

## **New Forms of Belonging and of Relational Identity in the Americas in the Context of Globalization.**

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### **1. Hermeneutics and Origins**

Some, discomfited by displacement from their original context, express their feeling of discontent with a cliché: “this makes no sense,” or even with anguished self-questioning: “What am I doing here?” Through this unease is also communicated a loss of the familiar, protective environment, the comforting bosom of meaning.

This generative environment of familiar signification (based on a tautology that validates national identity) has long been rooted in a mythical territoriality, that is to say, in a myth that posits attachment to the land as its hermeneutic fountainhead. The biblical myth contains this same generative nucleus of signification, first through an act, the fashioning of man from clay, and second through a being, which is Adama, meaning sprung from the earth. This myth, essential to the construction of meaning, because providing its semantic context, or “classemes” as Greimas (1966) coined it, permits the insertion of elements into a pre-established, constraining narrative structure, where everything, or almost everything, can find meaning. All myth is a legitimization story, as Lyotard discusses in *La condition postmoderne*. However, the biblical myth has the advantage of binding the external referent, the territory, to the very invention of meaning itself, the two being synthesized in the name of that primordial earthly being, Adam.

This child of the earth is therefore exalted by the high priests of old world nationalism, as epitomized by the characters in French Canada’s *La terre paternelle*, a novel by Patrice Lacombe. This is not to say that nation-states and colonial processes do not also draw upon territorial roots, i.e. on a mix of mythical memory and territoriality. This source material is manifest in the secular myths serving 19th century romanticism and 20th century genocidal excesses. We can see that it is not simply through territory that a national identity is erected<sup>2</sup>, but also through memory, constructed in exemplary tales, especially throughout the Americas. Nationality, within its territorial limits, seems to be an interplay of memories and oversights that reinforce each other through story. This function of the master narratives effaces social practice and attempts to establish consensus on forgetting the victims of history. This slippage is well illustrated by Latin American critics’<sup>3</sup> oft-cited phrase from Renan: “the essence of a nation is that its individuals have a lot in common, and also that they have forgotten a lot of things.”

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<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Benedict (1983) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

<sup>3</sup> “La esencia de una nación es que todos los individuos tengan muchas cosas en común y también hayan olvidado muchas cosas” (The essence of a nation is that people share

However, in the contemporary legitimacy of geographic and symbolic displacement, location is increasingly perceived as a relational discursive practice which transforms itself depending on other discursive practices with which it is in contact. Through the multiplication of contacts, one develops a reflexivity which leads to grasp the legitimizing process linked to these discursive practices. As we have seen above, one of these legitimizing processes is based on the belief that territory is a natural entity, a firm ground on which to build an identity and a stable semantic at the root of a strong social consensus. Nowadays, however, thanks to the expansion of college and university education to hundred of millions of people, thanks to travel, technology and communication, people practice reflexivity and understand that a territory is generated by discursive practices aiming at creating a homogeneous consensus, that is a Nation-State from which springs a belief in objectivity. In this case, objectivity is the result of a monologic discourse accepted by all those who discursively shared the same territory, for instance the belief that men and women were equal before the law although men were allowed to vote and determine the production of legal systems and not women. Today, however, territory is perceived as connected to the opposition within/without which contributes to hide that identity is constructed by interactions, and that it ultimately prevents the recognition of diversity.

To function reflexively leads to produce meanings not obstructed by binary oppositions, but rather giving the possibility to play with multiplicity, which eventually leads to a dynamic from which springs a third discourse. In order to illustrate this dynamic, one can consider the rearticulation of the political discourse in Europe after the Second World War due to the presence of the emergence of the conscience of the Holocaust. After the war, one of the questions was to determine if the Pétain government was legitimate or if it was installed by a foreign force. In the first case, those who served Vichy were, at most, erring patriots or, at best, patriots who tried to help the nation to survive. In the second case, those who served it were traitors and deserved to be treated accordingly. Two legitimacies were considered: one possibly linked to Pétain and the other connected with Free France and De Gaulle. The issue was to see if one could condemn those who served Vichy because their behavior was not deemed to conform to a patriotism in the service of the nation. As one can see, after the war, the logic of a nationalistic discourse was still at work and was based on a dualistic paradigm national/foreign which still excluded those who did not fit in one of these categories. However a very important question slowly emerged. It was linked to the fact that Jews were not treated like French nationals but like foreigners, although they were French nationals. Moreover, they were denounced by French nationals, often arrested by French police, and sent to concentration camps. This question displaced the questions of legitimacy related to a nationalistic discourse and its paradigm. Displacing the paradigm national/foreign by showing that there are hybrid categories and that this hybridity was

