Introduction

Ungoverned Specificities

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If you ask whether "national literatures" should be eliminated in favor of "global" perspectives, I'm inclined to say "yes"—as long as I don't specifically think about [my own] Australian literature and its long and ultimately successful struggle for an identity of its own.

Judith Ryan, "Shrunk to an Interloper"

This collection brings together a diverse group of essays focused on all aspects of Mexican visual art, literature, and criticism. Each essay also is preoccupied directly or indirectly with "the nation" and specifically with Mexico. Such a project—hovering in the thematic vicinity of the nation, or rather of a specific nation—is anachronistic at a time many have characterized with the word globalism. The paradox is reflected in the title of the collection, with "globalization" hooked onto the end of it like its caboose (or perhaps its engine). Critics in both the humanities and the social sciences appear more concerned today with theorizing the end of the nation as a disciplinary pretext or conceptual frame. In U.S. departments of Spanish such concerns characterize the work of many active critics, such as George Yúdice, Jean Franco, Alberto Moreiras, Doris Sommer, George Beverly, and Gwen Kirkpatrick, to name a few examples—albeit in

very different ways, but often with a strong debt to the work of Fredric Jameson, whose own eye has been roving increasingly southwest toward Latin America. Despite the significant conceptual and lexical variations that distinguish them, these critics tend to agree that studying literature and culture as delimited in some way by national histories and spaces is no longer viable given the changes brought about by globalism in international economics, politics, and culture.

The ten chapters that follow are likewise concerned with the problems and challenges of something like globalism. Nonetheless—and without suggesting that they are all written out of a common orientation or that they would all agree with the claims of this introduction (they are not and they would not)—they tend to hold back from embracing globalism as a theoretical frame, choosing instead to continue lingering with this ambiguous, singular—even perhaps *prohibitive*—something called, not just "the nation," but "Mexico." When they speak directly or indirectly to the challenges of globalism, they do so not by taking a point of departure in the theoretical impasses established by the dialectical framework of a (primarily North American) globalist critical discourse, but by commencing out of a fascination for the singularities and effects of rhetoric and images that continue to be associated with a specific nation and that the globalist discourse seems incapable of approaching. For despite its much-vaunted concern with singularities, that discourse is more concerned with those singularities that have been, so to speak, preconditioned by a dialectical framework as negative objects of mourning and that thus pose little rhetorical threat to, or seduction for, that framework and the descriptive critical gaze that maintains it.

At the same time, these chapters also are cautious about the risks of reestablishing or defining national difference or even of somehow assuming "the nation" as an organic entity. For as soon as "Mexico" is identified as different from *x* or simply defined in any way, it becomes a problem that pertains not to "itself" but to the very discourse that desires the definition in the first place. Instead, the collection participates in what we could say Mexico always already has been: the effect of a deterritorializing of itself. The chapters move consistently and conceptually toward Mexico's many borders—and not only the geographical ones—in an effort to treat "Mexico" as an open sign of something that owes its effect to its possibility of evoking itself from outside of its own borders. Such a possibility—that "Mexico" speaks outside of itself—has many consequences for critics of Mexican history and art,

with the current emphasis on the "borderlands" in cultural criticism being only one of them.

The studies in this collection thus risk the possibilities of not succumbing to a double hazard: on the one hand, the tedious nostalgia of looking back at the fictive stability of the nation seen as a cultural–historical organism and, on the other, the aggressive insensitivity of a critical discourse of globalism that risks subsuming into its general scope the specificities—not of negative objects of description but precisely of imagined discursive points of departure—that risk getting lost when the nation is abandoned as an open concept or form.

The latter hazard is becoming more real for writers in the contemporary North American academy, where the problems associated with globalism have come to compose one of the most prominent critical orientations on the academic market. Although globalism began to emerge into the general critical consciousness about a decade ago, it is still a hot topic in all its variations, not only for area studies but also increasingly for national literature departments as well. Its academic prominence could be described in a very general way by pointing first to its referential stimulations and then to its institutional conditioning factors. On the referential side, globalism critics perceive that the fiction of a national cultural–political center is no longer able to hold (what some would refer to as) the field of cultural production in its sway, no longer organizes that production in the face of transnational market forces and the seduction of the communications media with their proliferating, borderless marketing mechanisms: satellite television, cellular phones, advertising, and the Internet. Critical interest thus migrates toward matters associated with the fluidity of national borders, transnational (preferably round-trip) movements of people, linkages of geographically disparate regions by larger economic and technomedia factors, but also (often in a gesture of "contestation") toward smaller-scale cultural montages, such as urban centers, interest groups, and consumer cultures. Echoing Néstor García Canclini's 1995 argument in *Consumidores y ciudadanos* (*Consumers and Citizens*), many of these critics suggest, with different nuances and emphases, that the contemporary economic (dis)order is redefining citizenship itself around economic consumption rather than political conduct. Such formulations frequently stress a priority of affect and barter over decision and risk: a *feeling* of citizenship as a return on economic exchange rather than the *exercising* of citizenship as either a passion or responsibility in the face of an indeterminable future.

