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# Images of the United States in Mexican Discourses of Identity and in Literary Writing: The *Contemporáneos*

The Mexican discourse of national identity has been strongly influenced by an idealized image of the Mexican Revolution. On the other hand, it also contains an element of anti-Americanism which even informs the writing of intellectuals like Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, who have joined the ranks of those considering US-American culture as degenerate and barbarian, whereas Latin American culture is the true heir both of European civilization and of the Indian tradition. For a long time, the official (political and intellectual) discourse of identity with its anti-American bias stood in opposition to actual Mexican policy in economic matters where the USA served as a model. In literature, both the realistic school of the *novela de la revolución* and its aesthetic opponent, the avantgarde group of the *Estridentistas*, supported the official identity discourse. It was called into question only by the *Contemporáneos*, a school of writing of the 1920s and 1930s favoring an international and intertextual exchange which included US-American literature. The works of Salvador Novo, in particular, subvert the official discourse and reveal the counter-power potential of literature with regard to the institutionalized tradition of the Revolution as well as to North American dominance.

## I. Literary transgression and counter-power: Some general remarks

Mexican national identity is in many respects an offspring of the Revolution of 1910–1917 which Mexicans consider to be the most significant event of their history in the 20th century. The Revolution became synonymous with the process of civilization the Mexican nation underwent. It also served the *Partido Revolucionario Institucionalizado* (PRI) in defining a national identity. The nation identified with the discourse of the Revolution. Despite some major social achievements during the first decades of this century, the idea of revolutionary progress became little by little an abstract and static strategy of discourse with increasingly less pragmatic efficiency. The paradoxical compromise between revolution and power within the Revolutionary Party illustrates the discrepancy between the Mexican ideal image of the Revolution and its political, discursive manifestation.

In literature, the theme of the Revolution inspired the so-called *novela de la revolución* considered to be the major form of narrative literature of the first 50 years of this century, and ranging from traditional narrative structures to more experimental forms of realism. The *novela de la revolución*, which stands for the national literature of Mexico, corresponds with national strategies of discourse. At the same time, the historical avantgarde, which was represented in Mexico by the movement of the *Estridentistas*, was also dealing with the Revolution. Although the aesthetic program used in their search for a revolutionary form was in opposition to the realistic canon of the national *novela de la revolución*, they also supported the discourse of the Revolution by adopting the idea of change and, therefore, also the rules of the political revolutionary discourse. Both movements, *la novela de la revolución* and the *Estridentistas*, represent significant moments in the historical consciousness of the nation.

In considering the connection between the Mexican discourse of national identity and literary writing, I will focus on the relationship between institutional discourses in the sense of Foucault and what the French School calls *écriture* in the sense of Derrida or the later Barthes. According to Foucault, literary writing (*écriture*) can be a counter-power capable of disturbing institutional discourses as well as of weakening the coherence of their linguistic and ideological system. In approaching this question, some introductory remarks are necessary.

As a social practice, political and literary discourses are basically institutional devices. In dealing with political institutions, literary practice may act in complicity with politics (Lyotard 1979: 38) even if this was not intended by the author. Within the framework of the Foucaultian concept of discourse, a subversive literature is not necessarily restricted to an openly revolutionary pathos. In fact, literary strategies of discourse claiming to be in opposition to political or ideological power do not produce effects of counter-power if they accept the rules of the discourses they seek to cope with. The potential of literary counter-power lies rather in hidden strategies which are unspectacular and can be at work anywhere.[1] Foucault defines such a practice as *discursive heterotopies*, meaning by that highly heterogeneous mixtures of discourses weakening the internal discursive coherence, i.e. the standardized relationship between symbols and the world which one takes for granted. Such interaction of different discourses defies the basic assumptions within the ideological system that institutions are dependent upon. Literary writing is supposed to be more susceptible of combining heterogeneous discourses than other texts. In a more general way, the counter-power arising from literary practice eventually produces a transformation within the standardized way of looking at cultural manifestations.[2] Under these conditions, a transformative impact on the dominant ideological and political order of discourse can be achieved.

