

Juan Carlos Rodríguez and the Renewal of Althusserian Marxism¹

Juan Carlos Rodríguez y la renovación de marxismo althusseriano²

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Juan Carlos Rodríguez
Tras la muerte del aura (En contra y a favor de la Ilustración)
Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada. 2011

Para una lectura de Heidegger (Algunas claves de la escritura actual)
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Formas de leer a Borges (o las trampas de la lectura)
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² A review article of the following texts: *Tras la muerte del aura (En contra y a favor de la Ilustración)*; *Para una lectura de Heidegger (Algunas claves de la escritura actual)* y *Formas de leer a Borges (o las trampas de la lectura)*.

In the immediate aftermath of 1968, a number of works on Marxist literary theory appeared that were destined to command the attention not only of writers who were recognizably ‘Marxist’ or ‘Marxian’ but of others who boasted little in the way of allegiance to the Marxist tradition, however broadly defined. Two such works were Terry Eagleton’s *Criticism and Ideology* (1976) and Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* (1981). While deeply and confessedly indebted to Louis Althusser for kick-starting their careers, inspirationally speaking, both Eagleton and Jameson were subsequently to reveal an ambiguous, even troubled relation to the French Marxist: Eagleton, through a series of texts that, their unquestionable distinction notwithstanding, run hot and cold in their commitment to ‘Althusserianism’; Jameson, through a brand of Hegelianizing Marxism that finally proved unable to take on board the full complexity of the Althusserian legacy. Preceding both these scholars chronologically, and bearing comparison with them in terms of intellectual range, ambition, and productivity, was Juan Carlos Rodríguez, whose *Teoría e historia de la producción ideológica* appeared in 1974. Except that there the similarities end, for whereas Eagleton and Jameson were destined to achieve star status within their profession, a rather different career trajectory awaited Rodríguez. While accruing considerable local notoriety within his own academy and a not insignificant following, the Spaniard was yet unable to ‘break into’ the international circuit of ‘visiting professors’, guest speakers, conferences, etc³. More significantly, and again in contrast to his Anglo-Saxon counterparts, this former student of Althusser was to remain over the decades a loyal, although by no means uncritical, follower of his master (cf. Rodríguez 2003). Such destinies call for closer scrutiny.

At the most general level, the disciplinary inertia of Anglophone Hispanism, upon which access to the international academy necessarily depended, compounded by the global imbalances between metropolitan and non-metropolitan intellectuals, effectively nullified the impact outside Spain of Rodríguez’s work, which will be translated into English at a relatively late date (see Rodríguez 2002; 2008)⁴. More specifically, the importance that the Spaniard attached to the ‘radical historicity’ of literature and culture must have been major obstacle to its reception within a bourgeois academy persuaded of the appeal of such universal themes as ‘life’ and ‘death’. ‘La literatura no ha existido siempre’ was the statement with which *Teoría e historia* famously, or perhaps not so famously, began. ‘Tomamos el término “historia” muy en serio,’ its author further warned, ‘y en consecuencia no tratamos de poner parches’ (6). There can be no question, we are immediately informed, of continuing to think in terms of an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside’ of literature. ‘Entender la obra literaria desde su *radical historicidad* quiere decir, por el contrario,

³ With, of course, minor exceptions, specifically in the case of Italy, where his work has been enthusiastically received, cf. Francesco Muzzioli, ‘Rodríguez e la poesia del no’, in *L’alternativa letteraria* (Rome: Editorie Meltemi, 2001), 99-123.

⁴ The wave of Althusserian scholarship had become a mere ripple by the time it belatedly reached the shores of British Hispanism (cf. Smith 1988: 115-17), a marginalized discipline struggling to emerge from the clutches of a conservative brand of theological exegesis.

para nosotros, que tal *historicidad* constituye la base misma de la lógica productiva del texto: aquello sin lo cual el texto no puede existir (no puede funcionar ni “en sí” ni “fuera de sí”)⁶. And finally came the killer punch, at least as far as the traditionalist critic was concerned: just as literature had not always existed, neither necessarily had the *subject*. There existed no ‘subject for all seasons,’ only one that served, on a localized level, the requirements of a bourgeois society. To such claims the bourgeois academy replied not with critique, which would have meant engaging the substance of Rodríguez’s argument, but with silence, the most effective form of liberal censorship.

But how, in that case, it will reasonably be asked, were Eagleton and Jameson able to outwit the censor? Because they were prepared to accept the existence of transhistorical categories? Obviously not. Eagleton, to begin with, was by no means silent upon the reach of history, and specifically takes Althusser to task for claiming that ideology performs a ubiquitous social function: ‘It is hard to see how we could ever know that ideology is unchanging in its basic devices; but one telling piece of evidence against this claim is the fact that Althusser offers as a *general* theory of ideology what is arguably specific to the bourgeois epoch. The idea that our freedom and autonomy lie in a submission to the Law has its sources in Enlightenment Europe. In what sense an Athenian slave regarded himself as free, autonomous and uniquely individuated is a question Althusser leaves unanswered’ (Eagleton 1991: 149-50). The point is well made, and looks, on the face of it, to be more than adequately historicizing. The only problem is that Eagleton rarely extends his gaze beyond bourgeois culture and, more restrictedly, beyond the modern novel, as a result of which the reference to the slave mode remained little more than a gesture.

On the face of it, Jameson’s command to ‘Always historicize’ (Jameson 1981: 9) – words uncannily reminiscent of those with which Rodríguez opens *Teoría e historia* – might seem to promise more. Consider, to begin with, his thorough-going critique of the Frankfurt School’s attachment to the autonomous subject, the latter characteristic of the bourgeoisie’s progressive phase, which ‘precludes any imaginative appeal back beyond bourgeois civil society to some pre-individualistic and precapitalist social form’ (Jameson 1988 [1978]: 109-10). Equally encouraging is Jameson’s anticipation of the ideological barriers that must inevitably stand in the way of the historicizing impulse: ‘That the structure of the psyche is historical, and has a history, is [...] as difficult for us to grasp as that the senses are not themselves natural organs but rather the results of a long process of differentiation even within human history’ (Jameson 1982: 62). And yet, strange to say, the chapter in *The Political Unconscious* on ‘Magical Narratives’ is more concerned with historicizing Northrop Frye’s brand of myth criticism than engaging the complexities of feudal texts themselves, and simply marks one stage in Jameson’s gravitation towards a version of Hegelian Marxism that understood history as the unfolding of a Moving Spirit or Subject. There was, it seems, no escaping the reach of the subject form, in one guise or another.

And so Eagleton and Jameson proceeded on their merry way, the former towards reflections on the God Debate and the meaning and existence of Good and Evil, the latter towards a post-marxism gloomily persuaded of its own inevitable failure and subjection to consumerism, in both cases to the infinite relief of a bourgeois academy itself busy pronouncing upon the death not only of Structural Marxism but, yet again, of Marxism itself. We will let them go, safe in the knowledge that sooner or later there will need to be a settling of accounts between them and a Spanish Marxist who, by way of contrast, remained steadfast in his commitment to the radical historicity of literature and, more broadly, to the Marxist notions of exploitation and the class struggle. More germane to the present review is the extent to which, through his ongoing attachment to Structural Marxism, Rodríguez's work remains (in every sense) *unthinkable* within the parameters of Anglo-American critical circles. (The best proof of the validity of his 'ideological unconscious' will be its rejection by a bourgeois academy that, unconsciously, does not wish to know.) To elucidate further, let us turn to the first work under review, *Tras la muerte del aura* (2011).

