plus ultra* of social systems for countries that are emerging from Soviet-style state socialism, Latin American military dictatorship, and Southern African regimes of racial domination,”<sup>2</sup> then we find ample justification for continuing to talk about postmodernity and for talking about its relationship to Latin American culture.

As always, there is also a personal story behind this project. Initially, I felt both attracted to and concerned by theoretical writings on postmodernism. Postmodernism’s dissolution of the boundaries between high and mass culture seemed to me to echo, if not historically explain, the work of one of my favorite Latin American authors, the late Manuel Puig. Puig, in novels from *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (1967) to *Cae la noche tropical* (1990), directly incorporated the language, themes, and fragmentary forms of radio, B movies, soap operas, and popular music. And he did this for the most part as his contemporaries of the boom generation were spinning their massive modernist epics of the region. In turn, my attraction to both postmodernism theory and Puig seem partly explained by the circumstances of my own upbringing. I was the youngest, and only U.S.-born, son of well-educated Spanish immigrants in a politically progressive midwestern university town. I grew up (and remain) caught between an instilled appreciation for the loftier forms of an “Old-World” high culture and a somewhat embarrassed enjoyment of U.S. mass culture, even in its most maligned forms. I was raised on Watergate, disco, MTV, yuppies, CNN, and the Reagan-Bush era, but also on chess, *Don Quixote* and *Unamuno*, St. Teresa of Avila, NPR, and classical music on every radio in the house at what seemed to me like every waking hour.

This appreciation for high culture, along with a romantic notion of literature as the expression of human intellectual vitality, led me to experience a shock upon entering graduate school in the late 1980s. There, debates in contemporary theory intimidated me and struck me as abstract, esoteric, and distracting from the proper appreciation of literature. This initial impression changed as, impelled by the requirements of the program, I deepened my study of theory. But I never completely shed a skepticism for theory’s excesses, particularly with regard to the literary products of other parts of the world. This tension between theory and Latin American fiction became the fundamental impulse behind this work. For, as I further investigated the concept of postmodernism, I felt frustrated by what seemed to be unnecessarily abstract and reductive, universalizing

readings of some of my cherished Latin American texts. At the same time, I suspected the outright rejection of all postmodernism theory as a foreign, imperialist imposition, perhaps because of my own peculiar non-nativist initiation into Latin American literature via the mass cultural novels of Puig. If Latin American culture didn't quite fit the categories of postmodernism theory, neither did these seem to be quite alien to it. Perhaps the proper approach lay somewhere in between.

In fact, I came to realize, the proper approach lay not in between, but altogether elsewhere: in a different view of the relationship of theory to reality, in this case cultural reality. I discovered, in the writings of the late Caribbean writer and political activist C. L. R. James, a formal, but engagingly colloquial, expression of my concerns about this relationship. James wrote novels, plays, literary and cultural criticism, and histories, as well as pointed articles, essays, and books on urgently important political matters. But I found my methodological guideposts in his philosophical reflections on Hegel and Marxism. "Thought is not an instrument you apply to a content," James warned in 1948. "The content moves, develops, changes and creates new categories of thought, and gives them direction. . . . Now one of the chief errors of thought is to continue to think in one set of forms, categories, ideas, etc., when the object, the content, has moved on, has created or laid the premises for an extension, a development of thought."<sup>3</sup> James tells us that our thinking about reality—or theory—works through frozen categories, whereas reality continues to flow and thus escapes our attempts to represent it in theory. He was talking about the movement of reality over time. Yet his passionate interest in decolonization lend his words a spatial dimension. In that case, he might have been warning us against the instrumental application of theory to the raw materials of culture and, more specifically today, to the application of site-specific theories of postmodernism to international culture without regard for the locally determined specifics of that culture.