On the institutional side of the issue, globalism critics can point to the decline in the strategic value of traditional area studies to U.S. interests in the wake of the cold war, a trend that has undermined institutional justifications for focusing on nations as principles ordering the history of art and culture. Alberto Moreiras summarizes how the situation is perceived from this institutional perspective:

> The traditional aim of "understanding the foreign other," which was always defined from a US- or Eurocentric perspective that became consubstantial to the area studies enterprise, is today about to be replaced by a new goal: the new code words refer to the integration of problem-oriented scholarship and area-based knowledge in the context generated by the exponential increase in the speed and spread of processes of global integration and fragmentation. Traditional area studies were excessively dependent upon reflection on local cultures in view of their particularity and uniqueness. Its reconfiguration as area-based knowledge purportedly promotes the critical and dynamic study of historical localities in terms of the processes of globalization and fragmentation that affect them. (1996, 60)

Such a scenario is seen to have consequences not only for area studies but also increasingly for departments of literature as well, since the latter, which have always tended to be organized around national and regional cultural histories, participate—albeit with some important distinctions—in the same institutional framework as area studies and increasingly compete for the same funds and favors. Of course, not everyone would agree that institutional interests must be thought of as necessarily determining what kind of work goes on in academic departments. In a short article on the challenges posed by transnationality and corporate ownership of the university, J. Hillis Miller (1995) suggests that what is currently at risk is the university's role as the site of production of the "ungovernable." His metaphor is a reminder of what is at stake in an era when the work carried out in universities is increasingly under pressure to both justify itself economically and subordinate itself to larger institutional interests. Insofar as academics see their work as at some level framed by the institution, they lose not only a notion of their own ungovernable activity, but also, more important, the effects of such an activity on the future of the institution itself.[1]

Putting such a considerable objection to one side for the moment, we could also point out the paradox that emerges from the notion that academic work is framed by institutional and national interests. If such a framing is the case, then we are far from having escaped the concept and the effects of nationness and are, in fact, mere accomplices—or pawns—

of yet another of its ruses. Nationness is not disappearing if what is obliging us to shape our work around the increasing fluidity of national borders is itself a nation—the very nation that cradles our institutions in its ever-increasing complexity, transformation, and juridical decentering. In fact, most globalism-oriented critics have not ignored this problem, often organizing their conceptual schemas around the dilemmas posed when globalism is thus seen as the latest face of a North American cultural domination. That domination is precisely the crux of the problem as posed, with the "ideology" of capital never seeming to wander very far from the proper name of the United States. Within this perspective, some theorists conceive of globalism as a recasting of the national rather than the story of its disappearance. Examining the question of sovereignty, prominent theorist of globalism Saskia Sassen argues that the national system of governance is being reconfigured rather than eliminated, pointing out, for example, ways in which the dispersal of economic production has not been accompanied by a corresponding redistribution of institutions and profits: "Globalization is not global. It occupies extremely structured spaces in countries" (1996, 107–108). Sassen also notes that the free trade of goods and capital has not brought about legally sanctioned free trade on the labor market, and such obstacles to free flow continue to speak of the insistence of national boundaries. Nonetheless, national domination does not disappear from the formulation: Sassen ultimately identifies globalism with a hegemonic imposition of the Anglo-American juridical system that accompanies the reconfiguration of national sovereignty.