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many things and also that they forgot many things) (García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada*, Paidós, Buenos-Aires, 1999, p. 60).

rejected, caused a redefinition which points to lies and genocide. The discourse<sup>4</sup> of the Holocaust acts as a third term in the conflict between two legitimacies and contributes to the rereading of a past, which could not lead to the silencing of its most tragic and abhorrent elements<sup>5</sup>.

In the postmodern/postcolonial context, the new dynamic leads to crossing boundaries and limits. It opens a new frontier, that of a knowledge-based society in which discourses intersect. Different genres are now connected and one can see elements of the media in novels or discover a text from Heraclitus in a commercial for the multinational Conoco: "There is nothing permanent except change"<sup>6</sup>. These features particular to the contemporary discursive world and due in part to new commercial agreements and the development of a conscience concerned by what people of the Americas have in common tend to foster trans-disciplinary studies dealing with the Americas.

One important element of this new conscience of a continentally shared geo-discursive space is the practice of a new hermeneutic linked to a multicultural way of life giving access to cultural processes calling for a capacity to efficiently compete (instead of waging wars) by inventing productive relationships aiming at the future.

## 2. Encountering History

Viewed through a postmodern lens, the detachment of meaning from territory and origin is fundamental, because it validates adaptation to shifting contexts, displacement, and to the transitory. It is this process that leads to the production of new signification, and to the repositioning of identity and social relationships within the context of globalization. We cannot, however, forget that Modernism, and its particular form of rationality, has also strategically used to detach signification from territoriality, in order, for instance, to exclude Aboriginal peoples.

In all evolutionary ideals, the word 'progress' plays a crucial role, for, as Hobbes observed, all nations have begun in a state of nature, or of perpetual war against one another, and have evolved to a more civilized state, thanks to their faculty of reason. Of course, Hobbes' assertion opens up a deep question. Some societies attained the level of civility idealized in the French Revolution, while some did not. The solution to the problem lay in labeling societies with strange customs 'irrational' through the attribution

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<sup>4</sup> This ternary dynamic is always rejected by orthodoxies. This is the case when Muslims contest the Holocaust and engage in a dualistic discourse (Muslims/non-Muslims) calling for the violent elimination of those who do not respect Muhammad. See the poster: "Be prepared for the real Holocaust!" brandished by a Muslim protester during a demonstration in London: *Ottawa Citizen*, Saturday, February 4, 2005, p. A3.

<sup>5</sup> Both examples illuminate a process that is similar to the rereading of the past from the strategic point of view of the present. The present builds a past in whose meaningfulness remains in the present. Borges in "Pierre Ménard Autor del Quijote" and even more Oswald de Andrade in his *Anthropophagic Manifesto*, were very conscious of this dynamic and they both helped in building American identities escaping from the canons of the European past by rereading European codes from the point of view of the Americas and its many perspectives.

<sup>6</sup> *Business Week*, 23 oct. 1978.

process. The unknown other was therefore inscribed as a barbarian (paradigm barbarity/civilization) as indicated for example by Sarmiento, the Argentinean writer and future president of the Republic, in his novel, *Facundo* or by F.X. Garneau in his *History of Canada*.

Thus, the connection between land and Aboriginal could be rationally denied, by branding first peoples barbarian. In this way, from the outset, American nation-states concerted to separate territory from its resonant meanings to promote an exclusive and dualistic notion of progress. To do so, they promulgated a scheme whereby either the land was deserted, or whereby Aboriginals were directly connected to nature; in either case, Aboriginals were without history. Likewise, throughout modernity in a complementary movement, Nation-States established strong ties between territory and declarations of independence, land and constitution, and between territory and nationhood.