Many theorists of literary postmodernism and of social and cultural postmodernity inadequately interpret Latin American literature and culture in the process of substantiating their theoretical models. They do so by excluding the specific social and political conditions out of which that culture has emerged.<sup>4</sup> Where they do include social and political considerations, they oversimplify and reduce these to fit the requirements of an explanation of the political situations in Europe and the United States in the post-World War II era. These inadequate interpretations result in theories incapable of accounting for real and concrete, historical developments

in regions such as Latin America, as well as in partial misunderstandings concerning the causes and characteristics of recent Latin American culture. Both postmodernism theory and Latin American culture are impoverished. Furthermore, such expropriations might be seen as the latest in a long line—stretching back five hundred years—of European (and North American) self-fashioning at the expense of Latin America. This book, concerned with these problems, will therefore perform double duty. It will, on the one hand, criticize the limitations of postmodernism theory, and, on the other, suggest an alternative account of recent Latin American culture. This account does not reject the contributions of postmodernism theory, but does adjust them. In what follows, in other words, I have tried to heed James's caution and sensibly mediate the confrontation between the suggestive contributions of a variety of theoretical interventions and the exigencies of concrete historical developments in the economy, politics, and culture of Latin America.

This mediation involves two steps. In the first step, in chapter 1, I clear some ground for a different engagement of postmodernism theory and Latin American culture. This takes the form of a critique, from the point of view of Latin American culture, of existing theories of postmodernism. I will review the theories of Linda Hutcheon and Fredric Jameson—two of the most influential theorists of the postmodern. I ground my modifications of certain aspects of their contributions in recent developments in Latin American society and culture, including critical theory. At the same time, I will establish some points toward a new theory of postmodernism and Latin America. With this revised theoretical framework established, the challenge lies in properly grasping recent Latin American culture and its relationship to postmodernity. I address this in a second step of cultural analysis comprising the next six chapters of the book. I center a history of three moments of Latin American, especially Argentine, society and culture since 1960 on readings of four novels. Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela* (1963) will serve as the centerpiece for discussing Latin American modernity (chapters 2 and 3), Manuel Puig's *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976) as the focal point for examining a second, transitional, moment between Latin American modernity and Argentine postmodernity (chapters 4 and 5), and finally, Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (1980) exemplifies the social and cultural coordinates of postmodernity as found in Argentina (chapter 6). Tomás Eloy Martínez's *La Novela de Perón* (1985) provides an occasion to recapitulate the nature of Argentine postmodernity (chapter 7), inflecting its rewriting of history in the particular direction of that

crucial Argentine historical figure, Juan Perón. In chapter 8, I articulate the specific features of Argentine narrative and political postmodernity with certain features it shares with Central American testimonial narrative and politics and with women's writing and politics in Argentina during the same period. Ultimately, I hope to provoke first, a revised understanding of the multiple meanings of postmodernity when viewed globally, and second, a reconsideration of recent Argentine social and cultural history that is informed by this revised understanding of postmodernity. Such an understanding will include recognition of the relevance of all this to the emergence of new and more just democratic institutions not only in Argentina but also throughout Latin America.

I have many people to thank for their contributions to this book. I thank first my parents for encouraging and facilitating my interest in reading, writing, and thinking about culture in general. This book was originally a dissertation completed under the direction of Professors Fredric Jameson and Ariel Dorfman of the Graduate Program in Literature at Duke University. They combined their respective expertise with intellectual dexterity and generosity, and with a genuine concern for my own development. Their influence on my thinking will be evident throughout the book, but I am especially grateful that they encouraged me to disagree with them and develop my own positions on some of these issues. Stephanie Sieburth also read many versions of this book when it was still in the process of becoming a dissertation. Her attention to the details of textual meaning was a most helpful corrective to my tendency to paint with an excessively broad brush. Frank Lentricchia and Michael Moses, of Duke's English Department, also read an earlier version and offered useful suggestions for understanding these Latin American texts in a broader context. I also thank Professor Sylvia Molloy, of New York University, who very generously agreed to read the dissertation version of this manuscript. Of the many brilliant students with whom I shared classes and less-formal discussions at Duke, I wish to single out Michael Speaks for his particularly insightful and challenging comments on my ideas. Initial work on this book also could not have been completed without the various forms of support offered by the staff of the Graduate Program in Literature, in particular Sandy Mills.