The eventual destiny of historical avantgardes is indicative of the complex relationship between politics and literary praxis; it shows that literary counter-power does not depend on antagonistic utterances or themes. Before discussing the role played by Mexican literature in this context I intend to look more closely at the concept of revolution and at anti-Americanism as components of Mexican national identity. I shall then turn to the question of whether Mexican writers managed to function as a counter-power or whether they served the main ideological discourse of the Revolutionary Party, after all. In particular, I intend to discuss the work of the *Contemporáneos*, which has only recently been rediscovered. It represents a kind of avantgarde that was different from both schools mentioned above.

## II. Discourses of revolution, national identity and the role of the United States

The basic element of the national (political and cultural) discourse of revolutionary identity is the national image based on opposite models. They are on the one hand the rediscovered Indian origins and traditions and, on the other hand, a cosmopolitan vision of cultural heritage. Both are seen in contrast to the Anglo-American neighbor. The latter represents a lack of culture stemming from the absolute servitude to the ideology of economic power, a lack of culture which is supposed to put US-Americans outside the achievements of the classic Western tradition. The United States is thus considered the heir of the epoch of Positivism and therefore the incarnation of the worst legacy of Western culture. It is a manifestation of the cultural decadence described by Oswald Spengler in *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1923), whose theory was embraced by Latin Americans at the beginning of the century, when their continent aspired to build a common identity. Within this discursive system, which also contained racial concepts, the United States represent a degenerate race since its society is characterized by the most barbaric aspects of modern reality. Beginning with the essay *Ariel* (1900) by the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó, Latin American authors have represented the opposition

between barbarism and civilization by the Shakespearean contest between Caliban and Ariel. However, they have inverted the roles and assigned the part of the barbarian Caliban to the United States as a representative of Western degeneration. Since then the United States have been seen as the opposite of Ariel, whose place, in turn, is occupied by the Latin American intellectuals supposed to be capable of recovering the contribution of Western culture lost by the decadence of the modern age. This discourse of *latinidad* based on such a reinterpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*[3] guarantees a cohesion between two discourses which are only apparently in conflict: the nationalist and the cosmopolitan. Both have the same premise, namely the assumption that there is an authentic identity certified by the differentiation from some Other. Especially for Mexico after the collapse of the Porfirian regime as a result of the Revolution it is the Anglo-American culture which takes the place of the Other. At the same time, Mexico wants to define itself as a progressive nation. This entailed the overthrow of feudal latifundism and of the positivistic and racist ideology of an elitist oligarchy. Since the Creole oligarchy of Porfirio Díaz had favored Anglo-American interests and investments in the Mexican economy, it was unavoidable that the revolutionary ideologists took US-America as the negative pole for the utopian self-image of a socialist nation favoring the integration of the Indian population, a nation whose culture was even richer than the European because of its *mestizaje*, that is, its being a melting pot of several cultural roots.

It is unquestionable that the rejection of the imperialist objectives of US-American protectionism was urgently needed, since by the end of the 19th century this policy had led to an extensive control of the Mexican economy. However, the problem I would like to discuss is the ambiguity of the Mexican strategy of discourse and of self-representation. Revolutionary Mexico uses the negative image of US-America as a cultureless, positivistic and capitalist nation in order to create a self-image which is essentially different. The opposition against the United States thus guarantees an idealizing view of the Self. In contrast to that, the United States becomes the projection screen for everything negative which has to be eliminated by the Mexican strategies of identity. Actual politics were far less consistent. In fact, when in the 1950s — after the presidency of Lazaro Cárdenas — the concept "modern" implied the intensive industrialization of the nation, which was unthinkable without massive economic support by the United States, Mexico modified its strategy concerning its self-image and the image of the Other. The United States was then seen as a good partner in Panamerican politics. Even before that, Mexico had entered World War II on the side of United States. This development was invading the previously anti-American politics little by little, especially due to the reparation for the damage US-American property had received during the revolutionary wars. Eventually the United States was, in Mexican eyes, openly taking the place of Russia as an economic example to be followed. The discourse of a Mexican counter-identity notwithstanding, indeed, independent of the different strategies of the political discourse, material US-American interests were promoted. As a result, the anti-American discourse of identity persisted despite the leanings of the Mexican "Revolutionary" government, whose professed anti-Americanism only diverted attention away from the present politics and from the social and economic problems of the country. This type of discursive procedure is a general feature of Latin American discourses of identity. After the Mexican, the Cuban revolution of 1959 caused a new phase of anti-Americanism, which nonetheless did not prevent the surrender of the political elite to the economic power of US-America.[4]

The main conclusion to be drawn from these observations is that the discourse of national identity results from a system of self-affirmation as affirmation of one's own ideological position which needs the difference between the Self and the Other in order to represent itself. If one accepts the logic of identity and difference as a logic of opposition, any alternative and any counter-definition becomes neutralized by the logic of discourse in which any position can

eventually be subverted by the other. This is a basic condition of the Foucaultian concept of discourse.