The acknowledgment that globalism imposes itself as a version of national domination could be used to argue that nothing has really changed: If the nation has not disappeared but merely continues as a problem of domination—the laws of one powerful nation imposed on its neighbors, such as the Roman Empire's juridical invasion of the Iberian peninsula or Spain and England's of the Americas—then something like globalism always has been at work and there is no reason to rethink anything in light of world-historical changes. In terms of trade and economics, as well, a glance at the prevalence of "global" phenomena in past centuries might lead us to a similar conclusion. A recent *New York Times* article cites some interesting data to suggest that, in fact, the world economy was just as, or more, "global" a century ago: Labor today is less mobile than it was in the last century when 14 percent of Americans were foreign born compared with 8 percent today and when

immigrants moved around the globe without passports; international trade tariffs often were lower and the export market was at least as important as it is today (in 1879, 95 percent of Germany's imports were still free of duty, whereas American exports made up 7 percent of the American gross national product, compared with 8 percent today); and according to an International Monetary Fund report, capital movements as a proportion of economic output are significantly lower than what they were in the 1880s. We could go back even further: The same *New York Times* article cites the role played in the Spanish Empire by the Chinese demand for silver in the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, a period in which China absorbed half of the world's silver production, thereby playing a significant, indirect role in the mining industry in the Americas as well as the slave trade (Kristof 1999). In an initial series of cautions against assuming too quickly the novelty of globalism phenomena, Fredric Jameson cites from Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People without History* a reminder that "as far back as the neolithic trade routes have been global in their scope, with Polynesian artifacts deposited in Africa and Asian potsherds as far afield as the New World" (1998, 54).

But it is too easy to get lost in a fascination with facts and figures in support of positions favoring either the contemporary novelty or the historical immutability of globalism, both of which lead principally to games of anecdotal ping pong. An argument that globalism is nothing new risks insensitivity to the singular, contemporary effects of historical repetition, whereas an assertion that the world has dramatically changed easily becomes an untheoretical, artless attempt to shape the ghosts of the historically amorphous into an empirical event. Temporality is elsewhere. This is not to turn a blind eye to history, but simply to point out that it never has been easy to grasp change in language of any kind and that a response to it is not found in exemplary constative descriptions hyperconscious of the institutional binds said to condition thought, but out of the very fragmentations and frustrations of those descriptions: in strategic deviations of language that lure thought off of (and are lured off by) its alienating dialectical causeways and into something like the imagination as a recommencement of thought and the open possibility of its effects.

As Jameson himself observes in an article on globalism, the "facts" add little theoretically to the discussion: "the problems [of globalism] lie as much in our categories of thought as in the sheer facts of the mat-

ter themselves" (1998, 75). The statement, however, puts a spotlight on Jameson's own categories of thought in relation to globalism, which we could accuse of a failure to be put at risk by passionate deviations of language. Despite initially cautioning against easy assumptions of the "newness" of globalism, Jameson himself ultimately sees globalism as a historical shift located at the intersection of communication and technology and written through by a new phase of a dialectic of capitalist domination marshaled by the worldwide Americanization of culture. He finds this Americanization to be unlike any other national imposition, and in this sense he would not agree that globalization is merely the latest face of national imperialism, positing a "fundamental dissymmetry" between all other cultures of the world and the American culture (1998, 63), the latter of which he characterizes as the "becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural" (1998, 60). For Jameson, the imposition of this chiasmatic American econoculture is a fundamental historical break and a symptom of his particular definition of postmodernism.

There is something undeniably compelling about Jameson's description of the postmodern capitalist ideology of Americanization. Furthermore, his concerns should be associated with a genealogy of ethical (at times veering on apocalyptic) preoccupation with the threat to subjectivity posed by worldwide technological, economic, and juridical acceleration, a preoccupation that was perhaps most clearly formulated in Heidegger, recast in Hegelian terms by writers of the Frankfurt School such as Adorno, and treated most recently by Jacques Derrida.[2] But Jameson's argument fails to confront the conceptual challenges of that genealogy, and his reasoning looks very different when we go beyond its constative framework and interrogate its own relation, as an act of language, to the conceptual closures it describes. Ultimately, in this sense, the nimble lucidness of his description is depressed by the monotony of the dialectical suppositions that structure it and that merely replicate some of the most conservative philosophical biases of Western thought.

His *philosophical* treatment ultimately frames the response to globalism with an eventless binary indeterminacy based on a historical teleology that supposes an uninterrupted process of communication from one dialectical phase to another. Jameson believes that the past tells the future exactly where it is going: The mouth of communications technology transmits the (empty) content of a historical drive into the ear of