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Linda Hutcheon, over the course of several books, has established herself as a major authority on postmodernism, particularly in literature.<sup>1</sup> In *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, first published in 1987, she added a literary historical dimension to her own previous work on parody and self-reflexivity. At the same time, she consolidated and organized the notoriously confusing and inflated body of scholarship on literary postmodernism.<sup>2</sup> Her book has become a virtual textbook on postmodernism. In more recent works, Hutcheon has increased the range of the model introduced in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* to include Canadian fiction and other international cultural forms, such as dance, photography, film, and performance art. Thus, by studying Hutcheon's representative and respected work, we may get an appropriate look at the first kind of misinterpretation, the one that extracts Latin American fiction from its local social and cultural context.

Hutcheon cites, at one time or another, such disparate Latin American novels as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*; Mario Vargas Llosa's *The War of the End of the World*; Carlos Fuentes's *The Old Gringo*, *Terra Nostra*, and *The Death of Artemio Cruz*; Augusto Roa Bastos's *I, the Supreme*; Alejo Carpentier's *Explosion in the Cathedral*; and Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch* and *A Manual for Manual*. All these texts serve as examples of the primary mode of postmodern fiction, what Hutcheon terms "postmodern historiographic metafiction." Hutcheon includes within this category texts that use techniques such as the manipulation of narrative perspective, self-consciousness, and the incorporation of actual historical figures and texts to challenge the illusion of unified and coherent subjective identity and the distinction between art, specifically fiction, and life, specifically history or the past (105ff.). Hutcheon considers these two cultural institutions to be the moorings of what she calls "bourgeois liberal humanist" society (e.g., 179ff.). In that case, she argues, postmodernism, through its primary fictional mode "historiographic metafiction," targets that society from within, without pretending to escape from it or to inaugurate a new society. And postwar Latin America is one, if not the primary, source of this kind of fiction.

Hutcheon's claim that Latin American literature best embodies literary postmodernism depends upon several hidden presuppositions. First, she presupposes a definition—however implicit—of literary postmodernism. Second, she presupposes an identification of the constitutive features of the Latin American text or texts in question. Then, she must align the features defining postmodernism with the features identified in the Latin American text. She may *explicitly* do no more than substantiate her theory by referring to cultural examples such as Latin American texts. But she also *implicitly* pretends to explain the emergence and specific character of Latin American texts by reference to an international literary trend. The relationship thus works both ways.

The problem with this is not that postwar Latin America has not produced a body of fiction that concerns itself with history and that seeks to write Latin American history a different way and from a different perspective. On the contrary, one might argue that in the wake of the boom texts (written mostly during the 1960s) that Hutcheon primarily deals with, two new strains of narrative have emerged that seem to fit her stylistic description even more closely. Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits* (1982), Antonio Skármeta's *I dreamt the Snow Was Burning* (1984) and *The Insurrection* (1982), Carlos Martínez Moreno's *Inferno* (1983), Luisa Valenzuela's *Lizard's Tail* (1983) and *Other Weapons* (1982), and Marta Traba's *Conversación al sur* (1981) and *En cualquier lugar* (1984)—along with the novels discussed in chapters 6 and 7—combine stylistic complexity with a concern for representing and intervening in recent history. During the same period, *testimonios* (testimonial narratives) have emerged from all over Latin America, such as Alicia Partnoy's *Little School* (1986); Hernan Valdés *Tejas Verdes* (1974); Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1982); Domitila Chungara's *Let me Speak* (1978); and Elena Poniatowska's *Until We Meet Again* (1969), *Massacre in Mexico* (1971), and *Nada, Nadie* (1988). These *testimonios* certainly question the processes by which historical facts are constructed, passed off as given, and pressed into the service of a particular class, race, gender, or institution. Thus, it's not that Hutcheon invents a trend in Latin American fiction nor even that she doesn't read Latin American texts carefully.

The problem is that Hutcheon doesn't complete her reading. And if the texts are only partially read to begin with, the theoretical category built of such partial readings will be of accordingly limited use. At the same time, therefore, her implicit account of the text's appearance and characteristics will be limited. In this case, Hutcheon's partial readings of these texts in-

volves the exclusion of the social and political conditions out of which they emerged. This exclusion derives from certain limitations established by Hutcheon on her own theory. And it results in her misappropriation of Latin American fiction for her transnational canon of postmodern historiographic metafiction.