Towards a theory of social function

One of the advantages of beginning our review with *Tras la muerte* is that this work provides, among other things, a retrospective overview of the theoretical concepts introduced by Rodríguez into the study of literature, principal among which is that of the mode of production: 'Todo modo de producción', the Althusserian writes, 'es, de hecho, un proceso, una serie de formaciones sociales que se desarrollan a través de tres niveles o tres tópicos conjuntas: el nivel político, el económico y el ideológico' (Rodríguez 2011a: 28). While each instance exerts its own particular influence, which allows it to be abstracted, for analytic purposes, it is vital to envisage the determinate processes of relatively autonomous levels as operating simultaneously, if unequally, at the level of the structured whole: 'Ninguno de los tres niveles existe en abstracto sino únicamente como funcionamiento social, un funcionamiento no visible y absolutamente entremezclado' (28). We will be constantly misled in our reading of Rodríguez's work if we fail to hold in focus this key notion of the complex unity, understood as nothing less than the on-going ('always already there') co-presence of its elements, the latter caught in a constant interplay of reciprocal influences.

Equally important is notion of a structure in dominance, which accords primary, secondary and tertiary dominance respectively to the economic, political and ideological, through which to off-set the idea of a chaotic war of every element against every other. The primacy of the economy – and Rodríguez is particularly insistent upon this point – does not explain the political and ideological instances in such a way that these can simply be deduced or derived from the structure of the mode of production. Rejected, then, is the classically Marxist notion that the 'superstructure' can be reduced to the 'economic

base'. Rodríguez explains: '... si aceptáramos así las cosas el propio materialismo histórico se volvería imposible y con él, por supuesto, la noción de ideología (o de inconsciente pulsional / ideológico en sentido amplio)' (29). Indeed, the Althusserian further jettisons the very concepts of 'base' and 'superstructure', which he sees as inverting and therefore reprising the bourgeois spirit / matter dichotomy.

By this stage in the argument, the reader of liberal persuasions will already have begun to target what s/he perceives to be a bias in favour of structure, to the neglect of the individual, adducing as evidence the Althusserian's self-confessed 'anti-humanism'. The problem, we believe, lies elsewhere. The difference between Rodríguez and his post-modern and neo-liberal rivals is that, for the latter, human subjectivity is accepted as the basis of social theory while, for the Althusserian, the emphasis falls upon the social structures and relations that precede, and therefore determine, the interpellation of individual subjectivities: '... las formas de la individualidad son distintas en [cada modo de producción], *sólo que no hay una individualidad previa a su forma ideológica constituyente*. Se trata más bien de la construcción de *subjetividades históricas* desde el nacimiento, puesto que hoy *nacemos capitalistas* (como en otro tiempo *se nacía feudal* o *se nacía escavista*, etc.)' (30). The Althusserian is not seeking thereby to rob human practice of its complexity or of its capacity to transform society. Nor is he denying the fact that social mechanisms are necessarily mediated through the individual. On the contrary, Rodríguez willingly concedes that it is the individual who creates for him/herself an ideological form of life, otherwise a 'ser-como-soy', in the absence of which the system cannot function. That said, he remains alert throughout to the danger of conflating the individual subjectivity upwards, so as to encompass the social structures that otherwise determine it ('there is no such things as society', etc.), and loads his argument accordingly: there is no 'I' prior to history, just as there is no 'I' prior to its birth, outside history⁵.

Alongside the Althusserian notion of holistic causality, Rodríguez will develop his own distinctive notion of an *ideological matrix*, according to which each mode is characterized by its own distinctive relation between exploiter and exploited, the slave mode by the master/slave relation; feudalism, by the lord/serf relation, and the capitalist mode, by the Subject/subject relation. In the slave mode and under feudalism, the distinction between the exploiter and exploited is clear, as is the nature of the exploitative process through which the former extracts the social surplus from the latter. Under capitalism, by way of contrast, the two elements of the matrix appear equal – a fair day's work for a fair day's pay – masking thereby the exploitative nature of the extraction of surplus value. The effect of these matrices is to further annul the traditional base/superstructure relation

⁵ Belatedly, it is true, Rodríguez has come to regret the dearth within Marxism of a subjective reference at the level of ideology: 'Nuestro lenguaje debe de ser mucho más subjetivo y mucho menos directamente político u objetivo tal como ha sido antes, o ha sido hasta ahora (quizás por necesidades, quizás porque teníamos que defendernos de muchas cosas). Sobre todo respecto a los jóvenes, porque hay una cuestión básica: los jóvenes sí que se encuentran sin esperanza de trabajo para mañana y sin posibilidades de horizonte de vida más que el que ya hay' (Rodríguez 2012a: 160).

in favour of a completely new problematic, and to further displace the focus of attention from the subject, as the alleged source of ideology, to the systemic: ‘... la ideología no podría ser entendida ya así como un conjunto de ideas políticas o filosóficas, sino que se constituye en un nivel (tan real como cualquier otro) para que funcione un Modo de Producción’ (Rodríguez 2011a: 31). Social structures, it transpires, must be conceptualized along two dimensions, one that stresses the influence of the structured whole on ideology and one that stresses the impact of latter upon the former: ‘Son las relaciones sociales quienes construyen la ideología, a la vez que la ideología contribuye a constituir las relaciones sociales’ (31).

Through this complex process of argumentation, Rodríguez arrives at his key notion, that of ideology as a kind of *humus*. Secreted ‘originally’ at the level of the relations of production, ideology is legitimized ‘subsequently’ through the Ideological State Apparatus, such as the Church or the School, in such a way as to pervade the thoughts and actions of the individual. Rodríguez explains: ‘Por eso la ideología es inconsciente y por eso he hablado siempre de inconsciente ideológico (evidentemente a partir de ese inconsciente – pero sólo a partir de ahí – se podrán construir luego todas las figuras de la conciencia: desde la moral a la estética o la política’ (31). And thus is born the concept of the ideological unconscious, to stand alongside and indeed, as will be seen below, to encompass its libidinal counterpart.

Suffice it to register, by way of concluding this overview of Rodríguez’s conceptual apparatus, the contradictions the Althusserian sees as built into the internal functioning of each mode of production, together with those operative between separate modes, when these are articulated within the same social formation. We would further add that contradiction in general will prove essential to Rodríguez’s understanding of the complexities of cultural process.

Cashing out the concepts

Rodríguez, it goes without saying, is not interested in developing a number of finite matrices into which empirical descriptions may be forced, nor in arranging modes of production into an evolutionary series, in accordance with some ultimate goal. To be sure, ‘mode of production’ analysis is as vulnerable to reification as any other conceptual apparatus, notoriously so in the case of vulgar Marxism, and perforce Rodríguez himself looks at Spanish society during the transition (from feudalism to capitalism) from a certain level of abstraction. That said, it is his capacity to hold his general categories and descriptive accounts of determinate modes in productive tension that accounts for the explanatory force of the Althusserian’s approach, as is immediately apparent when we turn to the opening section of *Tras la muerte*, which addresses the bourgeois notion of Human Nature.