### **3. Contemporary discursive conflicts: questioning territorial boundaries**

At the end of the nineteen sixties, Frederik Barth published *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*<sup>7</sup>, in which he argued that a shared culture was less the result of definite qualities than of sustained activity and negotiation. Moreover, this result must be understood in its relationship to power. This means some group will, during a certain time, form into nations, while others will be ethnic groups within, or at the margins of a given nation. These ethnic groups will then be considered exploitative, backward, or folkloric, depending on how they are constructed in the views of others. Hegelian logic, masks a deep ontological crisis<sup>8</sup>, dictates the attribution of negative qualities to others in order to differentiate oneself from others.

Some group will be constructed into races by other group. This process of attribution<sup>9</sup> has a fluctuating impact, and establishes itself in function of larger politico-historical parameters, as black American writer James Baldwin points out in trenchant terms: "Color is not a human or personal reality; it is a political reality"<sup>10</sup>. In other

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<sup>7</sup> Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Bergen/London, Universitetsforlaget, Allen and Unwin, 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Shapiro, *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, New York, Harper, 1963.

<sup>9</sup> Patrick Imbert, "Le processus d'attribution" in *Les discours du nouveau monde au XIXe siècle au Canada français et en Amérique latine Los discursos del Nuevo Mundo en el siglo XIX en el Canadá francófono y en América latina*, (ed. M. Couillard et P. Imbert) Ottawa, Legas, février 1995, 285 p.

<sup>10</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire next Time*, New York, Dial Press, p. 103. It is the same thing for a paradigm believed to be biological such as life/death but which definitions are political: see G. Agamben, *op.cit.* p. 173-178.

words, as it is also obvious in the novel entitled *Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer* by the Montréal writer Dany Laferrière (born in Haïti), skin color is not natural but politico-cultural, and entails definite economic repercussions. These parameters are constantly renegotiated in the Americas, where migratory flux has a huge impact.

The constant redefinitions caused by the reduction of distance, and the legitimacy of displacement from birthplace, which is actually a geographic and a hermeneutic/argumentative location, makes manifest the problem of identity. Identity itself is reset in the shifting between inside/outside. This dualistic paradigm is rejected and identity is no longer considered stable, nor a given. Identity enters into a retroactive chain reaction where inside/outside is a discursive product that resets identity as an effect of discourse, subject to changing goals in the competitive dynamic of attribution and recognition. This discursive procedure splits itself into multiple unequal discourse relationships<sup>11</sup>, certainly, but where the negation of the other can no longer take place as it did under the terms<sup>12</sup> of modernity and colonialism as it is analyzed by Bhabha.

Bhabha's mimicry is the expression of the *not quite*, that is to say of a fight for identity between a valorized colonial model and a series of devalued behaviors, because the colonized can imitate the model, but *not quite* attain it: « [...] mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge [...] colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*<sup>13</sup>. » In fact the colonized person can never aspire to become a model in its own right because of its accent, the color of its skin, its relationship to women often doubly oppressed, its knowledge of many cultures and many languages (at least its own and the colonizer's). The colonized person always has to stay outside of what is considered important in the social game. In this light, to know

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<sup>11</sup> Nestor García Canclini, *Culturas Híbridas*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> This is similar to the exploration of an identity produced by autobiographical writing in *Le livre brisé* by S. Doubrovsky in which the subject is produced by writing itself. It is the same process as in *L'Amour la fantasia* by Assia Djebar, in which the subject is produced by a conflictual discourse between languages and cultures. In this text the subject no longer stems from a description of a real world which would precede him and which would need to be translated in words as best as possible. This is emphasized by C. Gronemann: "Sinn, so scheint es, ist weder in Bezug auf eine Wirklichkeit oder einen Autor noch im Text selbst fixierbar, sondern eine temporäre Erscheinung jeweils spezifischer Diskurse" (*Autofiction-nouvelle autobiographie-double autobiographie-aventure du texte: Postmoderne/postkoloniale formen der Autobiographie in der französischen und maghrebinischen Literatur*, Universität Leipzig, Oktober 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Homi Bhabha, « Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse », *October* 1984, n° 28, p. 126. See also: Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimetic in *The Theory of Reading* (ed. F. Gloversmith), Brighton, Harvester, 1989, p. 93-122.

more is negative, because it prevents the formation of a perfect copy of the colonizer, who with his/her power does not need to know more, or learn more languages, in particular the language of the colonized. The colonized is therefore, at best, only *like*. Bhabha's mimicry theorizes the invalidation as desired by a colonial power<sup>14</sup> or by any regime oppressing minority groups.