Hutcheon introduces her study as “neither a defense nor yet another denigration of the cultural enterprise [called] postmodernism. You will not find here any claims of radical revolutionary change or any apocalyptic wailing about the decline of the west under late capitalism. Rather than eulogize or ridicule, what I have tried to do is study a current cultural phenomenon” (ix). Ostensibly seeking to inject some calm reason into a discussion that has grown overly polemical, Hutcheon in fact excludes the concrete, historical, and political dimension of postmodern culture. She rhetorically equates “defenses,” “denigrations,” “eulogizing,” and “ridiculing”—all things we wouldn’t want to be doing in a scholarly discussion—with “claims of revolutionary change” or “wailing about the decline of the west under late capitalism.” In so doing, Hutcheon bans any discussion of the concrete political consequences or affiliations of postmodern culture. We must not speak of revolution or capitalism because those things require a polemical rhetoric alien to the rational study to be undertaken here. By explicitly (and appealingly) sidestepping these caricatured (and unappealing) positions, Hutcheon also manages to repress that dimension—the concretely social and political—or postmodernism upon which such interpretations focus. If every interpretation rewrites its object of study in a different way, then Hutcheon is here writing a cultural postmodernism at the expense of a social, historical, and political postmodernism.

Aside from matters of personal preference, this exclusion severely limits Hutcheon’s capacity to explain the emergence and specific function of the surface features she describes. Hutcheon cannot answer—or even ask, really—why postmodernism came *when* it did, nor why it took the form it did, nor even, finally, what function these various stylistic features serve. For example, Hutcheon rejects the explanation that the “postmodern ‘return to history’” results from the U.S. bicentennial in 1976, rightly observing that this cannot explain a similar return in Canada, Latin America, and Europe (93). But in its place, she offers a similarly narrow explanation: “The members of the ’60s generation . . . tend to think more historically than their predecessors,” giving rise to a “desire” for “reading as ‘an act of community’” (93). This only begs the question of causes. What gave rise to the “’60s generation” tendency to think more historically? Hutcheon’s exclu-

sion of social and historical causes and effects, such as revolution or capitalism, makes it impossible for her to ask, let alone answer, such a question.

At the same time, this example reveals a second problem with Hutcheon's model: its unconscious universalizing impulses. Hutcheon feels it is wrong to attribute an international return to history to one nation's bicentennial. But she fails to address the problems involved in assuming the existence of a uniform, international generation of the sixties and identifying it as the cause instead. She does not explain the emergence of any such "generation." But beyond this, Hutcheon also fails to ask whether, in spite of a certain admittedly internationalist impulse in various cultural movements in the sixties, this generation might not have different concerns and aims in different parts of the world. And also whether these differences were dictated by the many different institutional faces presented by Hutcheon's other homogeneous universal: "bourgeois liberal humanism." This tendency is striking partly because Hutcheon explicitly seeks to counter such "totalizing" impulses in other theories of postmodernism. But also, her very definition of postmodernism seems to preclude the kind of abstracting moves she makes: "Perhaps the most basic formulation possible of the paradox of the postmodern" is that "it is more a questioning of commonly accepted values of our [whose?] culture (closure, teleology, and subjectivity), a questioning that is *totally dependent* on that which it interrogates" (42; emphasis added). That definition should therefore be more self-consciously applied to her own work. For only by raising her theoretical gaze above the confusing crowd of local circumstances, cultural traditions, political projects, and historical tendencies can she align a whole series of varied international cultural artifacts and determine that they are the expression of a single postmodernism engaged in "using and abusing," "installing and subverting," "contesting, but not denying" bourgeois liberal humanism.<sup>3</sup>

Hutcheon thus excludes from her model the pressure that social and historical forces exert on culture. She also excludes the differentiating power that specific, local social and cultural elements might exert on dominant forces like "bourgeois liberal humanism." In the case of Latin American fiction, these exclusions lead Hutcheon to omit precisely those features of these texts that would make them resistant to inclusion in her canon of postmodernism, namely, the concrete ways these texts may reproduce or be resistant to the dominant economic, political, and cultural institutions in both the First World and the various regions and nations of Latin America. So, for example, no mention is made of possible relationships between

boom fiction and the Cuban revolution or the ideology of modernization, both potent social forces for the Latin American "'60s generation." Nor, as I noted above, does Hutcheon seem to be aware of a series of texts (many untranslated) that emerged from revolutionary struggles in Central America, or from the experience of fearsome state terrorism under military rule in the Southern Cone. The reasons for these inadequate interpretations lay in the blind spots within Hutcheon's own theoretical model.