the passive consumer. "The world has changed," it whispers; "there is no longer any change." Like Jameson, we are all hearing things, but what he is hearing in this case has no creative or imaginative effect on thought and ultimately leads only to a conceptual passivity that fails to confront the ironic relation between language and the real. Having defined globalism as an empty communicational concept that is nonetheless new, he posits that it slips in potentially two interpretive directions: In one direction, we have "a message about a new world culture" that is essentially optimism-inspiring, leading to a "postmodern celebration of difference and differentiation" in the expansion of global speech forums of the public sphere (1998, 56–57). In the other direction, the empty signifier of the new communicational concept is filled in pessimistically with a vision of the rigid order of economic production that underlies it: "we begin to fill in the empty signifier with visions of financial transfers and investments all over the world, and the new networks begin to swell with the commerce of some new, allegedly more flexible capitalism" (1998, 56). The latter paints a sinister "picture of standardization on an unparalleled new scale . . . of forced integration . . . into a world-system in which 'delinking' . . . is henceforth impossible and even unthinkable and inconceivable" (1998, 57). What faces the critic, then, is a choice between optimism regarding the new possibilities of communication and pessimism about the rigid division of labor in the new economic order.

Jameson does not just leave the binary to coagulate on its own, of course, but seeks to make "sparks fly" between the two terms, although ultimately what he presents as an indeterminacy in fact sides with a vision of the historical drive of capitalism rather than the open possibility of language and symbolic acts and their effects, precisely because it is the historical drive that his own language maintains as a teleology. Thus manipulated by his own dialectical framework, and despite what is admittedly a nod toward conceptual aperture in the hope of sparks in his final gesture, he has failed from the start to step out of the trap of a historical determinism, leaving completely intact the conceptual categories he otherwise promises to address. His description of globalism is limited by his unwillingness to risk a conceptual and linguistic displacement of the philosophical terms of the teleology that undergirds his argument—a teleology that continues to be such, regardless of its "postmodernism," precisely because its inception is a predetermined dialectical interiority that perpetually dooms its own possibilities to head banging against its own impasses.

Another way of putting this would be to say—recalling Miller's metaphor of criticism as a potentially ungovernable activity—that Jameson too easily allows his perception of a historical dynamic to govern the course of his criticism. The problem is a general one for many critics of globalism, few of whom have paused to consider either the complexity or the simplicity of the problem of whether perceived global-institutional changes should be allowed to dictate criticism's reimagination of its own activity. At issue is the paradox of a criticism that would permit itself to be conditioned by the unfolding of something that cannot itself be grasped outside of a critical framework. The risk is circular: in other words, a criticism too fixated on the "reality" of globalism would become a slave of its own constructions, regardless of "what is going on in the world" in a real sense. Perhaps still reacting against the timid theoretical formalism of two decades ago, much globalist discourse seems to have forgotten one of criticism's most interesting promises: to mingle with the enigmas of history by continuing to imagine and be imagined by the inception of thought outside or on the boundaries of its own teleological tendencies, and thus to seek out its own unassessible effects as history. Such a promise hardly seems possible when a world-historical process such as globalism is taken by critics both as the intellectual starting point to which they must directly respond and the uniform precinct of historical reality in which they are obliged to conceive the limits of their activity. (But we could promise in turn that promises are at their most imminent when they are missing or being broken and there is no need to lament yet.)

Part of the problem for U.S. Latin Americanist critics in the face of the supposed imperatives of globalism is that these imperatives are not external lures but grow almost seamlessly out of—are in large part produced by—trends in our own profession's critical-descriptive practices. Those trends include the tendency to frame Latin American artistic and cultural history as a single, homogenous critical unit, which in addition to making the region so much easier to master critically and pedagogically and allowing for institutional dominion over a more imposing field also has enabled globalist discourse to cast Latin American culture as a realm of specificities forever mourned and affirmed—in a binary dialectical framework—as the negative "other" of a European American symbolic order. The framework often differs strikingly from the ways (note the plural) in which critics in Latin America have conceived of their own national aesthetic–cultural histories and thus ignores a great many

effective specificities of (versions of) trends and aesthetic–historical processes. When the standardized chronological "movements" in Latin American literature are put up against the versions of aesthetic and cultural histories in individual countries, the dissonances are pronounced. To take an example that indirectly concerns several of the chapters in this collection, we could point to the ways in which the Latin American "Boom," although coinciding chronologically with a crucial turning point in Mexican art of the midcentury—the struggle by artists against the ideological restrictions imposed by official sanction of the post-Revolutionary Mexican School—is difficult to relate meaningfully to (or more important, has not been related meaningfully to) that struggle. The problem of Latin American regional criticism is an old one and has been debated a great deal, but perhaps not enough at a time when proposals for paradigmatic changes toward globalism—thus seen as an outgrowth of prior homogenizing critical tendencies—threaten to shut off all memory of the problem, despite ubiquitous calls for attention to "specificities" and "singularities." (Although, again, threats also can be invitations and there is probably no need to cry wolf.)