Rodríguez uses the occasion to orchestrate a confrontation between his version of the ideological unconscious and its libidinal equivalent, as theorized by Lacan. At first blush, the Lacanian suspicion of all forms of naturalism and essentialism may appear to chime happily with Rodríguez's critique of Human Nature. Moreover, there is little to object to, from the Althusserian standpoint, in the Lacanian emphasis upon the heterogeneity of desire and language and, more specifically, upon the power of desire to dislocate and disrupt the symbolic order, a fact which possibly explains Rodríguez's willingness to make concessions. Specifically, he is prepared to accept that, as Lacan claims, we are by nature sexual, speaking, mortal beings: 'Y esa sería la propia potencialidad psíquica ("estructurado como lenguaje") de la especie humana' (40), but with important qualifications, notably with respect to the Lacanian concern with the relation between the subject and language *as such*, which, Rodríguez clearly suspects, returns psychoanalysis to an historical and political vacuum ultimately no less debilitating than the most crudely naturalistic interpretation of Freud. Hence his resistance to any attempt to ontologise human nature on the basis of the libidinal drives: '... esas pulsiones están siempre vacías, hay que rellenarlas como se rellena un sueño o como se rellena un pavo: hay que configurarlas, ponerlas en acto "viviéndolas". Y ese relleno, esa configuración del yo, esa puesta en acto, sólo lo establece nuestro lenguaje familiar, nuestras relaciones sociales, nuestro inconsciente ideológico' (40). If biology goes all the way up, it is no less certain that history goes all the way down: 'Y ahora se comprenderá por qué digo que mis planteamientos suponen un antihumanismo teórico, puesto que el yo no existe sino que sólo existe el yo soy histórico. Por supuesto teniendo en cuenta que la pulsionalidad del yo es siempre decisiva a su vez en la constitución y singularización del yo soy histórico' (41).

Having completed this theoretical groundwork, Rodríguez is perfectly positioned to contest the 'linguistic turn' in evidence in Anthropology, through a re-reading of Lévi-Strauss and the objectification of the subject in Montaigne. The details of his argument need not concern us here. Suffice it to note the analytic precision afforded by the deployment of the concepts outlined above, which allows the Althusserian to explore the determining influences germane to both Lévi-Strauss and Montaigne. This same precision is similarly in evidence in the following essay on Dracula and vampirism, where it enables Rodríguez, among other things, to capture every nuance of the transition from feudal to bourgeois society, not least of all with respect to the notion of 'blood': '... obvio que la ideología de la sangre es totalmente feudal: el honor se lava con sangre, la sangre (*azul*) de los nobles, incluso las sangrías médicas, etc. Y obvio también el carácter religioso de la relación vino/sangre, etc. Pero tampoco puede caber duda de que la obsesión *sanguínea* del Drácula de Stoker obedece igualmente a la obsesión biologicista típica del Positivismo de la época (*cf.* las múltiples observaciones médicas al respecto en la obra), entendida pues, la sangre como la expresividad material básica de ese *élan* vital del que enseguida hablará Bergson, y que preanunciaba Claude Bernard en su Fisiología, etc.' (p. 74 footnote 7).

The next chapter finds Rodríguez further focusing on the contradictions that arise between the ideological matrices of co-existent modes, as these are mediated through Tolstoy: ‘¿Cómo se iba a considerar Tolstoi un sujeto libre sin más si su individualidad había estado configurada siempre por su condición de señor feudal, por estar atado a su linaje y al Señor de los cielos?’ (124). As a feudal lord, also bearer of all the ideological prejudices that define such a status, the author of *Ana Karenina* will not hesitate to punish the latter’s eponymous heroine, a divorced woman with a child who, in her capacity as free subject, has dared to defy the conventions of society. That said, the progressive transformation of ancestral lines into new monogamic families finds the same author better disposed towards Natasha and Pierre (in *War and Peace*), new subjectivities who teeter on the brink of the world of liberty. How, it might be asked, does Tolstoy manage to resolve the problems he poses? The simple answer is that he doesn’t, which, Rodríguez concludes, should hardly come as a surprise, it being the task of literature not to resolve the problems that real history poses but how to present them.

To explore these matters in greater detail, let us turn to what is, in many respects, the core of *Tras la muerte*, namely its treatment of the new drama.

Staging Human Nature

We saw above how Rodríguez arrived at the notion of the ideological unconscious. The discussion of the new drama in *Tras la muerte* is of special interest in that it throws into relief diverse aspects of this seminal concept, an appreciation of which further enables us to anticipate the obstacles to its reception in the bourgeois academy. These obstacles should not be minimized: perforce the traditional critic approaches Rodríguez’s work from the standpoint of empiricism, that is, from a standpoint internal to the ideology that the Althusserian is critiquing. It is no small matter to be called upon to consider the historical, ideologically motivated, origins of categories long held to refer to universal aspects of human nature, and this in effect is what the traditional critic is being asked to do.

For Rodríguez, Leandro Fernández de Moratín is the Spanish representative par excellence of the new bourgeois drama and *El sí de las niñas* his key work. The classical theatre, we recall from *Teoría e historia*, is born in the womb of the Absolutist state – what is traditionally referred to as the medieval theatre was in fact a form of liturgy – as the representation of distinctively public, that is to say, political thematics. The new drama, by way of contrast, arrives in the wake of the new constitutionalism, culminating in Cádiz, 1812, and will take the form of the public representation of a quintessentially *private* space: ‘El modelo será ahora el individuo y su privatización posesiva o familiar trasvasada al espacio público’ (172). *Private*, that is to say, self-possession underscores the new social contract, the workings of which presuppose the existence of subjects characterized by their freedom, freedom to choose, among other things, which partner to marry. Except

that, on the evidence of *El sí de las niñas*, private freedom stands in fraught, not to say contradictory, relation to the publicly legitimated power of merchant capital. To elaborate: while the nubile young woman possesses certain inalienable rights, which the patriarchal authorities insist she is bound to exercise, in reality she cannot even be said to possess her own personage, which, qua commodity, circulates on the marriage market.

How, given such seemingly intractable contradictions, is it possible for the system to work at all? Rodríguez is very explicit on this point: ‘Porque si nos fijamos en el fondo de los fondos de las obras moratinianas o res-publicanas del XVIII lo importante no es que la niña se case con el viejo o con el joven, sino que lo importante es exactamente eso: que la niña tenga que casarse para que el contrato social/familiar siga funcionando en tanto que representación pública de lo privado’ (173). In other words, while the young woman *freely* exercises her choice with respect to her partner, at the level of conscious intention, her decision to marry is always already determined, unconsciously, by the matrix effect of the whole social formation. The broader implications of the argument are clear: while individuals experience themselves as free, and must, within the irreducible limits their freedom, choose to act, the reality (in scientific terms) is that their acts are the outcome of, to coin a phrase of Marx, ‘many determinations’.