Fredric Jameson conceived of his model of postmodernism as "radically different" from what he called "stylistic" models—of which Hutcheon's might be considered the culmination—for which "postmodernism" was a style an artist might choose or reject.<sup>4</sup> Instead, Jameson attempted to produce a concept of postmodernism as a "cultural dominant": a dominating cultural medium within which all cultural production takes place and to which it must all, in one way or another, respond. Moreover, Jameson sought to explain the emergence of that cultural dominant in terms of Ernest Mandel's account—in *Late Capitalism*—of postwar mutations in the structure of capitalism. Hence the title of Jameson's landmark essay on the topic, as well as his more recently published collection of essays and new reflections: *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Jameson interwove his cultural analyses with political and economic accounts precisely to *historicize* the cultural phenomena of postmodernism: to address the question of why postmodernism came *when* it did, and of what it might mean given the economic and political circumstances in which it emerged.

Some have felt that Jameson overstated the link between postmodern culture and the social forms of late capitalism. But he undoubtedly succeeded in shifting the terms of the debate so that critics and theorists were forced to consider postmodernism within a broader field of forces than those usually associated with changes in literary or artistic practice. Of course, my own critique of Hutcheon, the possibility of seeing a gap in her theory, depends heavily on Jameson's rearranging of the debate. The importance of his model notwithstanding, the question for us to keep in mind is how Jameson—who presumably will attend to the social and historical dimensions of a text—constructs the specificity of Latin American culture within his broad version of postmodernism.

In fact, we come across the Third World often in Jameson's theory of postmodernism. For example, it functions centrally as the space whose disappearance manifests the emergence of late capitalism. "This purer capitalism of our time," Jameson writes of late capitalism, "thus eliminates

the enclaves of precapitalist organization it had hitherto tolerated and exploited in a tributary way. One is tempted to speak in this connection of a new and historically original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious: that is the destruction of precapitalist third world agriculture by the Green Revolution, and the rise of the media and the advertising industry” (36). Compare this to an earlier formulation: “Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the third world and the unconscious.”<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, it is “above all” a change in the status of the Third World with respect to capital that distinguishes late capitalism (ix). The latter finally saturates the previously colonized, but until now untransformed, “agricultural” or “precapitalist” spaces of the Third World, including Latin America.

It may be obvious that this seemingly final victory of capitalism over all resistant spaces is lamentable to Jameson. But consider the specifics of his lament. Jameson catalogues, among the baleful features of postmodernism, a “weakening of historicity” (6), defining historicity as “a perception of the present as history” (284). In modernism, historicity came from “some residual zones of ‘nature’ or ‘being,’ of the old, the older, the archaic” (ix). These zones “[threw] up the concept and the image of an older mode of agricultural production” (366) and permitted “the lived coexistence between several modes of production, the existential experience, within a single life and a single individual, of multiple ‘alternate’ historical worlds.”<sup>6</sup> Latin Americanists might think of Alejo Carpentier’s *Lost Steps*, whose protagonist in traveling from a northern metropolis to the heart of the Orinoco, passes backward—by his own accounts—in time through several historical periods. In postmodernism, late capitalism obliterates the nature of the Third World and paralyzes our sense of historicity. Since we cannot recall the past out of which our present was shaped, we lose our sense of the present as changeable. We therefore weaken our capacity to formulate projects for new futures. We are left immobile as political subjects. Jameson therefore advocates a concept of postmodernism, as well as a postmodern cultural practice of cognitive mapping, that will, in the first words of the book, “think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (ix). The urgency of this call is underscored when we go back to his best-known work, *The Political Unconscious*. There, we find a similar version—“Always historicize!”—characterized not only as the moral of *that* book but also as the “‘transhistorical’ imperative of all dialectical thought.”<sup>7</sup> How though, given the bleak picture of a uni-

formly modernized—“imploded”<sup>8</sup>—capitalist landscape, can we regain the leverage necessary to think historically?