With respect to Mexico it can be observed that the more the discourse of identity unfolds from this opposition, the more Mexican consciousness adopts the point of view of Anglo-America. To define how Mexico differs from the United States then means to assume the characteristics of Otherness according to the Anglo-American system of alterity.[5] In this system, Mexico is represented by the plumed serpent, the *huaraches*, the Indian *serapes* and the Revolution. Painting is then exemplified by Rivera, the novel by *la novela de la revolución* and industry by silver manufacturing at Taxco. According to Salvador Novo, a writer of the *Contemporáneos* who will be more closely considered below, this US-American image of Mexico has been embraced by the Mexican public, eventually causing the inferiority complex Mexican intellectuals had already observed before:[6] "Los turistas americanos compran muñecos de petate, se hacen pijamas de sarape y usan huaraches. A su regreso a su país publican un libro sobre México" (Novo 1965: 53).[7]

In the following I will consider some of the consequences of US-American stereotypes underlying Mexican identity. The Mexican elite, which controls the national consciousness, is particularly taken with a tourist view of their own culture (Sheridan 1985: 261).[8] This exotic point of view makes the unchallenged existence of the "two Mexicos" possible: a political discourse on the one hand claiming the integration of the Indians (in the sense of the Rousseauian noble savage) while on the other allowing the splendid isolation of the Mexican political and cultural elite in Hollywood-style mansions on the hills surrounding the capital, far away from the apocalyptic and polluted life of the city. Various attempts to define *mexicanidad* as a national essence show how deeply this discursive logic is rooted in Mexican identity. The peculiar aspect of the discourse of Mexican identity produced by the intellectual elite in speculating about *mexicanidad* is that it camouflages this group's elitist distance from the masses which they view from behind a patriarchal facade.

## III. The double face of the official discourse of *mexicanidad*

The problems I referred to earlier concern not only the political version, i.e. the official and national application of the discourse of *mexicanidad*, but also its complex modification implied in Octavio Paz' conception of Otherness. In *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), Mexican cultural plurality is seen as doublefaced, as unfolding from the affirmation and the negation of its Western origins supposed to exist simultaneously in the Mexican consciousness. The incarnation of this consciousness are the *pachucos*, whose bizarre mixture of Mexican and US-American characteristics Paz could observe during his first stay in California. The *pachuco* as the representative of Mexicans in general is characterized by solitude and the *nada*, i.e. nihilism, as a result of his situation between the two countries. The United States holds the position of the Other which is therefore associated with the white race, modernity and economic progress, whereas the Self is conceived in opposition to that, namely as Indianicity, retrogression and historical dormancy. The characteristics of the Other are seductive, whereas the Self is repulsive. To overcome this duality and the complex of inferiority, Octavio Paz proposes the utopian view of a compatibility between the Indian roots and the classic, premodern Western tradition,[9] developing at the same time a sacral view of the Revolution, which is supposed to have returned to Mexicans the original, Indian rights. Despite the well-meaning attempt of Paz to cope with the self-image of weakness, this romantic version of the Revolution, as well as his criticism of the Unites States, supported the political discourse of the "Revolutionary" government of the Fifties by allowing the party to ideologically compensate for the actual economic sell-out to the United States by the presumption of a cultural superiority towards the barbarian,