By way of contrast, the dominant bourgeois ideology is convinced as to the existence of the free subject – it does not wish to know otherwise – and wishes, moreover, to see its values confirmed upon the stage: ‘Pues bien: a partir de aquí (y con el ejemplo práctico de *La comedia nueva* y del resto de sus obras) Moratín nos ofrece las líneas básicas que deben estructurar una comedia’ (198). And those rules presuppose, as Rodríguez proceeds to explain, the self-appointed function of the poet as an ‘observer of Nature,’ understood as distinctively *Human* Nature, raised to the scenic status of a naturalistic *model*. Crucial to the functioning of this model is the proximity/distance between the stage and the audience. Proximity, insofar as the audience needs to be able to identify with the scenic setting, otherwise the bourgeois drawing room, just as it needs to be able to empathise (to laugh and cry) with the fate of its occupants, otherwise the members of the bourgeois nuclear family; distance, insofar as the values on display must be raised to modelic status: ‘Lo que el espectador debe ver allí, en el escenario, es su propio inconsciente, sus propias creencias, que al distanciarse aparecen como legitimadas, como auténticas y como verdades semejantes (vero-símiles) a las propias. Sólo que corregidas, reformadas y más sólidas’ (199). The qualification is important: the function of the theatre is not simply to entertain but also to teach and to reform, as a necessary ideological accompaniment to the reforms being enacted contemporaneously at the economic and political levels⁶.

⁶ Rodríguez notes, in passing, that the same magic is in evidence in the cinema; also that the distance/proximity opposition operates rather differently in the theatre of Brecht.

Philosophy and Human Nature

While the appearance of Derridean deconstruction did much to modify the division of labour operating within the English-speaking academy, it remains the case that the literary critic in this same academy still fails to see knowledge of philosophy as a necessary, integral part of his or her professional baggage. Nothing could be further from the situation we encounter in Rodríguez, as is immediately apparent when we turn to the next section of *Tras la muerte*, entitled 'La invención del criticismo'. A certain irony attaches to this contrast: the philosophical tradition to have most attracted the attention of the Althusserian is that of Anglo-Saxon empiricism, taken in conjunction with the Kantian reaction to it. Let us consider the details.

Althusser himself, it will be recalled, called empiricism to account for assuming the process of knowledge to begin with a 'purely objective given', otherwise what is immediately accessible to direct observation, and for thereby collapsing the process of knowledge into an ontology of experience (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 35 ff). At the same time he was equally critical of the concept of the linear or transitive causality prevalent within empiricist circles, a concept that, alongside expressive causality, he contrasted unfavourably with his own notion of structural causality (186-87). Indications are, however, that, such disquisitions apart, the French Master was rather more familiar with Montesquieu and the continental tradition than he was with John Locke and British empiricism. The same cannot be said of Rodríguez, who, in the present section of *Tras la muerte*, as throughout his career, shows himself to be a close reader of John Locke and particularly of David Hume, whose ideas he summarizes to great effect.

In contrast to Locke, who continued to defend the idea of real and unknowable unified essences, Hume argued that when the mind thinks of an object, it simply associates various perceptions together, the further implication being that, in Rodríguez's own words, 'la sustancialidad del yo no existe porque es sólo un agregado de experiencias psíquicas' (Rodríguez 2011a: 217). The result is a species of psychological subjectivism with far reaching consequences: not only is ontology dissolved but, to the extent that physical laws are identified with constant conjunction, the very notion of scientific laws is called into question. Again, as Rodríguez succinctly remarks: 'la ósmosis entre naturaleza y naturaleza humana se hace muy frágil puesto que la idea de causalidad resulta absolutamente dudosa' (217).

But that, of course, was the least of it. However troubling the Humean rejection of underlying substances for the physical sciences, it proved quite devastating for the notion of sociality, as the basis of civil society. Clearly, if no laws existed and everyone did as they pleased, the prospect of social chaos reared its ugly head. Hume's response was to recognize the need for norms, not least of all with respect to aesthetic taste, but of a kind to be established *a posteriori*, on the basis of force, consensus, habit and custom. 'Desde

este punto de vista volvemos a comprobar que la normatividad de Hume pretende ser tan mínima como las reglas del mercado' (224).

Enter at this point the figure of Kant, who, over and above the rather modest powers attributed to the mind by Hume, argued for the existence of complex *a priori* categories, including the concept of causation, that the mind brings to bear on its experience of the world. His reasoning was as follows: while (as Hume and other empiricists argued) objects and their activities are the product of sense impressions, the latter are in turn actively structured and ordered by consciousness. Such was the basis for a transcendental ontology of the subject that effectively revived the notion of *underlying* unities of objects, albeit at the cost of locating them firmly within a constituting subject. Opposed to this subject was an object relegated to the status of an unknowable *noumenal* entity.

And in this way the terrain is prepared for a confrontation with Jorge Louis Borges and, in particular, with 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius'.

The attractions of the latter, from an analytic standpoint, are obvious: 'Borges traduce literalmente de Hume para incorporarlo a su relato *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*' (217). Principally, in Tlön there is no conception that space endures through time. In the words of Borges himself: 'La percepción de una humareda en el horizonte y después del campo incendiado y después del cigarro a medio apagar que produjo la quemazón es considerada un ejemplo de asociación de ideas' (Borges 1971: 23). As Rodríguez will remind us, the examples that Borges chooses, of the smoke, the nub end, the burned wood, are taken directly from Hume, the point being that Tlön refuses to recognize the existence of structural mechanisms or laws over and above that of constant conjunctions that constitute physical events. 'Quiero decir: que unas cerillas, un bosque ardiendo y las cenizas que quedan después suponga una relación causa/efecto no es algo en absoluto prescriptivo, depende de cada caso' (Rodríguez 2011a: 217). Except that on Tlön, it is not simply the existence of laws, physical and juridical, that is questioned but that of substantives. Decomposed into a series of adjectives, the latter are 'convocados y disueltos en un momento, según las necesidades poéticas' (Borges 1971: 22).

A strange world, indeed, and one wonders exactly why it should have been so successful in imposing itself on the 'real' world: 'Casi inmediatamente, la realidad cedió en más de un punto' (Borges 1971: 35), until, that is, we recall the inextricable intermingling of Hume with Kant upon which Rodríguez insists: '[Borges] es muy humiano, aunque lo mezcla con Kant' (Rodríguez 2011a: 221). The textual evidence is overwhelmingly in support: Borges' stories invariably turn on the Kantian notion of the sublime, the notion through which the narrator strives to capture the sense of the ineffable, such as our feelings before a thunderstorm or a landscape, or the impression produced upon the narrator by Herbt Ashes' redaction of Tlön: 'Me puse a hojearlo y sentí un vértigo asombrado

y ligero que no describiré, porque ésta no es la historia de mis emociones sino de Uqbar y Tlön y Orbis Tertius. En una noche del Islam que se llama la Noche de las Noches se abren de par en par las secretas puertas del cielo y es más dulce el agua en los cántaros; si esas puertas se abrieran no sentiría lo que en esa tarde sentí' (Borges 1971: 18-19). The stage is thus set for an agon or struggle, between two narrative versions, that of 'the real world' and that of the ideal world of Tlön, a struggle in which victory goes to the version most able to free itself of any contaminating truck with matter. The outcome is a no-brainer: 'Entre las doctrinas de Tlön, ninguna ha merecido tanto escándalo como el materialismo' (Borges 1971: 24-25).