For contemporary globalism discourse never stops calling for a return to specificities while at the same time ignoring the ways in which its own framework subsumes those specificities it ostensibly bears witness for under its own generalized critical categories. Again, this nearly always has to do with an annulment of the specificities within a dialectical framework that condemns them to a permanently mourned negativity, rather than a seeking out of specificities as possible inceptions of thought or as the effect of that which troubles and inaugurates critical language: the homeless intuition that refuses to merely confirm or reproduce prior critical categories. In this sense, the seeming sophistication of globalist discourse often masks the most conservative and unimaginative of critical strategies: the reading of specificities as metonymies of a dialectic of globalism in which the part under examination is assumed to fully express the workings—the historical teleology—of the whole. When the part in question is a work of art or an effective rhetorical instability of some kind, such a strategy can be revealed as the most metaphysical gesture of criticism's attempted mastery of its other, a gesture that has refused to confront or play with the impasses of the philosophical tradition.

A few examples demonstrate this trend more concretely, such as Doris Sommer's use of the term "particularities" in her introductory essay to

an issue of the *Modern Language Quarterly* devoted to globalism. Sommer speaks favorably of what she refers to as (borrowing from Derrida) "untranslatable particularities," "as a renewed response to the pressures of dramatic 'globalization.' " But these particularities are further modified as "specificities of time and place" and "particularities of literary context and strategy" (1996, 119), which carefully limits them to phenomena visible to and envisioned by the mastery of the critical gaze and not those that would interrupt that gaze itself with the possibility of another rhetorical point of departure (texts, other critical formulations, rhetorical slippages, art, images, ghostly alterities). Furthermore, the will to mastery is only confirmed by the ostensible political value of these particular particularities: Sommer proceeds to observe that "pride of place may again be working, as it did in the nineteenth century, to safeguard a sense of personal and collective autonomy, even if the political promise of autonomy may not be immediately apparent" (1996, 119), thus protecting and distancing the particularities she seeks from any notion of rhetorical or conceptual risk. And, finally, the gesture toward particularities is further dissolved when Sommer frames them within the categories of a prior critical structure that avoids any risk of contamination by them. For the turn toward "untranslatable particularities" turns out to be merely a new version of the "culturally consolidated formulas of [nineteenth-century] *costumbrismo*" (1996, 120), the operation of which is predetermined by a critical–historical framework that was applied globally over the field of Latin American literary history. The critical language thus promotes "singularities" as a concept without really performatively interacting with them because it is more invested in perpetuating its own institutional–critical frame.

Although Sommer's introductory piece is not intended to be read as an in-depth treatment of the problem of specificities, it is nonetheless symptomatic of a tendency evident among more sustained analyses of the issue. An example of the latter is an essay by Alberto Moreiras, which shows similar problems in the treatment of singularities in North American globalism discourse. Moreiras intelligently critiques a recent version of the tradition that has sought to conceive of Latin America as an organic totality—namely, an attempt by Antonio Cornejo Polar to theorize that totality as heterogeneity—from a perspective interested in identifying the larger ideological–economic agency that writes or frames such formulations. Moreiras thus targets "a certain understanding of local singularity that serves the reproductive interests of the

neoliberal order by fostering consumption of (and thus, not coincidentally, annihilating) difference" (1996, 80). Nonetheless, by limiting himself to identifying the inscriptions of economic interest and thus narrowing the possibilities of his analysis within an economic predeterminacy or momentum, Moreiras settles himself securely within Jameson's dialectical framework, allowing that framework to totalize the concept of singularities itself. Despite his brief, poetic evocation of "singularizing dreams" ("places where a singularity is enacted and an intensity is affirmed, sites of a resistance which is also a withdrawal, a monadic pulsion, a punctual, discardable identity, or a customized difference . . . virtual expressions of a certain distance, a certain inadequacy, a felt disjunction vis-a-vis global incorporation" [1996, 74–75]), Moreiras is ultimately more interested in running headfirst into the dialectical impasse set off in his text by italics, which seem to express critical frustration rather than effect an emphasis: "*the very impossibility of thinking heterogeneity beyond the processes of globalization that always already determine it as heterogeneity for consumption*" (1996, 80).