However, in the new postmodern/postcolonial dynamic, the mimicry of *like* is no longer negative, because new symbolic and economic assertions have been and are being produced every day. Minorities that are often subjected to the imposition of additional forms of mandatory knowledge and to the effort to communicate in the dominant language have now gained some power out of their bilingualism and bi-culturalism. Thus, a francophone technical college in Ottawa, La Cité Collégiale, plays positively on linguistic difference, no longer framing it as linked to an oppressed or dispossessed minority, but as the capitalization of useful, supplementary knowledge that adds to technical mastery: «FRENCH speaking students BILINGUAL employees ». This reversal of perspective is effective, because it transforms the difference of the Francophone minority of Ontario into an advantage, especially when it is attached to a learning process pertaining to new technologies: «the gateway to a broad range of *regional, national* and *global* opportunities<sup>15</sup> ».

The discursive procedure that repositions the outside not as a given but as a product of language, and therefore as a malleable concept, disrupts the notion of a unified subject<sup>16</sup>, and of homogeneous mono-cultural groups<sup>17</sup>. It leads to helping minorities to have access to positions of power because the background is no longer monochromatic but multi-colored. Such a background made of diverse discourses stimulates reflexive activity. It permits one not to be beholden to the outcome, but to envisage, as Michel de

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<sup>14</sup> One must of course add that the actual results of colonization occasionally proved to be very beneficial for the colonized. For example, in Pondicherry, the former French colony of coastal India, a senior employee receives 6000F salary per month « *alors qu'un citoyen indien, même de haute caste, gagne péniblement 500 F par mois.* » [while an ordinary Indian citizen, even of the highest caste earns, with difficulty, 500F a month] (*Grands Reportages*, octobre 2001, p. 76-77).

<sup>15</sup> *Ottawa Business Journal*, April 24, 2000, p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Castro-Klarén, Sara (1999) "Mimicry revisited: Latin America, post-colonial theory and the location of knowledge" in A. and F. de Toro (eds.) *El debate de la postcolonialidad en Latinoamérica*, Frankfurt/Madrid, Vervuert/Iberoamericana, p. 137-164.

<sup>17</sup> It also repositions those basic antagonisms and impulses towards exclusion analyzed by René Girard in *Things Hidden since the Beginning of the World* (London, Athlone, 1987). One thinks about the appropriation mimesis which goal is to control the Platonic mimesis allowing those in power to pretend to be able to say what is reality, how to define oneself and what to do

Certeau<sup>18</sup> mentions, the rules of the production of discourse, a dynamic particular to specialized languages, which trickle, little by little into public discourse<sup>19</sup>. In this context, one is regularly confronted with a new hermeneutic based on a multi-discursive activity. It has been fostered already a long time ago by writers such as Cortázar, Aquino and Laura Esquivel but has now recently been disseminated in commercials and newspapers in order to reach out to as many people as possible.

#### 4. The production of various, and legitimate, significations

"La deconstrucción postmoderna es a un nivel particular una lectura superpuesta, una *para-lectura*, que tiene por fin el emplear otros textos como base de motivación hasta el punto de hacer olvidar o eliminar este punto de partida. La deconstrucción es leer no creyéndole al texto, sino cuestionando todo, es ir a la traza más lejana, pero sin querer jamás dar un juicio definitivo, sino ofrecer una hipótesis." (The postmodern deconstruction is, at a certain level, a superimposed reading, a para-reading which goal is to use other texts as a motivating basis in order to make forget a particular point of view. Deconstruction is to read without believing in the text, questioning everything, it is to look for the most remote trace, but without trying to give a definitive judgment, only a hypothesis. (Alfonso de Toro, "El productor 'rizomorfo' y el lector como 'detective literario'" p. 150; K. A Bühler. A. de Toro (eds.), *Jorge Luis Borges*, Frankfurt/Madrid, Vervuert/Iberoamericana).