Now we come across the Third World again. For the “radical difference” of the texts of the Third World have a “tendency to remind us of outmoded stages of our own first world cultural development.” This reminder “challenges our imprisonment in the present of postmodernism and calls for a reinvention of the radical difference of *our own* cultural past.”<sup>9</sup> Jameson locates these texts somehow outside the ostensibly total range of late capitalism and postmodernism, characterizing them as “forms of oppositional culture: those of marginal groups, those of radically distinct residual or emergent cultural languages . . . resistant and heterogeneous forces which [postmodernism] has a vocation to subdue and incorporate” (159). These resistant, but not postmodern, forms of culture bear a family resemblance to, but are finally contrasted with, Jameson’s favored First-World cultural forms—the work of sculptor Hans Haacke, for example—which are both resistant and postmodern. The Third World returns from its annihilation, paradoxically, to serve as the cultural source for historical thinking, a source to be mined by us in the First World in order to regain our own debilitated historicizing faculties. We might reasonably ask, in light of this central and complex, but finally vexing and paradoxical role assigned the Third World, what in Jameson’s theory permits such an expropriation of Third-World culture?

If Jameson makes historicity and Third-World spaces indispensable to politics, he also links them both to the concept of utopia. Indeed, the impulse to preserve at least the *concept* of utopia—along Althusserian lines<sup>10</sup>—forms perhaps the secret force behind Jameson’s interest in historicity and the Third World. Jameson therefore writes: “One wants to insist very strongly on the necessity of the reinvention of the Utopian vision in any contemporary politics: this lesson, which Marcuse first taught us, is part of the legacy of the sixties which must never be abandoned in any reevaluation of that period and of our relationship to it” (159). Considered in light of the centrality of both “historicity” and the “emergent cultural languages,” the concept of utopia now appears to take two forms for Jameson. Both of these involve paradoxes. First, an intellectual utopia is represented by the paradoxical imperative to “think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place.” Second, there is the paradoxical utopian space of Third-World culture—reminiscent of a whole history of European constructions of the “New World” as utopia<sup>11</sup>—from which emanates “various forms of oppositional culture,” despite the

fact that “multinational capital ends up penetrating those very precapitalist enclaves (Nature and the Unconscious) which offered extraterritorial and Archimedean footholds for critical effectivity” (49). But these two utopias are also linked because it is precisely the loss of the Third World, as representative of our own bygone modes of production, that brings on the crisis in historicity.

This suggests one of those restrictions within Jameson’s theory that determine the paradoxical character of his formulations with respect to the Third World. Jameson writes that “it is thus the limits, the systemic restrictions and repressions, or empty places, in the Utopian blueprint that are the most interesting, for these alone testify to the ways a culture or a system marks the most visionary mind and contains its movement toward transcendence” (208). Perhaps these paradoxes testify to one of the ways late capitalism marks the visionary attempt to represent it. Perhaps the paradoxical nature of Jameson’s own utopian postmodern cultural politics is an “empty place in the Utopian blueprint” for *our* time. Only by insisting on doing that which contemporary culture prohibits—namely, thinking the present historically—and only by summoning the return of a seemingly eliminated space, can the *concept* of a utopian future be kept alive.

There is also something “outside” Jameson’s theory that helps explain his paradoxical reliance on the Third World. I mean the dynamic of contemporary capitalism itself. Far from imploding in a landscape of pure uniformity and complete modernization, it develops strategies for generating difference from within itself. This, at least, is the image of capitalism developed in both the school of radical geography and the contributions of some Latin American scholars to the postmodernism debate.<sup>12</sup> This image complicates the two Marxist theories of imperialism invoked by Jameson. Jameson’s argument that capitalism increasingly homogenizes the world landscape derives from the most influential classical accounts found in Marx and Lenin. In 1848, Marx wrote: “National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto.”<sup>13</sup> Lenin extended this thesis in 1916: “The export of capital affects and greatly accelerates the development of capitalism in those countries to which it is exported.”<sup>14</sup> For classical Marxists, capitalism was an international revolutionizing force. It would obliterate national boundaries en route to establishing an international class—the proletariat—capable of ushering in communism. But Jameson also relies

on a contrary thesis, developed in the 1960s and 1970s by dependency theorists. They argued that capitalism in “metropolitan” or “core” nations “developed underdevelopment” in certain fixed “satellite” or “peripheral” regions. Samir Amin thus asserted: “During the first seventy years of the twentieth century, however, which have been marked by a speeding up of the historical process, the division of the world into ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ countries has not become less pronounced; on the contrary, the gap between them continues to grow larger.”<sup>15</sup> In this way, Jameson’s understanding of the logic of capitalist development draws from two succeeding, historically determined accounts in Marxist theory.<sup>16</sup>