culturally underdeveloped neighbor. In his book *El Ogro filantrópico* Octavio Paz openly builds a system of oppositions between the United States and Mexico, claiming the superiority of an epicurean Mexican culture and cuisine over the positivistic pragmatism of the American fast food culture. In *Tiempo mexicano* Carlos Fuentes extends this opposition to the notion of time: mythic circularity and a synchronous conception of time allow Mexican culture to recover the utopian force of the European Renaissance against "enculturation" (Burke 1972), i.e. the segmentation of different cultural spheres and of historical times after the Enlightenment, the latter a cultural process the Anglo-Saxons are blamed for. The case of Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes appears to me to be an obvious example of the inefficacy of simply producing antagonistic utterances against a system. Fuentes' open criticism of the government and its commitment to the USA only exploits the same symbolism underlying the self-definition of the nation as culturally superior and has thus consolidated and legitimated the national system of representation. He has therefore contributed to the antagonistic cultural discourse palliating and veiling the actual political and economic dependency. The recent polemics between these two writers, as well as between Octavio Paz and Héctor Aguilar Camín, the editors of the leading Mexican reviews (*Vuelta* and *Nexos*, respectively), again demonstrates the inefficiency of a simple polarity of positions within the same discourse. The (conservative) Paz *(Vuelta)* accuses the progressive Socialist Aguilar Camín *(Nexos)* of compromising himself by supporting the interests of the government; the latter returns the insinuation and so on.

In contrast to such a mythology of images of Self and Other, which underlies the discourse of identity supported by intellectuals, another movement of ideas existed in Mexico from the beginning of the century. This movement attempted to criticize the system of oppositions between the Self and the Other on the basis of the Mexican discourse of identity with its revolutionary self-image of Mexican culture. One of the main objectives of the *Contemporáneos* was a critical analysis of the discursive compromise between the literary and the dominant political discourses.

## IV. The Contemporáneos

The *Contemporáneos* were a "postavantgardist" group of authors of essays, poetry, novels and dramas. They are an example of a practice of writing where literary creativity also involves some critical philosophical questioning. In examining this group I also attempt to demonstrate the continuity of its line of thought in Mexican culture.[10] The *Contemporáneos* properly called themselves "a group without a group". In fact, due to their heterogeneity, their only common objective was to continue the tradition of the so-called "Ateneo de la juventud" (Athenaeum of the Youth), a prerevolutionary intellectual circle founded by Alfonso Reyes, José Vasconcelos and Henríquez Ureña to create a Mexican philosophy on the basis of classic European traditions. The name *Contemporáneos*, which is drawn from one of the last reviews they edited (1928–1931),[11] reflects the genuine interest of these writers, namely to develop a type of writing able to generate a critical vision of the main questions of the contemporary world. They refused to cope with ideology and power in the sense of "littérature engagée" according to Sartre. Instead, they looked for a kind of poetic consciousness capable of destabilizing ideological systems, including anti-systems such as the poetic program of the historical avantgarde. Their inclusion of references to foreign writers for purposes of cosmopolitism was a method of keeping a critical external point of view alive. In this respect, the *Contemporáneos* were up in arms with the "official" avantgarde as well as with its opponents, the conservative realistic writers of the *novela de la revolución*. The *Contemporáneos* refused any engagement with the discourse of revolutionary identity.[12] In postrevolutionary Mexican literature this discourse was represented on the one hand by the *Estridentistas*, the Mexican avantgardist group inspired by Italian Futurism,

which attempted to transfer the revolution to art by looking for new ways of writing in opposition to realistic theories. On the other hand, it was represented by the "nationalists" who pursued what they considered a true representation of the revolution. The latter criticized any involvement with Western literature or any poetic experiment likely to weaken the mimetic mission of literature; eventually they would call the *Contemporáneos'* attitude and literature non-virile and feminine (Sheridan 1985: 243). The international interests of the latter were considered a sign of alienation from national concerns.[13]

In opposition to the nationalists as well as to the historical avantgarde, the *Contemporáneos* achieved a kind of literature which could be called postmodern in the sense of Kristeva's concept of intertextuality – a phenomenon which should not be seen as the unique manifestation of the postindustrial epoch, but rather as an intrinsic condition of what we call a "modern" episteme, which calls into question the connection between text and reality by recognizing that our perception of the world depends on texts as intermediaries. In this sense, the *Contemporáneos* were heirs to Alfonso Reyes' assimiliation of Western culture (in the sense of a free play with various cultural traditions and different intertexts) as the best way to be a member of the human community, and in this sense, also to be a Mexican.[14]

Various essays, novels and dramas of the *Contemporáneos* are intertextually linked to classical and especially contemporary authors. Not only Spanish modernism, but also French contemporary novelists like André Gide and English writers like D. H. Lawrence play an important role. Among the US-Americans, John Dos Passos, especially after his stay in Mexico, was important to them. Thornton Wilder's and Eugene O'Neill's innovations in drama were expressly taken up by the *Contemporáneos* in spite of the stigma of anti-nationalism pinned on them by orthodox Mexican intellectuals. In their journals, the group published translations of or comments on a number of contemporary American texts.

