

**Dynamic Identities and the Construction of Transcultural Architectures**

**Felipe Hernandez M**



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## **Contents.**

### **Abstract**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One: The Transcultural Phenomenon</b>	<b>17</b>
1.1 Tracing Transculturation in Latin American Theory	19
1.1.1 The Politics of Transculturation: Fernando Ortiz and Cuban Theory	19
1.1.2 Transculturation Theory in the Andean Region	26
1.1.3 Narrative Transculturation	29
1.1.3.1 The Lettered City	33
1.2 Becoming Transcultural: A Post-Structuralist Approach	40
1.2.1 The Rhizomatic Model of Becoming	42
1.2.2 The Analogy with the Orchid and the Wasp	46
1.2.2.1 The Concept of Becoming	48
1.2.2.2 Power and the Majorities	50
1.3 Rethinking Transculturation	52
1.3.1 Reconciling Transculturation	54
1.3.1.1 Displacements: The Problem of Migration	54
1.3.1.2 The Question of Consumption and the Dynamics of Transculturation	58
✓ 1.3.2 Transcultural Architecture	62
<b>Chapter Two: Translation and the Evanescence of the Category of the Original</b>	<b>69</b>
2.1 On the Notions of Literary and Cultural Translation	71
2.1.1 Unsettling the Primacy of the Original	71
2.1.2 Translation as Transformation: Or Difference in Translation	75
2.2 The Case of Postcolonial Translation	81
2.2.1 Translation as the Performative Nature of Cultural Communication	81
✓ 2.2.2 The Disruptive Capacity of the Notion of Translation in the Postcolonial Context	84



2.3 Cultural Translation in the Latin American Context	88
2.3.1 Appropriating, Translating, and Transgressing in Latin America	88
2.3.2 From Cultural Translation to Cultural Hybridization: The Unfinalizability of the process	94
<b>Chapter Three: The Cultural Politics of Hybridization</b>	<b>99</b>
✓ 3.1 Cultural Dialogics	101
3.1.1 Heteroglossia as a Cultural Condition	103
3.1.2 Dialogue and Dialogization	108
3.1.3 Hybridization	113
3.2 Cultural Difference, Hybridity and the Postcolonial Situation	117
3.2.1 Multitemporal/Multidimensional: Building the Ambivalent Modern Nation	118
3.2.2 Cultural Difference and the Agency of Minorities	123
3.2.3 Hybridity and its Subversive Value	127
3.3 The Hybridization Debate in Latin America	134
3.3.1 The Quest for a Differential Identity: Against Monolithic Views of Latin American Culture	137
✓ 3.3.2 From Cultural Heterogeneity to Cultural Hybridization	140
3.3.3 The Current Debate on Hybridity in Contemporary Latin American Culture	146
<b>Chapter Four: Theorizing Latin American Architectures</b>	<b>157</b>
4.1 Post-Independent Reactions: A Historical Excursus	159
4.1.1 Neo-Classicism and the Arrival of the European Styles	160
4.2 Recent Architectural Discourses in Latin America	165
4.2.1 Appropriating Architecture	167
4.2.1.1 Fernández's Critique to the Notions of Modernity, Modernism and Modernization	167
4.2.1.2 The Process of Appropriation in Fernandez's Discourse	172
4.2.2 An-Other Latin American Architecture	177
4.2.2.1 Spirit of Place and Spirit of Time	181
4.2.2.2 "Other" Architecture	186

4.2.3 A Divergent Architecture	189
4.2.3.1 Critical Background	190
4.2.3.2 The Notion of Symbiosis	194
4.3 Architectural Theory in Colombia	197
4.3.1 The Notion of Syncretism	198
4.3.2 The Notion of Architectural Hybridization: A Concept Thoroughly Mistaken	204
<b>Chapter Five: Dynamic Identities and the Construction of Transcultural Architectures</b>	<b>215</b>
✓ 5.1 The Unseen Side of the Museum: Reading Between Architecture, History and Cultural Theory	218
5.2 Can the User of Architecture Speak?	227
5.3 Cultural Difference and the Architectural Practices of the Minorities	235
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>244</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>267</b>

## **Abstract.**

Latin American architectural theory has not been successful in dealing with the complexity of Latin American cultures, and in engaging with the whole range of architectural practices that take place in the continent's cities and buildings. On the contrary, in most cases, architectural theories have been used as means to create hegemonic architectural narratives and systems of referentiality through which a sense of homogeneity could be reconstituted. Consequently, architectural theory appears to be in radical opposition to the realities of Latin American cultures and societies.