The will to transform the reader into a producer of multiple significations can be noticed in many different discourses throughout the Americas. It belongs to a large intertextual procedure that permeates the production of contemporary symbols. This desire to valorize multiple significations is linked to the evolution of the Americas trying to escape the monosemic impositions of the inherited canon. The canon was first reified by the colonists, then by an essentialist structure that persistently enforced the reproduction of European models. This essentialist structure can be seen in the valorization of the opposition within/without under its related form barbarity/civilization. This opposition which was disseminated in the 19th century by Sarmiento in his essay entitled *Facundo* was connected to a European vision of the Americas valorizing the cities in contact with Europe and rejecting the interior. It started to be violently criticized in 1928 by the Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade's in the Anthropophagic manifesto<sup>20</sup>. In this text, he claims that in the Americas one has to devour, rather than imitate, European codes. He also proclaims a revisiting of other cultures such as those of indigenous peoples and African slaves. In de Andrade's text, the cannibalization leads to

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<sup>18</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L'histoire, science et fiction dans la philosophie de l'histoire et la pratique historienne aujourd'hui*, Ottawa, Ed de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1982.

<sup>19</sup> Basil Bernstein, *Class, Codes, and Control*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971. Patrick Imbert, *The Permanent Transition*, Frankfurt/Madrid, Vervuert/Iberoamericana.

<sup>20</sup> Oswald de Andrade, *Anthropophagies*, Paris, Flammarion, 1982 (1<sup>ère</sup> éd. 1928).

manifold metamorphoses, to recognizing other cultures and to embracing the future. Cannibalization displaces the opposition barbarity/civilization and opens the way for a democratization of multiple encounters in non-homogeneous cultural and geographical American spaces.

One has to realize that the canon was also linked to a pedagogy that focused its energies on the uncovering of the deep meaning of a text. This method reinforced the notion that a text could have only one true meaning, one imposed by institutional authorities, whether they be secular, religious or other. In order to produce alternative and legitimate meanings, one has to escape from the canon based on the opposition within/without and from a pedagogy imposing only one true meaning to a text. This is what is nowadays regularly emphasized not only in literature but in many commercials. Borden Ladner and Gervais (a Canadian law firm), invites people to make adjustments in perception: under the image of a small spoon, the caption “Be”; under that of a multi-blade jackknife, “Be bold.”, following both images, the slogan reads: “Borden Ladner Gervais NEVER gives one-dimensional advice (*En route*, avril 2001, p. 4)”.

The cultural supplement to *La Tercera* (p. 4), in Chile, rests on similar logic. In a full page ad, the photograph of a nude woman is displayed twice. The first image bears the tag *arte*, and the second, *porno*. The desire to provoke reflection on the making of meaning, on the process of attribution, and on the revisiting of semantic mechanisms is omnipresent. This desire corresponds to a society that no longer relies on authoritarianism and the imposition of one legitimate interpretation<sup>21</sup>, but rather, increasingly, on the efficiency of people who are supposed to become sophisticated producers of goods and of meanings.

The choice to generate content, starting with the content itself as raw material, is symptomatic of a contemporary social dynamic where sophisticated technology multiplies sources of information as well as access to that information.

Advertisements point to the abyss underlying the endless proliferation of possible meanings. They regularly invite consumers to produce new, unlimited different commentaries on a message. For instance, Xpedior uses a clothespin to say, “Some see a clothespin, a couple hugging and kissing<sup>22</sup>, some see a painful antidote for snoring,

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<sup>21</sup> This productivity linked to places of enunciation can be multiplied. This is what happens in *Self* by Yann Martel. In a paragraph, one can read the following sentence: “Pourquoi Georgie est-il mort?”. (Why is Georgie dead?). One underlines that for a doctor it is a valid question linked to a valid answer : “leucémie infantile” (infantile leukemia). However, for the mother the medical answer is not valid because the mother does not really ask a question but a pseudo question which is, in fact, a disguised assertion: When asking “Why is Georgie dead? What she really says is « I cannot accept this loss ». Signification varies considerably following the place of enunciation and the power relationship linked to language and knowledge.