From Idealism to Materialism

The principal lesson that Rodríguez takes away from 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', with respect to empiricism and the status of laws, relates to questions of judicial law: '... los casos son la clave del sistema jurídico anglosajón: ahí no caben los códigos previos o normativos' (Rodríguez 2011a: 217). The observation is unexceptional at an informative level: the British legal system, from its medieval beginnings, has spurned Roman law in favour of a common law based on individual precedents. And yet a reading more attentive to the manifest content of Borges' short story might well have prioritized the question of scientific law. 'Este monismo o idealismo total', the Borges' narrator observes with respect to Tlön's dominant philosophy, 'invalida la ciencia. Explicar (o juzgar) un hecho es unirlo a otro; esa vinculación, en Tlön, es un estado posterior del sujeto, que no puede afectar o iluminar el estado anterior. Todo estado mental es irreducible: el mero hecho de nombrarlo – *id est*, de clasificarlo – importa un falso. De ello cabría deducir que no hay ciencias en Tlön ni siquiera razonamientos' (Borges 1971: 23). This statement neatly brings out the absurdity of the empiricist position: if laws of nature are simply constant conjunctions of events, then it is the subject that creates the laws of nature!

The significance of this point becomes apparent if we follow the empiricist tradition through to Hegel and Marx. Hegel, it will be recalled, rejected the Humean view of objects, accepted by Kant, as mere congeries of properties brought together by consciousness, in favour of an alternative notion that envisaged them as immanent irreducible unities, independent of human experience. Concessions were made to the role of sense impressions, as received by consciousness, which continued to be given recognition within the Hegelian scheme, but only within the strictest of limits: the important fact for Hegel was that objectivity did not depend on our experiences for its realisation but enjoyed an ontologically primary unity, at the level of the Absolute Spirit or Reason, otherwise the complete idea of human freedom. The dynamics of this Absolute Spirit were summarised by Rodríguez to effect in *Teoría e historia* in terms of the vicissitudes of content and form: 'el contenido (o sea la idea encarnada en la época) no se encuentra "a gusto" en esa época y tiende a romper su forma para encarnarse en otra forma nueva (no se encuentra

a gusto: esto es, impelido por la necesidad de liberarse a la “alienación/mediación” por la materia, buscando reencontrarse, el espíritu persigue una encarnación más plena, más liberadora, sobre la anterior)’ (Rodríguez 1990: 125).

Now I think these matters would have yielded their full intellectual load if Rodríguez had pressed them further to confront the philosophical basis of his own Marxism. For as should be obvious, Hegel’s principle that essences are non-empirical/actual is preserved in the Marxian idea that the objects of possible sense-perception have *a priori* status as social structures and laws that transcend the level of individual experience. In freeing the object from its transcendental subjective dependence on forms of cognition Marx was able to posit such phenomena as the law of value as objectively real, although sometimes unrealized or realized as unperceived relations, distinct from and, due to the influence of other laws, out of phase with the phenomena they generate. In this way, by placing transcendental structures in a knowable transcendental object rather than subject, Marx was further able to extricate the transcendental method of critique from the subjectivistic trap – the kind of trap set for it in Tlön – and, in the process, to transform transcendental *idealism* into transcendental *realism*.

The key Marxist text in this context would obviously be the *Critique of Political Economy* (1857), but if Marx’s commentators have failed to appreciate its radical innovations, the fault is not entirely theirs. For as Roy Bhaskar reminds us: ‘Marx never satisfactorily theorized his scientific, as distinct from simple material object, realism’ (Bhaskar 1993: 345), from which followed an ‘under-development of the critique of empiricism, as distinct from idealism, of the intransitive dimension and theme of objectivity in contrast to the transitive dimension and the theme of labour’ (345). Althusser, we saw above, was not slow to target empiricism for its theoretical shortcomings, particularly insofar as it thinks the knowledge of the real object ‘as a *real part* of the real object to be known [...], *inscribed in the structure of the real object*’ (Althusser and Balibar 1970: 37-38). To which, as is well known, Althusser responded with his distinction between the real object and the object of thought, together with his assertion of the socio-historical nature of knowledge against the ahistorical and empiricist assertion of the immediacy of ‘the facts’. Whatever may be said in its favour, this distinction has predictably exposed Althusser to the charge that he has in effect reduced the *real object*, otherwise ontologically prior to the *object of thought*, to the quasi-Kantian status of a limiting concept (Bhaskar 1989: 143)⁷.

⁷ A full discussion of these issues would need to address key aspects of the Althusserian legacy, beginning with Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, who, initially supportive of Althusser, shifted rapidly from an anti-realist voluntarism of *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* to the systematic rejection of the principle of structural causality in *Capitalism Today*. In the latter work, the concept of social structure is ruthlessly simplified, at the expense not only of distinct theoretical levels but also of the matrix effect of the complex whole (see Resch 1992: 99-105). Althusser’s own late brand of aleatory materialism (Althusser 2006), which sacrifices the emphasis upon real structures and processes in history for a celebration of the accidental, unwittingly opened the door to a postmodern Marxism of nominalist persuasion that gravitated towards methodological individualism (see Callari and Ruccio 1996). The spirited defence of Althusser carried out by Michael Sprinker (see Sprinker 1992) has not prevented a new generation of critical realists from reiterating the criticism voiced by their Master. Thus Neil Curry writes: ‘For Althusser, there is no real of the real. The exterior (absence) cannot be posited as anterior (present) for to do so would imply something rather than nothing coming from somewhere. This would be deemed spiritual or metaphysical by Althusser and, therefore, would be rejected’ (Curry 2004: 147).

Rodríguez himself, in the volumes under review, is content, as we have seen, to reiterate the positions assumed by Althusser: ‘Ninguno de los tres niveles existe en abstracto sino únicamente como funcionamiento social, un funcionamiento no visible y absolutamente entremezclado’ (Rodríguez 2011a: 28). Likewise, with respect to the specific level of ideology, the Althusserian rests content with his earlier formulation in *Teoría e historia* (Rodríguez 1990: 11-13), according to which social relations are ontologically real if only observable in their effects. Ideology, it follows, is ‘[un nivel] tan real como cualquier otro’ (Rodríguez 2011a: 31) Now while there is nothing objectionable to it in principle, this way of conceptualizing the social world was vulnerable to the return of idealism, unless sustained by the appropriate philosophical underlabouring. And the threat of such a return was never greater than when, on the authority of Jorge Luis Borges, postmodernism released subjective experience from its materialist chains.

We will be returning to Rodríguez’s reading of Borges below, but first we need to discuss his *Para una lectura de Heidegger*.

Being and History

There are several reasons why the philosopher of *Being and Time* might have been a source of particular interest for the Althusserian. Firstly, there is a certain satisfaction to be found in locating such an important figure, whose ideas pretend to plumb the very essence of Being and Time, within a very determinate set of *historical* parameters. Secondly, Rodríguez is doubtless keen to measure his distance from an existentialist project that, to some extent, emerges as a competitor to his own. Regarding the first of these, the Althusserian summarizes the relevant parameters in the following terms: alarmed by the rise of German communism and despairing of the capacity of conservatives and liberals to deal effectively with it, a set of leading impresarios and bankers became convinced of the need to finance the Nazis as a protective measure, protective that is of their own capitalist enterprises. Of course, Rodríguez does not intend to argue that Heidegger’s philosophy as a whole is a simple reflex of its social context. His ambition is rather to ‘hincar el diente’ (12) into the discursive conjuncture that philosophy and context share in common.