Simply put, regardless of how sophisticated or even poetic the discourse *about* singularity becomes, it is incapable of meaningfully substituting for the effort to imagine, hallucinate, or enact those singularities as points of departure of criticism. The observation brings us back to the description of the chapters that follow, all of which are characterized by such an effort. That is, in all their variety, they share a sense that criticism finds its effects by allowing itself to be spoken through by—becoming lost in, interrupted by—the specificity of the topic being treated, that is, its other, the singular dissonance of image or rhetoric. And in the process, other ghostly singularities are evoked that have not ceased to be contiguous with it, in particular "the nation." Although such a "strategy" cannot be categorically said to escape the theoretical (or fictional) impasses of globalism or of criticism itself, the performative effects of privileging the imagining of art and singularity in this sense might be quite different from the effects of the propagation of mere dialectical rigor.

Ultimately, the chapters in this collection speak and act for themselves, but the convention of the critical introduction calls for a brief topographical description. Thematically, the chapters roughly follow a historical chronology through all aspects of Mexican art of the twentieth century, as traced out in their sequence, a strictly formal arrangement. This does not mean that they are each pegged to a different time period

and then lined up in chronological order. In fact, their common concern is the possibility of effecting a contemporary critical performative, with the thematic focal point being a kind of secondary preoccupation, which nonetheless inaugurates the possibility of that critical performative. (The selection as a whole is not representational of historical periods, genres, or cultural groupings in any way; rather, its criteria is based on variety of critical approaches.) Although thus maintaining their primary emphasis on the "contemporary," the chapters nonetheless tend to look either "back" (those of the first half of the collection) or "forward" (the second half) in a historical–thematic sense. Thus, although both groups of articles keep one eye idling on the phantasms of globalism and contemporary culture, the arena where the effects of criticism are potentially felt, they focus with the other hallucinating eye—through the singularities that inaugurate its vision—on different directions of the future.

In looking back, the first group concentrates particularly on aesthetic and critical issues associated with modernism of the twenties and thirties, the period that by most accounts marks the inception of the modern Mexican state out of the cultural and ideological fragmentation of the Revolution—a process in which aesthetics played a crucial role—whereas the second group looks forward to themes more commonly associated with that always-provisional term, "postmodernism," to imagine more contemporary points of thematic reference. But rather than thereby establishing an opposition between nostalgia and vanguardism, the two tendencies continually exchange places and should be seen as versions of each other. For example, Karen Cordero Reiman looks back at the muralists of the post-Revolutionary period, but to focus on the representation of corporeal experience in contemporary installation art, whereas Debra Castillo looks forward to border literature, not to take leave of the past but to widen the scope of Mexican literature and criticism to thematics of gender and national borders that perhaps suggest possibilities of fresh critical revisions of earlier, more "centrist" Mexican literature. The effect of the two tendencies thus suggests backward and forward not as diverging strategies but as two variations on an openness to the critical future.

The first chapter in the collection, "Mexican Art on Display," by Olivier Debroise, opens the discussion with what we could call an unconventional overview of twentieth-century Mexican aesthetic–political history, covering a wide chronological expanse from the post-Revolutionary period to the Chiapas rebellion of the 1990s. What is unconventional about this overview is that its lens is not a history of Mexico or of Mexi-

can aesthetics, but a history of the projection of "Mexico" in art expositions, both at home and abroad. But Debroise's focus is more critical than historically descriptive, centering on the dilemma of Mexican art's seemingly inextricable association with the icons of its pre-Hispanic or indigenous past—despite the clearly "constructed" nature of that association—as seen not only in officially sanctioned national art exhibits starting in the 1920s, but also in contemporary Mexican art that often repeats identity cliches despite its critical character. Debroise's conclusions might veer on pessimism, but there is also a critical enthusiasm at work in his call for an interrogation of the specific discursive sources or mechanisms out of which the pre-Hispanic or autochthonous iconicity has emerged in each case in which it is identified, an interrogation he himself puts into motion through attention to details of Mexican aesthetic history—particularly that aspect of this history that shares a border with the United States—that often are left to oblivion by regional historical frameworks.

Despite sharing many of its concerns with Debroise, Juan Bruce-Novoa's study of Mathias Goeritz and the story of Mexican art in the 1950s has a more optimistic assessment of the possibility of a Mexican art that would not simply be reducible to its iconic inscription by the fictive constructs of the national past. Bruce-Novoa examines this crucial period in which many Mexican artists successfully joined a post–World War II international artistic dialogue by refusing to merely serve the nationalist ideologies that had gradually come to coopt the work of artists over the previous three decades. Bruce-Novoa wants to maintain the possibility of speaking of an "artistic expression that is both national and progressively international" by demonstrating how Goeritz's work, in the face of fiercely conservative nationalist pressures, asserts its Mexicanness merely by its own passionate contiguity with Mexican spaces and times rather than by an appeal to the coded, iconic references of a mythical national past.