<sup>22</sup> This allusion is linked to a famous drawing by Marc Demoulin who represents two bodies’ halves. One of a man and one of a woman kissing each other and whose body is presented is the shape of a clothespin.

sheets blowing from a clothesline on a breezy spring day, an alligator standing on his hind legs” (*Forbes*, May 29, 2000, p. 117). This advertisement clearly aims to induce a semantic production not limited to known orthodoxies of a single commonly agreed upon truth. This type of text is widespread, of late, in the Americas: "Qué significado tiene para Ud. una puerta? La ve como un obstáculo? Pesada e inmóvil? Gruesa? O quizás a Ud. se le abren todas las puertas. Cieden y de repente ya ni siquiera son puertas sino entradas. Descubra nuevos lugares. De continente a continente. De una orilla a otra. Donde Ud. haga negocios. Qué significado tiene una puerta cuando Ud. tiene la llave?" (What is the signification of a door for you? Do you see it as an obstacle? Heavy and motionless? Thick? Or perhaps all the doors open in front of you? They give way and thus they are not doors but entrances. Discover new places. From continent to continent. From a shore to another one. Where you do business. What does a door mean for you when you hold the key?) (*En Vuelo*, (Aerolíneas Argentinas), Noviembre 2000, p. 15). And after, Diners Club confirms that their card is the key, thus reducing multiple meanings to a simple solution.

This shows the difference between the valorization of the production of multiple meanings in media as opposed to the production of meanings in arts and literature. Advertising hereby becomes a clear illustration of an observation made by A. Fuat Firat and A. Venkatesh: “the image does not represent the product, the product represents the image, because selling the product becomes secondary to selling the experience”<sup>23</sup>. And the experience here is to produce multiple different scenarios. The production of multiple legitimate meanings is therefore the favorite contemporary means of blending culture into the commercial sphere, and vice versa<sup>24</sup>. The commercial experience, as such, becomes a cultural experience, one of being on the cutting edge, as the creator of a new lifestyle through the strategic deployment of competing messages. However, the goal is still to remember the main goal: be ready and learn how to efficiently compete. The situation is quite different in a literary text. For instance, Yann Martel’s novel *Self* demonstrates that the world is a reserve of scenarios that aim to transform an identity into multiple self-images and to exchange information and positions in the social dynamic in order to favour solidarity and interpersonal relations. The exploration of scenarios is a constant in *Self*, where the novel’s character is masculine and feminine and then masculine once more, all the while proclaiming to be a lesbian. The determining identity factor ceases to be biological or a label from an intangible authority, and transforms, instead, into the exploration of socio-discursive positions and their movements. Those movements, similarly to the movie entitled *Transamerica* featuring a transsexual and its relationship to his/her parents and his/her son, shows that location is relational and depends on the capacity to control power relationships.

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<sup>23</sup> A. Fuat Firat and A. Venkatesh, "Postmodernity: the Age of Marketing", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, n°10, 1993, p. 244.

<sup>24</sup> Beatriz Sarlo, *Escenas de la vida posmoderna*, Buenos Aires, Ariel, 1994.

Evidently, in cases where there is movement from a system of a single meaning to a multiple-meaning system, as in cases of cross-culture encounter, State institutions eventually decide to adjust to transformations and contribute to educating the population on ways to take stock of new semantic data, and subsequently to change its daily habits<sup>25</sup>. In Canada, for instance the Government decided to contribute to the development of multicultural society where multicultural policies are influenced by cultural shifts powered by economic liberalism, postmodernity and globalization. This is why the law of multiculturalism which was implemented in 1971 has changed significantly. In 1971 the emphasis was put on the legitimacy of linking the roots of the culture of the immigrants in their territory of origins and in preserving a kind of static folkloric culture independently of its contextualization within Canada. This view has been challenged vigorously by numerous thinkers among them Neil Bissoondath who criticized the fact that the whole thinking was static, dualistic and led to a ghettoisation of ethnic cultures and of minorities. Therefore, in 1991 a new concept was put into place, which allowed for programs fostering the elimination of social barriers and calling for economic integration through the implementation of laws against racism and exclusion. This was again modified in 1995 after the publication of numerous criticisms by Bissoondath<sup>26</sup>. This led to three main goals: 1/ to create a just and equitable society, 2/ civic participation, 3/ recognition of differences in identity, and this in order to foster integration, contextualization, interaction and transformation while recognizing ethnic diversity. This new policy complements the Charter of Rights and demonstrates that Canadians instead of seeing themselves as linked only to a territory and to the past see themselves as turned towards the future, a future allowing for intercultural interactions based on the fact that pragmatic goals are shared through the recognition of the legitimacy of basic texts and policies. A textual legitimacy fostering a constant dialogue among citizens and their representatives and open to redefinitions is put in action.