More important than this relatively routine contextualizing exercise, however, there is the question of the inherent interest Heidegger’s programme holds for somebody of Rodríguez’s intellectual persuasions. The recognition that meaning is *historical* was, after all, what led Husserl’s most famous pupil to break with his master’s system of thought. Husserl, Rodríguez recalls, ‘para poder esencializar el ser de las cosas [...] había tenido que olvidarse del Ser. Y recuperar ese ‘olvido de ser’ será – es obvio – el eje vertebral de todo el Heidegger pleno [...]. Y ahí, en ese olvido del ser, fue donde Heidegger vio la brecha decisiva’ (Rodríguez 2011b: 30). The historicizing impulse, which drove the recovery of being, will remain crucial to Heidegger’s ongoing attempt to overturn the static eternal truth of the Western metaphysical tradition. Nor is that where the similari-

ties with Rodríguez's work ends. What is central to Heidegger's thought, as Rodríguez explains, is not the individual subject but Being itself. The mistake of the Western metaphysical tradition, according to the existentialist, has been to see Being as some kind of objective entity, and to separate it sharply from the subject. Heidegger's project defines itself accordingly: 'si todo el planeamiento burgués (la Ilustración "revolucionaria") se había basado en la relación "Sujeto / Sistema" (o Sujeto / Objeto) ¿cómo tachar la barra de en medio y darle un nuevo sentido a todo el *planeamiento* permaneciendo – por el momento – sin embargo *dentro* del planeamiento? ¿Para intentar destruirlo / salvarlo?' (61-62). How, in other words, to return to pre-Socratic thought, before the dualism between subject and object opened up, when Being had somehow encompassed both?

And thus does Heidegger's project of descent begin, through a gradual deepening of thought towards the remains (fragments) of Heraclitus and Parmenides and the one true, authentic event – the direct presence of Being as a vital experience. Rodríguez charts the major themes with meticulous care: the sense of Being as thrownness, the importance of thinking not *on* being but *from* being; language as the house of being; the dangers posed by the languages of publicity and of science/technology, the subjectivization of thought and objectivization of the thing, existence towards death, etc. etc. The Althusserian will largely refrain from critique, and is left simply to wonder, even when Heidegger enters the strange world of etymology and the allegedly substantialist roots of language: '... casi como las *Etimologías* de San Isidoro y no exagero un ápice' (92). Will refrain from critique except when it comes to drawing a contrast between the existentialist's review of the rise of Cartesianism and his own: 'A nosotros nos interesa sin embargo – como cuestión intempestiva – [...]: ¿por qué y cómo la substancia (*upokeimenon*) se transformó en sujeto. ¿Qué ocurrió ahí – esa brecha – en el todo granítico o en el bloque evolutivo, de la historia de la filosofía? ¿Por qué la aparición del *sujeto* – y de la subjetividad – como "asunto propio" (*Sache selbst*) de la Filosofía tal como se nos ofrece desde Descartes a Hegel o Husserl? ¿Cuándo y por qué aparece ese sujeto libre y como conciencia?' (104).

Only when the materialist comes to make an overall assessment will he finally bare his teeth, at which point he will not spare a body of work that abandoned the abstractions of Western metaphysics to set up a different kind of metaphysical entity – *Dasein* itself – that, in the last instance, represents as much a flight from history as an encounter with it. He is particularly unforgiving regarding the philosopher's celebration of peasant awareness. 'Heidegger no piensa jamás que esos zuecos de la campesina' – the reference is to the famous painting by Van Gogh – 'estén rotos y deslustrados por el trabajo y el sudor cotidiano en el campo. Piensa sólo que se esencian como Arte por su "enraizamiento" en la propia tierra nativa' (147n31). The omission is taken to be symptomatic of a more fundamental absence: 'Heidegger, sí, se preocupó del capitalismo digamos liberal, del estalinismo ruso y por supuesto de "su" mundo nazi en la inmediata posguerra. Y se preocupó

– ¡hasta qué punto – de la esencia de la técnica hasta convertirla en el eje de todo’ (159). What he failed to notice was the penetration of North American capital into the fabric of daily life, to the extent that the new way of *being-here* became, by definition, capitalist:

... lo que se le olvidó a Heidegger no fue el olvido del Ser, claro está, sino el olvido del ser-del-capitalismo como configuración de nuestra vida cotidiana. En cierto modo dejó plenamente de lado el mundo angloamericano (jamás cita a Locke o a Hume, jamás al fordismo o al taylorismo como formas de vida, sólo meras alusiones al individualismo o al pragmatismo en Norteamérica). Y sin duda ese es el auténtico *vacío* de Heidegger: no que la esencia de la técnica y la cibernética configurasen el mundo, sino que la técnica y la cibernética, etc. estaban envueltas en (y producidas por) las relaciones vitales capitalistas que son las que verdadera – y globalmente – configuran nuestro mundo’ (160-61).

Heidegger and the New Marxism

It will be useful at this point, by way of further characterizing Rodríguez’s ideas, to discuss alongside them those of two scholars that, while comparable with the Spaniard’s insofar as they (a) converge on the same real object, in this case the work of Heidegger, and (b) share a common grounding in the work of Althusser, are yet incommensurable with them with respect to certain (unconscious) theoretical assumptions that sustain them. The scholars I have in mind are two in number, Andrew Collier and Jonathan Joseph, both of them connected more or less closely with the British school of critical realism.

Collier traces much of the same ground covered by Rodríguez, namely Heidegger’s attempt to escape the errors bequeathed by the last three hundred years of Cartesian philosophy and those that reach us from the more distant origins in the classical world. We will not linger on the details. Suffice it to say that the critical realist’s exploration of the opposition of use to exchange values, as it operates, differentially, in Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Sophists, usefully augments the Spaniard’s work. Equally interesting, and more germane to our present concerns, are his comments on Heidegger’s critique of the technological conception of reality as a stockpile. While it is a critique with which he fully concurs – indeed, he believes it to be singularly relevant to the modern world – Collier believes the source of the stockpile attitude is to be found not in science or technology, as Heidegger believes, but in commercialism. Why the preference for ‘commercialism’ over ‘capitalism’? Collier argues as follows: while capitalism can be viewed as both a market economy and a society divided along class lines, only the first of these characteristics to the stockpile attitude (Collier 2003: 78). Commercialism today, the critical realist elaborates, has become a kind of totalitarian commercialism, evidence of which is to be found in the shift from the Heideggerian notion of rootedness or dwelling in a place to a marketing of geography through tourism. He concludes: ‘This all-pervasive ideology is the principal enemy of every decent person’ (Collier 2003: 79).

What might seem a relatively minor issue – the market economy versus class division – is nothing of the kind when viewed from Rodríguez’s perspective. Of course, there is no denying the prioritization of the market in *The Communist Manifesto* – ‘nos va a decir que la burguesía nace del mercado’. Unfortunately, and it pains Rodríguez to have to say so, its authors (Marx and Engels) were in this respect totally misguided (Rodríguez 2012a: 140), as Marx himself later went to great lengths to explain in *Capital*. The Althusserian points specifically to the latter’s famous chapter on the primitive accumulation of capital, in which priority has shifted to what is invisible about capitalism, namely the extraction of surplus value. The difference between Collier and Rodríguez in this respect is fundamental: at the point where the critical realist displaces attention from the relations of production to circulation – doubtless to the infinite relief of his bourgeois colleagues within the academy – the Spanish Althusserian steps forward to re-assert the centrality of class conflict and the extraction of surplus value, as indispensable to any Marxism worthy of the name.