Mexican historiography has condemned the *Contemporáneos* for their indifference towards the discourse of national identity and their refusal to follow the nationalist discursive strategies either affirmatively or negatively. Literary historians neglected the work of most of these writers until the ideological liberation of Mexican intellectuals, which occurred after the collapse of the revolutionary discourse that followed upon the student rebellions and the massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968.[15] The collapse of the myth of the Revolutionary Party also progressively liberated the literary institution. Indeed, the first anthology of poetry by the *Contemporáneos* was edited in 1982 by Luis Mario Schneider and the first monographic study (by Guillermo Sheridan) was published in 1985. In contrast to the *Contemporáneos*, the *Estridentistas*, who are now almost considered an interesting historical curiosity, were the subject of a study by L. M. Schneider as early as 1968.

Among the *Contemporáneos*, Salvador Novo is one of the most fascinating writers. His "postmodern" practice of writing anticipates a critical counter-position to several discursive strategies used by intellectual posterity. By that I mean the discourse of *mexicanidad* by writers like Octavio Paz that I mentioned before, as well as the academic studies based on the exotic stereotype of the Mexican Revolution.[16] *Divorcio (drama ibseniano)*, written by Novo in 1924 at the age of 19, is an example of the intertextual practice of this author which he uses for a critique of the intellectual tourism within the nationalist discourse. According to Sheridan (1985: 170), in his preface to the drama Novo "takes the risk" of claiming to have been inspired by an extensive catalog of classic and contemporary masters like Shaw, Pirandello, Cocteau, O'Neill, Galsworthy and Valle-Inclán. In this piece (5 acts of three minutes each) a Mexican woman, who at first was in a relationship with a *gringo*, is abandoned by Benito, her Mexican fiancé, when he marries a *gringa*, Mrs. Gutenberg(!), during his business studies in Texas. The visit of Mrs. Gutenberg in Mexico gives Novo the occasion to develop a caustic portrait of bourgeois Mexicans as well as Americans linked together by a common tourist view of Mexican culture.[17]

The plot is indeed an ironic allegory of the tourist self-image of the Mexican bourgeois. Using the perspective of a foreign visitor enthusiastically seeking the spectacle of the "laboratory of the revolution", the drama ironically reveals the bourgeois transformation of the Revolutionary Party.

At the same time, Novo published a selection of "modern French poetry" as well as an anthology of American new poetry (Sheridan 1985: 172).[18] Novo's anthology, which according to José Emilio Pacheco was almost unknown in Mexico in 1979, included the first Spanish version of poems by Ezra Pound, Sandburg and Frost. Ezra Pound's poetry gave considerable inspiration to Novo's poetic writing. The shift to Anglo-American poetic diction in his poetry was a means to desacralize Spanish traditional rhetoric.[19] The following example drawn from a chronicle about a trip to Puebla shared with Dos Passos, which was published in *El Universal Ilustrado* in 1927, illustrates Novo's play with innovative Anglo-American speech rhythms:[20]

> Ya empe pum; zó el festival. Ya se ha de ir a acabar. ¿Cuál música oímos? Tituli camixli huicitli clap clap clap clap clap clap clap. Traducido ya no es lo mismo. Clap clap. Esta es la recámera de las alumnas. La virgen de la silla. 'El amor maternal es el amor más puro'. ... (Sheridan 1985: 294)

In attacking the myths of the humanistic tradition Novo anticipates the desacralization of literary myths as a general practice in Mexican writing after the "revolution" of 1968.[21] The indifference of Novo's prose to the conventions of realism, which was a sign of his sceptical denial of hallowed value systems and an indication of his critical awareness, was obviously interpreted by politically motivated writers as being reactionary. However, in its contrast to traditional realistic prose, the postmodern rejection of the demands of mimesis in the novels by the *Contemporáneos* was both progressive and a most significant affront to the political discourse of identity.[22]