## 5. Interpretance

In literary texts, as opposed to advertisements, as we saw it with Diners Club, one does not end up valorizing one solution. In literary texts, where postcolonialism is contextualized within predominant global postmodernism, where issues surrounding bilingualism and dual discursivity (public language/specialized languages), from which arises the reflexive function, then hermeneutic finalist aims, and the appeal to positivist empiricism and binary classifying instrumental rationality, veer off course, towards a

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<sup>25</sup> This is well underlined by Don Tapscott: "Teachers can become navigators providing meta-learning-crucial guidance and support regarding how to go about learning" (*Growing Up Digital*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1998, p. 154). This meta-learning process is not defined very clearly. Moreover Tapscott does not mention the fact that teachers should teach how to learn more than to communicate informations.

<sup>26</sup> Bissoondath, Neil (1993) "A Question of Belonging: Multiculturalism and Citizenship" in W. Kaplan, *Belonging: The Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship*. Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens's University Press.

dynamic of interpretance as defined by Peirce in 1867<sup>27</sup>. This is what a contemporary writer from Montréal, Yann Martel fictionalizes in *Self*, when he evokes the classifying categories of Peter Mark Roget's Thesaurus (1779-1869). Roget grouped words into 1042 categories, according to meaning, from (1) Existence to (1042) religious buildings (p. 239). In this remarkable way, Roget expressed an aspect of modernity's scientific and secular focus on totality. As it happens, Roget's undertaking arises from the same quarter century as Peirce's writing does but Roget's lives in England and Peirce in the United States. It interests Martel's protagonist because he/she can measure the discrepancy between Roget's method and his own hermeneutic-physico-cartographies, which are inscribed in a flux nearer to a peircean dynamic of interpretance<sup>28</sup>. Roget's venture into classification also impresses Martel's character because Roget worked in many languages, spawning a "super-thesaurus," which the character acknowledges nonetheless remains a strongly ethnocentric artifact. The protagonist seems to understand that the intent of the undertaking was to encounter the other, with the hope of achieving universal peace, and yet knows that the process remained hamstrung by an epistemological flaw, the dualistic logic of classification, which excludes the third element, typical of peircean semiotics and of the dynamic of interpretance rejecting the Aristotelian logic and its excluded third.

The dynamic of interpretance, arising from the popularization of the metalinguistic function, combines itself with a desire to present opposites as complements open to dynamism. Again, it is evident in the Samsonite advertisement promoting a new suitcase that the economist discourse reduces non dualism to monism, that is to Samsonite, whereas literary discourse is able to open the text to options and to complex situations: "Yin and Yang cutting-edge Chinese concept of total opposites coming together to create perfect balance." (*American Way*, May 15, 2000, p. 20). In this way, Samsonite can simultaneously peddle the suitcase's protective hard case along with its flexible soft side! Yin and Yang<sup>29</sup> are reproduced, then, not in the mimetic mode of a mirror, nor in Bhabha's use of mimesis, where it fiercely competes in a world of "the not

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<sup>27</sup> Peirce, C. S. (1960) "On a New list of Categories", dans *Collected Papers*, Cambridge, Harvard U.P., (1<sup>er</sup> ed. 1867). Voir aussi: Savan, David (1988) *An Introduction to C.S. Peirce's Full System of Semeiotic*, Toronto, Toronto Semiotic Circle.

<sup>28</sup> David Ray Griffin; John B. Cobb Jr.; Marcus P. Ford; A.Y. Pete Gunter; Peter Ochs, *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1993.