But neither of these theories seems to account for contemporary capitalism. Consider instead geographer Neil Smith’s concept of uneven development described, if rather dramatically, here: “Capital is like a plague of locusts. It settles on one place, devours it, then moves on to plague another place. Better, in the process of restoring itself after one plague the region makes itself ripe for another. . . . Differentiation as the means to a spatial fix becomes itself the problem to be fixed.”<sup>17</sup> In this conceptualization, capitalism becomes a mobile process rather than a glacial, if methodical, leviathan. This capitalism does not lend itself to the binary conceptual structures of dependency theory either: of regions easily and permanently identified as penetrated or unpenetrated, First World or Third World, metropolis or satellite, developed or underdeveloped. As Arjun Appadurai writes, “The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those which might account for multiple centers and peripheries).”<sup>18</sup> Even Ernest Mandel, from whom Jameson borrows his economic model, observes that late capitalism is “an integrated unity, but . . . an integrated unity of non-homogeneous parts.”<sup>19</sup> Finally, Norbert Lechner points out that “the development of capitalism . . . at least in the Southern Cone [of Latin America], only deepened and complicated the existing structural heterogeneity.”<sup>20</sup>

The groundwork for this concept is already laid in Marx’s *Grundrisse*. There he included the earlier image of capital as “the constant impulse to exceed its quantitative limits: an endless process,” which is “destructive towards, and constantly revolutionises . . . tearing down all barriers which impede the development of the productive forces, the extension of the range of needs, the differentiation of production, and the exploitation and exchange of all natural and spiritual powers.”<sup>21</sup> But he nuanced this with the concrete observation that “the fact that capital posits every such limit as

a barrier which it has *ideally* overcome, it does not at all follow that capital has *really* overcome it; and since every such limit contradicts the determination of capital, its production is subject to contradictions which are constantly overcome *but just as constantly posited*.”<sup>22</sup> It is out of this line of Marx’s writing that geographer David Harvey cautions that “geographic differentiations then frequently appear to be what they are not: mere historical residuals rather than *actively reconstituted features within the capitalist mode of production*.”<sup>23</sup> All this suggests that perhaps there is something in contemporary capitalism that produces the optical illusion to which Jameson falls prey. If he sees both a desert of complete modernization extending to the horizon and scattered, miragelike oases of Third-World resistance, perhaps it is because the saturation of the globe by capitalism, as the geographers argue, brings with it a multiplication, not an eradication or organization, of differences.<sup>24</sup>

The classical Marxist line that suggested an endless capitalist “explosion” leads to Baudrillard’s prediction of a “fatal implosion” as well as to Jameson’s vision of capital as “late capitalism” (as in nearing the end of its trajectory). The argument is that capital requires differences, an exterior, to survive. If contemporary capital has consumed all difference, then it will, in effect, run out of gas. But the alternative Marxian formulation as well as the theories of radical geography suggest instead that capitalism engages in a constant self-refueling. As it consumes difference in one place, it regenerates it elsewhere. Michael Speaks calls this an “injective imperative” and it bears a striking resemblance to Marx’s original formulations of capital’s dialectic of expansion and barrier. Speaks writes:

Contemporary capital functions, then, not by modulating the differences within its simulational matrix (by the orbital recurrences of the same), but by modulating the differential between second and third order simulation . . . Without the ability to differentiate or modulate, late capital fails the “injective imperative”: new products, market segments, and consumers can only be sold/created to the extent that capital is not a completely deterministic system, to the extent that it still has the capacity to either open up new “third world” markets and consumers (excavating the real), or create new consumers and products in the “first world” (insinuating the hyperreal).<sup>25</sup>

Compare this with Marx’s description:

It is the tendency of capital to remove the natural ground from the foundation of every industry, and to transfer the conditions of its production outside it to a