Whatever Collier’s other shortcomings, his view on the pervasive influence of consumerism suggests a familiarity with the Althusserian notion of structural causality, the validity of which he warmly acknowledges elsewhere⁸. It is precisely such a notion that is lacking in Jonathan Joseph and in the potentially fruitful contrast that he draws between Althusser’s unflinching defence of science (as opposed to ideology) and Heidegger’s defence of lay knowledge (as opposed to science). A difficulty arises quite early on when Joseph questions what he understands to be the equation in Althusser between ideology and practical knowledge: ‘while this may be true of knowledge embedded in work practices – a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay – this is not true of the knowledge needed to cook a meal or ride a bicycle or to find one’s way around a city’ (Joseph 2004: 144). Really? In that case, how does one explain the cultural variations in spatial, cartographic awareness – feudal lords, as every historian knows, were accustomed to barter away whole tracts of their land, through their inability mentally to envisage its boundaries – or why the bourgeoisie invested so much energy in the reformation of eating habits throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century?

But while these are perfectly valid objections to make to a sociologists who clearly has little understanding of history, they do not get to the root of the problem, the nature of which becomes more apparent in the following: ‘We can start with lay knowledge involved in practices and look at how, as this gets more complex, it may become more ideological’ (144). At work here is the notion of a unilateral progression, which *begins* with ‘facts in themselves’, disguised as the practical, and *develops* towards the ideological, along a path of increasing complexity. Soon to re-appear, because already implicit in this same

⁸ See particularly Andrew Collier, *Scientific Realism and Socialist Thought* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

notion, is the concept of the ‘free subject’, encapsulated in John Macquarrie’s claim: ‘I am, therefore I think’ (156). The inversion of the Cartesian formula is rather less radical than Joseph seems to believe, in that it continues to prioritize the subject and so invite the conclusion that Althusser and Heidegger may both be happily ‘combined’ (156). Our own conclusion, somewhat different, is that the sociologist remains firmly anchored in an empiricist unconscious, the latter totally odds with the Althusserian notion of history as a process without a subject, also of the matrix effect of the mode of production, according to which all social activities are ideologically inflected, although admittedly in varying degrees.

Linguistic Idealism or Materialism?

We left Borges at the point where an idealist Tlön had triumphed over the material world: ‘El contacto y el hábito de Tlön han desintegrado este mundo’ (Borges 1971: 35). Also with the warning that the failure of Althusserians to clearly thematize ontology exposed them to a recolonization by idealism, recently reconstituted in various postmodern forms. With this in mind let us rejoin Rodríguez’s analysis of Borges as elaborated in his recently published *Formas de leer a Borges*.

For those scholars, including the present writer⁹, who have seen in Borges an incorrigible idealist, Rodríguez has a surprise in store: ‘Es curioso así como Borges, a partir del idealismo de Berkeley, puede hallar un subsuelo sólido para el materialismo de su escritura’ (Rodríguez 2012b: 33). The gist of his argument appears to be as follows: the mature Borges will systematically distance himself from the view of writing that understands itself as an expressive activity, expressive, that is, of the subjective (authorial) presence that precedes it. Confirmation, if required – the observations is ours – can be found in ‘Tlön’ in the marginal aside: ‘... ésta no es la historia de mis emociones sino de Uqbar y Tlön y Orbis Tertius’ (Borges 1971: 19). Once the subject is eliminated, one is seemingly left with the material structures of language, carried to such an extreme as to constitute an absolute materialist ontology. A materialist ontology! Borges! Understandably Rodríguez himself can’t quite believe the strangeness of it, as he never tires of reiterating: ‘He aquí lo asombroso de la materialidad de la escritura en Borges, creada a partir de un idealismo tan límpido como de Berkeley’ (34).

Materialism, materiality – the terms reach us laden with a good deal of accumulated baggage, some of which ties them to empiricism, even though empiricism has idealist forms and tendencies. Certainly, materialism in its most general metaphysical form refers

⁹ Cf. Malcolm K. Read, *Jorges Luis Borges and his Predecessors or Notes towards a Materialist History of Linguistic Idealism* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, 1993). Also Read’s ‘El posmodernismo y sus predecesores: una perspectiva Borgiana’, in Elizabeth Monasterios P. (ed.), *Con tanto tiempo encima: Aportes de literatura latinoamericana en homenaje a Pedro Lastra* (La Paz, Bolivia: Plural editors, 1997), 299-308.

to the view that everything that exists is in some sense material, although this leaves a considerable body of ontological problems unresolved. Moreover, to complicate matters, versions of materialism have tended to be constructed with reference to idealism. This is, of course, the stuff of manuals, of marginal relevance to the case of Borges. That said, some clarity of definition is called for, at least with respect to the tradition represented by Berkeley, the niceties of which can best be understood with reference to that of Hegel. As was explained above, the latter did not maintain that reality was composed of mental objects, as has often been wrongly assumed, by way of conflating his idealism with the phenomenalism of the British empiricists. Objects were, for Hegel, creations of the Idea that, once in existence, are as material or non-phenomenal as anything could be, which makes the German philosopher a non-realist materialist, paradoxical thought this may seem. Phenomenalism, by way of contrast, is a form of non-materialist realism, insofar as even Berkeley, among the empiricists, continued to allow for the existence of thought-independent entities¹⁰.

Having done this necessary groundwork, let us endeavour to make sense of Rodríguez's argument. Unsurprisingly, we find Hume quickly added to the empiricist mix: 'Hume', the Althusserian elaborates, 'también destruye la imagen de la relación causa/efecto como clave de la discursividad científica. Y curiosamente, al modo de Borges, establece la aleatoriedad de los signos sucesivos en el tiempo, de lo que se llamaría la arbitraria asociación de ideas' (Rodríguez 2012b: 34). Now the aleatory nature of signs undeniably lies very close to the core of Borges' writing.

Even restricting ourselves to 'Tlön', the evidence is overwhelming. Following the initial chance event – 'El hecho se produjo hará unos cinco años. Bioy Casares había cenado conmigo esa noche ...' (Borges 1971: 13) – we enter into the world of fiction, a world in which the same process – the passage from the real to fictional – is reprised: 'ahora me deparaba el azar algo más precioso y más arduo. Ahora tenía en las manos un vasto fragmento metódico de la historia total de un planeta desconocido' (19). Authors there are, although of a singularly collective and sometimes rather faded kind ('que entre sus afiliados tuvo a Dalgarno y después a George Berkeley' [31]), displaced by the objectivity of the text, a text subject to the *law* of chance and, consequently, experienced by the narrator, cast as reader, in vertiginous, that is to say, transcendental terms: 'Tal fue la primera intrusión del mundo fantástico en el mundo real. Un azar que me inquieta hizo que yo también fuera testigo de la segunda' (33).