<sup>29</sup> Here is a product linked to the post world. First the Yin and Yang philosophy has been displaced when one compares it to its use during the seventies by the young generation fighting authoritarianism. However, even in the seventies their vision of Yin and Yang was already contextualized through the dualism at work in the structure of indo-european languages and there essentialism based on grammar and the use of the verb to be. Its role in the use of the attribution process has been shown by Alan Watts dans *The Way of Zen* or Hubert Benoit in *The Supreme Doctrine*.

quite,” but rather through a dialectic that generates notions of hybrid-like or chameleon-like complementarity. Rather than a world of antagonistic difference, the Samsonite advertisement recontextualizes Yin and Yang for its own benefits and moves in a world where territorial and discursive claims can be blended and exchanged.

### Conclusion

This being the case, is it still possible in year 2001 to concur with this statement from the authors of the 1975 Trilateral Commission on Democracy? “What is in short supply in democratic societies today is thus not consensus on the rules of the game but a sense of purpose as to what one should achieve by playing the game. In the past, people have found their purposes in religion, in nationalism and in ideology. But neither church, nor state, nor class now commands people’s loyalties”<sup>30</sup>. One thinks not. In fact, the postmodern dynamic, particularly in the Americas, is both a cultural and commercial undertaking, disseminating a symbolic capital. This dynamic sends the a priori of specialized languages into public discourse, and leads the public to become producers of differentiated meanings departing from shared texts. The goal is to develop the individual semiotic faculty of populations<sup>31</sup>, so that they might establish original links with different elements and units, and also to invent contexts in tune with cultural difference, so that each and every citizen will turn his/her hermeneutic capacity toward progress. In fact, for a population that increasingly travels, temporarily confronting the shuttling of its knowledge between countries, as in the case of immigration, it becomes necessary to establish flexible grounds for constant exchange and renegotiation between ideas.

This was already the hope of Randolph Bourne in 1916, who first used the word postmodernism, and who anchored his optimism for the future in the horrible lessons of World War 1: “America is already the world federation in miniature, the continent where for the first time in history, has been achieved that miracle of hope, the peaceful living side by side, with character substantially preserved, of the most heterogeneous people under the sun”<sup>32</sup>. The Americas, as opposed to America itself, are organizing into epistemological meeting-places, which favor exchange while rejecting rigidly fixed identities subject to processes of exclusion discussed by Karl Popper<sup>33</sup>. These reconciliations do not slip into homogeneity due to an insistence on the individual’s hermeneutic competence, and also because cultural a prioris are recontextualized and displaced so that they might contribute to new norms, better ones in which all collaborate. These norms transform societies founded on the primacy of territoriality,

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<sup>30</sup> M. Crozier, S.P. Huntington, J. Watanaki, *Report on the Governability of Democracy to the Trilateral Commission*, New York, New York University Press, 1975.

<sup>31</sup> See Patrick Imbert, *Trajectoires culturelles transmaéricaines*, Ottawa, Presses de l’Université d’Ottawa, 2004.

<sup>32</sup> R. Bourne, "Trans-National America", *The Atlantic Monthly*, CXVIII, 1916, p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> Karl Raimund Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, New York, Harper, 1963.

born of the secularized biblical myth of man sprung from the earth, into societies privileging the text and the rights of the individual. Individuals find their place in this scheme because the text recognizes and legitimates their multiple possible interpretations, and unlike the colonial situation Bhabha analyzes, validates within itself the capacity of being multilingual and multicultural.

All of which means that the reflexive function, originating from (as well as democratizing) specialized languages is displacing the role of intellectuals<sup>34</sup>. A world is opening in which there are only textual fragments which no longer work as great legitimization stories bounded within a certain territorial limit. In this dispersal of fragments, intellectual function is democratized away from the fashioning of utopian Nation-States comprised of great thinkers illuminating the masses, and also away the hyped legitimacy of networking, incarnated through the internet and the ideology underlying world wide communication. Individuals regain power formerly monopolized by scholars, and by civil servants of the Nation-State, in the loosening of ties between territory and hermeneutics; individuals appropriate this power to deploy their own multiple, competing significations in order to foster an ongoing dialog linked to the future, and to allow a definition of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in the context of a democratic society when dealing with other cultures.

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<sup>34</sup> Denise Bombardier provides us with a remarkable North American critical point of view of the French intellectuals and of their auto-justification based on discourses trying to hide their own contradictions. See for instance: "Cachez ce franc que je ne saurais voir" et le parisianisme ou la tribu branchée dans *Lettre ouverte aux français qui se croient le nombril du monde*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2000.