New studies by Mexican writers like José Agustín and Carlos Monsiváis see in the skeptical attitude of Novo the first reaction against the discourse of identity based on the simplistic opposition of Ariel vs. Caliban. The writer José Emilio Pacheco, for instance, draws attention to Novo's short novel *El joven* (1923). This novel focuses on the search for identity,[23] which was politically significant for Mexican culture after the revolutionary chaos of 1910 to 1917. This text can be considered as an example of Novo's poetic prose and of his early critical reaction against the national discourse of identity. The plot appears to be uncomplicated. A young man recovering from an illness gets up in the morning, goes for the first time to downtown Mexico City and comes back home in the evening. The changes he observes in the Mexican metropolis are an allegory of the contemporary situation of Mexican culture. Instead of the French tradition which was dominant in the 19th century, the US-American model has taken over. The latter is obvious from the signs of technical progress and from the speed of the numerous American cars – "rápidos y yanquis" (1933: 23) – says the original Spanish text. The rapidity of change and the diversity of city life confuse the young protagonist. His first attempt to overcome this confusion is to resort to the well-known model of indigenistic identity: it is the memory of the harmonious past, which seems at first glance to console him. However, the narrative structure, whose logic does not depend on the action but rather on the inner process of consciousness, shows that the indigenistic model taken as a basis for finding an identity leads to the interpretation of modernity as decadence. The idea of decadence subsequently hinders the young man's convalescence. Only when he starts accepting the present chaos independently of the utopian past, does he find a different solution to the quest for identity and at the same time a cure for his illness. In fact, the protagonist distances himself from the utopian vision of the past as implied in the indigenistic model: "Lo único que producía Tenochtitlán eran esculturas y piedras de los sacrificios que a su vez favorecerían el turismo norteamericano

y las excavaciones desconcertantes" (1933: 45).[24] The protagonist becomes aware that the past, which was supposed to give him an authentic origin, has rather provoked his weakness. This awareness allows him to regard the "influence" of the other cultures not as a deprivation of authentic origins, i.e. alienation, but as the freedom to manipulate the relationship between the Self and the Other. Some US-American movies give him this inspiration. They use, for example, the history of the ancient Romans in order to affirm the superiority of modern times. In this process of manipulating the Other, the origin loses its significance. This way to change the Other and to bring it to life is rather important to him.

Novo also refers to the contemporary linguistic polemics between the defenders of British English and those preferring the so-called American dialect, arguing in favor of the acceptance of American English as an independent language:

> Y por qué no han de componer su propio lenguaje los que han fabricado todo lo suyo? Europa inventó ladrillos y ellos [los norteamericanos] alzaron rascacielos. Italia les mandó a Caruso y ellos grabaron discos con sello rojo. (1933: 51–52)[25]

Novo sees the assimilation of other sources by US-American culture as the chance to overcome inferiority. In this respect, the novel offered a message which for a long time was to be neglected by Mexican and Latin American intellectuals, namely the recognition of the fact that the sentiment of weakness results from a historical or territorial position which one takes as an authentic guarantee of identity.

The poetic writing of Novo is significant in two respects. It points out the political risks involved in the US-American infiltration of Mexico. At the same time it destabilizes the discourse of cultural superiority towards the United States and thereby weakens the discursive strategy which allows the political elite of Mexico to surrender to the economic power of the United States by using cultural superiority as a discursive alibi. Such subversion of the dominant symbolic system as opposed to its reinforcement by use of the discourse of identity in the writings of, for instance, Paz and Fuentes, might have induced Mexicans to destabilize their own economic, political and intellectual elite, that is, the inner enemy of their own culture.

**Notes**

1 For the concept of counter-power see the contribution of Friedrich v. Krosigk in this issue.
2 For the Foucaultian concepts of discourse and heterotopy see Borsò 1991 b.
3 For a criticism of the reception of *The Tempest* see Fernández Retamar 1972.
4 Focussing on this problem is, for instance, one of the most important objectives of the well-known novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) by Garcia Márquez.
5 See Breinig's analysis of US-American novels approaching Mexico as a foreign culture (1990).
6 For an early example of criticism against the negative image of the United States within the Mexican discourse of identity, see the essays by Martín Luis Guzmán (1915–1920) and Samuel Ramos (1934).
7 "The American tourists buy straw dolls, make pajamas from serapes and wear huaraches. Returned home, they write books about Mexico" (my transl.). See also my critique of Carlos Fuentes in this respect (1990).
8 Sheridan properly reminds us of the similar assumption of the foreign (German) point of view in the definition of national identity by Spanish intellectuals at the beginning of this century (Sheridan 1985: 261).
9 For instance, Paz observes a similarity between the functions of the theater in ancient Greece, the cultural tradition of medieval feasts and the Precolumbian feasts.
10 See my discussion of the group of the *Ateneo*, especially Alfonso Reyes, at the turn of the century (Borsò 1992). By my presentation of this critical-philosophical tradition I attempt to question the general assumption that a "new authentic literature" only started in the Fifties of this century. On the con-