This thesis does therefore engage in detail with cultural theory and postcolonial discourse, and uses post-structuralist methods of critique, as a means to engage with the whole range of politics and sociocultural practices with which architecture is inherently related. Approached via the work of various cultural theorists, the complex reality of Latin America is not seen as a problem that requires resolution through the elimination of differences. On the contrary, and unlike architects and architectural theorists, cultural theorists aim their efforts at revealing those areas of conflict where the very fractures of Latin American cultures can be found, and where diverse and often antagonistic sociocultural groups clash while attempting to negotiate their differences. Only in this way would it be possible to create a cultural politics of difference in order to deal with cultural multiplicity in situations of inequality.

Engagement with broader aspects of cultural theory will provide the possibility of questioning the validity and sufficiency of existing methods of architectural analysis in Latin America. That is why the most prominent theoretical models that have been created in Latin America during the past twenty-five years will here be placed under scrutiny. Greater engagement with issues outside an exclusively architectural discourse will not only bring to light the shortcomings of existing methods of analysis, but also provide the means to correct and enhance them. In this way, aspects that have been little theorized or which have remained invisible to the eyes of architects and architectural theorists will be revealed. The theories examined throughout this thesis will also provide the means to validate minority architectural practices that have so far been dismissed for not corresponding to parameters established by hegemonic architectural narratives.



## Introduction.

During the past twenty-five years, various theoretical models have been created in order to describe and analyze contemporary architectural practices in Latin America. However, none of these models has been entirely successful in dealing with the complexity and dynamism of the Latin American cultures in respect of the particularities of architectural production. In fact, in many cases, architects and architectural theorists have been exclusive in their approach to cultures, in general, and architecture, in particular. Consequently, they have failed to incorporate the totality of architectural practices that participate in the development of Latin American cities and buildings, and have overlooked the existence of cultural difference.

Recent Latin American architectural theory, with very few exceptions, strives towards the construction of monolithic and univocal architectural narratives with which to validate certain practices and disqualify others. Hegemonic architectural narratives have generally been created and appropriated on the basis of an exclusive selection of paradigmatic buildings that can be used as referents for the continued judgment of architectural production. The theoretical work of the Chilean architects Cristián Fernández Cox (*Modernidad apropiada*) and Enrique Browne (*Otra arquitectura latinoamericana*) can be taken as examples of this trend. As with the work of other architects and theorists like Carlos Comas (Brazil), Germán Téllez (Colombia), and Marina Waisman (Argentina), among others, Fernández and Browne's theses are supported by the same case studies. Particular attention is therefore paid to the work of Luis Barragán in México, Eladio Dieste in Uruguay and Rogelio Salmona in Colombia. It is not coincidental that, while the buildings designed by the latter group of architects are taken to represent Latin American architectural practices, they also comply with the parameters of modernist Euro-American architectural narratives. In other words, the buildings designed by Barragán, Dieste and Salmona are celebrated

because they have reached a high degree of refinement in comparison with Euro-American architectures despite the fact that they were designed and built in Latin America. "Sameness" is seen as their main quality, and difference is understood as a pre-given concept, a fixed category, associated with issues of ethnicity and geographical location. In other words, the buildings produced by the above-mentioned architects are seen to embody the same values found in modern Euro-American architecture, and are different only due to the fact that they exist in Latin America. Existing methods of architectural analysis are not prepared to deal with the concept of difference. On the contrary, there is a tendency amongst architects and architectural theorists to create systems of referentiality so as to reconstruct a sense of order and homogeneity. However, as I will demonstrate in this dissertation, order and homogeneity have never really existed, and, therefore, could never be truly recreated.