The two chapters that follow Bruce-Novoa's continue the contemporary critical dialogue with the ghosts of Mexican modernism, but specifically through a deliberate contrast of works and texts from that modernist period and more contemporary periods. Karen Cordero Reiman improvises her own phenomenological approach in contrasting corporeal references in the installation work of contemporary artists Silvia Gruner and Gerardo Suter with works by two of Mexico's most prominent post-Revolutionary muralists, Diego Rivera and Jose

Clemente Orozco. Cordero finds less problematic than Debroise or Bruce-Novoa the issue of Mexican art's references to a national past, and is more interested in utilizing that referential function to illuminate problems of the representation of sensorial experience in the earlier works—an aspect of muralism that has not been discussed much—by means of the contrast with Gruner and Suter, in whose work that experience is critically and ironically foregrounded.

Susan Schaffer likewise contrasts artistic works between the same periods and also brings literature into the discussion. In telling the story of Diego Rivera's abandonment of his Russian lover in Paris, the painter Angelina Beloff, her essay suggests an ironic allegory of the relation between the incipient Mexican nationalist art of the 1920s and European art. Schaffer does not just tell that story, however, but interrogates a conflict of its many narrations, focusing on Elena Poniatowska's aggressive rewriting of Bertram Wolfe's biography of Rivera in her novel, *Querido Diego, te abraza Quiela.* Schaffer's reading of the novel meticulously examines the "palimpsestic strategies" used by its author to ironically subvert Wolfe's representation of Beloff, who, in addition to being Rivera's companion in Paris for many years, also served as the subject for many of his cubist experiments, had a child with him, and was subsequently abandoned by him, along with his engagement with European art, upon his return to Mexico, where he quickly became consumed with the national muralism project. Schaffer weaves together discussions of text and image, demonstrating how Poniatowska's fictive re-creation of the same material worked over by Wolfe both parodies and revises the earlier version in the opening of an ironic space for her subject "in which room is allotted for complexity, contradiction, and evolution."

Jacobo Sefamí's contribution occupies a liminal space between the chapters of the first and the second parts of the collection, with its reading of poetry associated with an event that many critics (at least until the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas) often have sought to take as a new historical point of reference for Mexican art and culture beyond the Revolution: the 1968 Tlatelolco student massacre. Sefamí seeks to demonstrate that the work of poet David Huerta, often characterized as emblematic of an aesthetic oblivious to concerns of national history, is, in fact, deeply preoccupied with its relation to that history. He shows through careful detail that Huerta, who was himself a witness to the massacre, not only treats Tlatelolco thematically but also allows it to be one of the "animat-

ing forces" of his poetry. Sefamí traces this theme throughout Huerta's production in a trajectory in which the "emblematic" function of Tlatelolco is seen to persist as an "allegory of a moment which came to a halt, a space of time which affixed itself to memory."

Danny Anderson leads the collection toward a questioning of traditional assumptions about the Mexican literary canon by examining contemporary struggles for positioning in the politics of the increasingly market- and global-oriented publishing world, recalling that the category of "literature," beyond its critical history as an institution in itself, undergoes continual redefinitions through the disputes and contingencies of the cultural sphere. His examination of recent literary production in Mexico focuses on the complex interactions between shifting social demands, market factors, and competitions for critical legitimacy among Mexican cultural institutions. Anderson's concern is to trouble the facile binary that is produced out of public debates on literature in Mexico: the division of literature into categories of "light" (associated with "feminine" and mass market tastes) and "serious" (associated with disinterested, "serious" aesthetic and formal experimentation). He shows how such a dichotomy ignores a highly productive, contingent, third category or noncategory. This alternative often emerges from what is considered "light" literature and often is associated with female writers, but it is marked by an unpredictable critical power that is formal, thematic, as well as social. Posing important questions about the horizons of literary and cultural production in Mexico, Anderson both implicitly and explicitly responds to factors on the cultural landscape that, despite their differences, are increasingly shared by North American and Mexican contexts.