trary, such a tradition of critical writing has continued, in spite of the censorship leading to cruel repression and the massacre of Tlatelolco in 1968. The dissemination of this kind of literature and the rise of a plurality of discourses after the crisis of Tlatelolco has made it impossible to speak of a single discourse of identity in contemporary Mexican culture.

11 One of the reviews, *Forma* (1927–1928), included two different groups of writers: the nationalists and the internationalists (Sheridan 1986: 278). The first review, the *Falange* (1922), also had a nationalist tendency, whereas with *Ulises* (1927) the modern attitude of the *Contemporáneos* began. A few months before the review started in 1928, Torres Bodet had published a volume of essays entitled *Contemporáneos, notas de crítica* (Sheridan 1985: 321).

12 At the times of the review *Ulises* they already refused to belong to any "ism". The concern of the *Contemporáneos* was to formulate sceptical questions (Sheridan 1985: 285).

13 The charge of "afrancesamiento" (Sheridan 1985: 260) reminds one of the similarity between Mexican (Latin American) and Spanish discourses of identity.

14 One of the *Contemporáneos*, Jorge Cuesta, took up an idea of Reyes: nationalism means anti-patriotism because of the reduction of the concept of nation to the misanthropic vision of a limited authenticity (Sheridan 1985: 354).

15 On 2.10.1968 President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz ordered the bloody repression by military force of a manifestation by Mexican students on the Plaza of Tlatelolco.

16 Ironically, the Revolution was the only topic capable of guaranteeing Mexican scholars the continued interest of Anglo-American colleagues (Sheridan 1985: 259).

17 The self-critical tendency of Novo is evident in some remarks about the response of American alumnae of a summer school. The *gringas* found him "so young, so cute and so bright; son las únicas que me han pedido autógrafos, que han tomado en los veranos kodaks mías y que me han hallado interesting" (Sheridan 1985: 171).

18 According to Sheridan (1985: 172) these anthologies are currently not available.

19 Even before that the review *Ulises* is, like the Anglo-American models, "irreverente, irresponsable, típicamente efímera y llena de errores de imprenta" (Cuesta, in Sheridan 1985: 286).

20 As a further example, Pacheco reminds us of the interest Pedro Henríquez Ureña took in English literature as early as in his *Ensayos críticos* (1905); Ureña's knowledge of Anglo-American literature was remarkable.

21 Among other examples, in *Children of the Mire* (1974) Octavio Paz judged that the aesthetic irony leading to a "relativisation" of the mythic vision of the artist is a significant characteristic of a postmodern "estética del cambio".

22 According to a remark by the poet Gorostiza about Novo's *Return Ticket*, in this experimental novel as well as in Novo's essays the idea of travelling becomes a method of "dissemination" of meaning: "No viaja, transmigra. No se transplanta, se siembra. [...] Novo [ensayista] procede como si las palabras no tuviesen sentido alguno. A sus ojos, los nombres representan a los objetos, en sólo dos dimensiones y son como su fotografía. Les falta espesor, es decir, sentido [...]. Hay en esta tendencia un deseo de ubicar el lenguaje, de reintroducir en él el dibujo que perdiera la palabra romántica? ("Alreador de 'Return Ticket'", in Gorostiza 1988: 127).

23 For a detailed analysis of this novel see Borsò (1991a).

24 "The only things that Technotitlán has produced are its sculptures and sacrificial stones, which in turn have been the cause of North American tourism and of confusing excavations."

25 "Why should those who have otherwise made their own things not also modulate their own language? Europe invented the building blocks, the North Americans built skyscrapers from it. The Italians sent Caruso, the Americans made records."

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