Such, presumably, is what Rodríguez has in mind when he writes: 'El escritor, creyendo que es libre, ejerce su libertad lanzando un golpe de dados pero, al final, este golpe de dados depende del azar, que está por encima de él. El escritor está obligado a lanzar el

¹⁰ I am indebted for these distinctions to Ruben 22.

golpe de dados, no como una libertad sino como una necesidad. Quien domina es el azar, que es imprevisible y pertenece al nivel trascendental' (Rodríguez 2012b: 82). Victory, in the case of 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius', falls to a planet that, like any fiction, as opposed to a journalistic report, is swept clean of chance: '¿Cómo no someterse a Tlön, a la minuciosa y vasta evidencia de un planeta ordenado?' (Borges 1971: 35). Ordered, let us recall, insofar as consisting not of a concourse of objects in space but a series of immaterial acts. In other stories by Borges, the agonistic struggle pits one writer against another, a writer who, like his or her competitor, is also invariably a reader: Juan de Panonia against Aureliano, Red Scharlach against Löonrot, Emma Zunz against Loewenthal. The characters may vary but the criterion by which they are judged remains the same: who will produce the more transcendental text, more transcendental because more completely detached from material circumstance and therefore more able to contain the other within itself? It is this agon that Rodríguez projects onto the broader canvas of literary production, arguing in effect that if any reading is bound to be constrained by the objectivity of the text, that objectivity cannot contain the endless productivity of the text across time: '... si bien la contingencia del texto no sólo se fija a sí misma sino que detiene el delirio de la lectura (tú no puedes decir sobre el texto más que lo que el texto dice de sí mismo, aún sin decirlo), sin embargo esa contingencia fijada no puede evitar que el tiempo la atraviese y la haga viajar en contra de sí misma' (Rodríguez 2012b: 47).

The density and abstract nature of Rodríguez's prose might possibly have blinded the reader to a curious slippage, curious at least in the context of the Althusserian's early seminal texts: it is no longer *history* that traverses the literary text but *time*.

Time or History?

Historicity / temporality: only a nuance separate them, except that it is the difference that separates idealism from materialism as, once upon a time, Rodríguez would have insisted, and did in fact insist, where else but in a chapter on Borges, 'La noche de Walpurgis: de Stoker a Borges', included in *La norma literaria*. In this piece, the Althusserian addresses Borges' famous short story 'Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote', in which, it will be recalled, Pierre Menard sets out not only to *read* the *Quijote* but also to *reproduce* it, word for word. Menard's project, Rodríguez argues, is contained within the boundaries of a phenomenology that, in the Kantian mode, insists that the work of art demands the presence of a reader to receive it and to re-inscribe it. Menard's brilliance lay in carrying over this project from *reading* into *writing*, the effect of which was to throw into relief one important fact: located at his own historical moment, Menard necessarily produces a text that is both the same as but radically different from Cervantes'. Thus, as Borges himself explains, while both texts speak of history as the *mother* of truth, that of Menard necessarily means something very different from Cervantes': 'Menard, contemporáneo de William James, no define la historia como una indagación de la realidad sino

como su origen. La verdad histórica, para él, no es lo que sucedió; es lo que juzgamos que sucedió' (Borges 1971: 57). So much Borges can see. What he can't see, because he envisages writing only from the standpoint of the individual and not from its objective reality, is the ideological horizon within which every piece of writing is contained: 'Porque ese horizonte ideológico no es una atalaya exterior desde la que el texto se ve (desde la que se lee) sino que ese horizonte ideológico es el nudo mismo, la clave de la lógica interna de cada texto: la que lo produce y desde donde se produce. *Id est*: la radical historicidad de la literatura' (Rodríguez 2001:402).

In this essay, Rodríguez is resolute in viewing the literary text as the determinate, material product of an objectively real historical conjuncture, as opposed to a purely discursive form, detached from its material production. Of course, the Althusserian would have readily accepted that the mechanisms of *production* do not determine the *reception* of the text, but only to insist on what a materialist theory of reception would confirm, namely that the newly discovered 'freedom' of the reader in bourgeois society – exercised quintessentially in the reading of the bible – was no less ideologically determined than that of the writer, and no less enclosed within its own ideological limits. Now while Rodríguez would doubtless continue to recognize such positions as his own, one's impression is that a fundamental shift has taken place in his more recent text, that, furthermore, Borges' own idealism has somehow invaded and overwhelmed his own materialism, somewhat in the manner that Tlön displaces material reality, so as to set in motion an endlessly productive textuality: 'Con lo que la fijación de la lectura queda libre de cualquier barra, de cualquier limitación, y siempre puede comenzar a reiniciarse,' and in the process to liberate space and time from any contaminating truck with history: 'Así este doble juego del tiempo que fija el espacio de la escritura (y supuestamente también el de la lectura) pero que, por ser tiempo, no puede estarse quieto, disemina la grafía y sus huellas hacia otros espacios y otros lugares, y así la labor de la lectura puede reivindicarse' (Borges 2012b: 47).

From here the royal road stands open to the post-structuralist celebration of the infinite openness of the text and, more specifically, of indefinite multiplicity of metaphors, which, Rodríguez assures us, 'nos ayudan a comprender la materialidad de la escritura' (54). It is a road that no Marxist has any business taking for the very important reason that the materiality masks a value form that is in fact a form of idealism, constructed along the following lines. The first step is to dematerialize the network of social relations by reconfiguring them as a form of discourse. The next step is re-materialize them through the fetishistic foregrounding of their 'physical' materiality. Both steps combine to establish the apparent one-way determination of language over the real. There is very little that is curious about all of this, except that it suggests a greater proximity to the idealism of Kant and Hegel than to the subjective idealists of empiricist persuasion. In other respects, it is eminently predictable in its strategic aim, which is to cover over and conceal the underlying social (economic) relations producing the discursive. Left uncontested,

its effects can be disastrous, not least of all for the very concept of ideology, which, once detached from the mode of production, can be conveniently recast as a species of free-floating discourse. It is hard to imagine how such Absolute Idealism could be mistaken for materialism, or indeed, be mistaken for what it is, namely, a (ruling) class theory of production. Except by a Marxism whose own hold on ontological realism has been seriously weakened.

Conclusion

Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton, we began by suggesting, have each in their own way, succumbed to the forces of an 'advanced' capitalist culture, the brilliance of their individual achievements notwithstanding. It would have been strange were it otherwise, considering that their respective careers coincided with a period that saw the Left in full-scale retreat before the forces of neo-liberalism, as embodied in the regimes of Reagan and Thatcher. Class politics was always a problematic exercise in the States, where, for historical reasons, inequality has been largely viewed through the prisms of race. But even in Britain, class came to be seen by many on the left as no longer plausible as a vehicle of change, in contrast to identity politics, where history actually seemed to favouring those fighting for the emancipation of women, gays and ethnic minorities. In Spain the situation was, at least for a time, rather different. At a point when abjuring the left had become routine further north, this nation's belated entry into modernity and, in quick succession, into postmodernity, provided the perfect standpoint from which to theorize, in materialist terms, the earlier transition from feudalism to capitalism. It was an opportunity not to be missed, and Rodríguez did not miss it: breaking with bourgeois scholarship, he was able, in a relatively short time, to come up with a theory of ideological production that was sophisticated, complex, and, considering it was launched at a time when the broader Althusserian movement entered into crisis, remarkable for its staying-power. Over the ensuing decades, one work followed upon another, each enduringly critical of a dominant system that they continued to define as inherently exploitative, in defiance of a whole generation of so-called Marxists, who progressively made their peace with capitalism. Of course, nobody could remain immune to the crushing sense of powerlessness that gripped what was left and Rodríguez didn't, as we have suggested with respect to his most recent work on Borges. That said, the texts under review arrive as a timely reminder of the force of his earlier critique of capitalism and its continued relevance to a generation of young people who, unemployed in their thousands, must arm themselves against a political, entrepreneurial and financial elite that, even as it conveniently dismisses the relevance of class politics, quietly goes about its principal business, that of shovelling huge sums of money into its bank accounts.

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