Rebecca Biron is likewise concerned with the centrism of Mexican literary culture, more specifically with its problematic relation to gender, in her examination of the Mexican literary and media establishment's treatment of writer Elena Garro upon her 1993 return to Mexico following twenty years of exile in France. Just as Schaffer suggests Rivera's return from Europe as an ironic allegory of Mexican muralism's rejection of its own necessary "outside" in a European aesthetic, Biron presents Garro's exile as a metaphor for what she sees as the Mexican cultural establishment's problematic relation to gender. Biron takes as her starting point a contrast between the national eulogies for Garro and her former husband Octavio Paz, who both passed away in the same year. She proceeds to show how Mexican media and literary culture have tended to deny Garro's work a consideration on its own

terms beyond the extractions and inventions of biographical allegory, particularly those associated with Garro's relation with Paz. Biron does not linger in her critical observation of this critical-media space but performs a careful reading of Garro's literary texts themselves, working around the cultural misconceptions that have led to "the production and erasure of Garro's voice in contemporary Mexico."

The theme of exile and transnational movement is given a different take in Montserrat Galí Boadella's discussion of Quebecois artist René Derouin. Galí Boadella discusses the history of "travelling artists" in Mexico and the strong romantic impulses behind their fascination with Mexico, in order to contrast them with the peculiar transnational syncretism of the experiences and work of Derouin. She characterizes the latter as a "migrant" rather than a "traveler," given the way Derouin's critical and artistic fascination with Mexico goes beyond a mere romantic distancing, with the country literally becoming the material of his work as well as—in a contrast with Quebec—the object of theoretical reflection on space, culture, and history. Galí Boadella traces out a detailed critical trajectory of Derouin's work, showing its technical and aesthetic development, in the process also reading Derouin's own conceptual observations through his written commentary in personal diaries and exhibition texts.

Debra Castillo interrogates the literary work of another kind of postmodern artist working at the limits of not only national but also gender boundaries. She characterizes the work of Tijuana writer Rosina Conde as marked by a "consciousness of liminality" that "extends itself to all realms of experience," including both the lives of ordinary middle-class people as well as the accented experience of prostitutes and striptease artists. For Castillo, the unhallowed spaces and unstable specificities of Conde's writing, combined with its refusal to accommodate the binaries of interpretive ideological closure, result in a productive instability. Conde's work is a pronounced refusal of erasure on the still-centralized Mexican national cultural scene. It also becomes a locus for questioning the regional and gender binaries that structure discursive constructions of Mexicanness. At the same time, however, Castillo acknowledges that Conde's stories refuse hospitality to their readers; their estrangement effects a productive sense of unease and questioning within the critic's own specific North American institutional context. Castillo thus shows Conde speaking to contemporary issues of criticism in the North American context.

Closing the collection is a chapter that at first might not appear to fit into a collection of this type, although its preoccupation with the Mexico-U.S. border meshes thematically with Castillo's article. "Fitting in," however, is precisely what is at issue, and Rolando Romero's chapter, by not fitting in, perhaps destabilizes lingering tendencies of the collection as a whole to maintain its scope within the geographical and historical borders of Mexico. Romero takes the collection across the border to dialogue directly with critical treatments of the postmodern hybrid in both Mexican and North American criticism, focusing specifically on the conflation of the figure of the Chicano with the place of the "alien" in the film *Blade Runner.* Romero critiques problems of cultural representation in the film and reflects more broadly on postmodernism's "inability to stare cultural hybridity in the face." He questions the tropes of avoidance that often permeate postmodern logic in its relation to that hybridity, tropes that cast the hybrid other as always either past or future but refuse to acknowledge it as an effect in the present, a logic that too easily becomes a convenient avoidance of encounter. In this way, flying in the face of a variety of postmodern formulations, Romero presents a reminder of postmodern criticism's privileging of deferrals over promises and interruptive possibilities. Romero haunts the critical tropes of postmodernism without seeking a resting place among them. He speaks from the outside, and perhaps in this sense, within the collection as a whole, speaks as the deterritorialization and continued effect of Mexico.

NOTES

1. See also Miller's more recent formulation of the challenges facing the academic disciplines of the contemporary university in his 1999 work (coauthored with Manuel Asensi).
2. In one of the most recent examples, an article devoted to religion, Derrida expands the concept of globalism to its widest implications in philosophical, economic, technoscientific, legal, and religious terms, coining the word "globalatinization" (in the French original, "*mondialatinización*") to refer to this "hyper-imperialist appropriation that has been underway now for centuries" (1996, 29) and is now led by Anglo-American language and culture. Globalism, Derrida states, is "at the same time hegemonic and finite, ultra-powerful and in the process of exhausting itself" (1996, 13). It is "running out of breath, however irresistible and imperial it still may be . . . [and] this expiring breath is blasting the ether of the world" (1996, 29).

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