One of the reasons why recent theories have not been entirely successful in dealing with the complexity of Latin American architectural production could be the fact that architects and architectural theorists have limited themselves largely to an architectural context and have failed to engage sufficiently with broader cultural issues. Therefore, methods of architectural analysis are disconnected from the entire spectrum of cultural, social and political circumstances with which architecture is inherently connected. Architects appear to have withdrawn themselves from the realities of the social sphere in order to produce hegemonic systems of referentiality, and pedagogical architectural narratives for an imagined community. This attitude occludes the complexity, dynamism and convoluted historical experiences of Latin American people. Systems of referentiality and pedagogical architectural narratives are two different terms yet they are not mutually exclusive. The former is associated with a common practice amongst architects in Latin America as well as in other contexts: the exclusive selection of paradigmatic buildings to support architectural



criticism. The latter refers to the narratives that are created to endow such buildings with referential value. The main problem found in the creation of systems of referentiality and pedagogical architectural narratives is that both need to be based on binary logics that qualify and disqualify architectural practices. This is seen in the case of Fernández and Browne's work whose systematic selection of buildings designed by Barragán, Dieste and Salmona turns into referential systems supported by their own pedagogical narratives through which non-dominant architectural practices are ignored for the sake of creating coherent cannon. Instead of making visible the true conditions of contemporary Latin American cultures, architectural theories tend to homogenize cultures and societies thereby ignoring situations of inequality and inequity. Consequently, the methods of analysis currently in use for the examination of architectural practices contribute to the hiding of the heterogeneous and fragmented reality of Latin American cultures as well as the discontinuous and conflictive historical experiences of the peoples who inhabit Latin American cities and buildings.

It will also be demonstrated throughout this thesis that the two prevailing theses about Latin American architecture —Modernidad apropiada and Otra arquitectura latinoamericana— are informed by theoretical models that are equally ill-suited to deal with the complex realities of contemporary Latin American cultures, as is the case of critical regionalism. The term critical regionalism was apparently coined by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in the late 1970s. However, it was only in the 1980s that the term reached its highest point of development and popularity through the influential work of Kenneth Frampton. Critical regionalism points towards the recuperation of the values of the local as a source of opposition against an emergent homogenizing modern culture. Therefore, it provided one of the first opportunities for Latin American architectural theorists to engage with debates about the conflict between the global and the local as well as between the modern and the traditional. It

is clear in the work of Tzonis, Lefaivre and Frampton that critical regionalism is intended to be a strategy of resistance against the alienation produced by forces of globalization. It therefore tries to mediate between homogenizing forces of modernization and the historical continuity of traditional local cultures in specific regions so as to alleviate the effect that the former would have upon the latter, and hence prevent their disappearance. However, in order for critical regionalism to be a strategy of resistance it must depart from the premise that modernization implies the fusion and further disappearance of non-dominant cultures. Such a premise has been dismissed by recent cultural theories that demonstrate the impossibility of cultures' disappearing as a result of processes of cultural merging brought about by modernization and other globalizing forces. As I will prove below, especially in chapters one to three, cultures maintain rhizomatic forms of constant interaction. These forms allow cultures to change: they renovate themselves in a process of permanent becoming, yet never thoroughly synthesize —the outcome that critical regionalism proposes to resist. It thus become clear that critical regionalism is not only based on a series of rigid binary structures, but also that it reinforces hierarchical structures according to which so-called central cultures are endowed with the power to possibly erase local forms of culture.

In addition, Frampton's notion of critical regionalism appears to be reduced to an architectural aesthetic. It is clear that the theoretical synthesis between the global and the local is reduced, by analogy, to a formal program. Frampton analyses a series of examples, which, in his eyes, clearly illustrate this synthesis. Thus by presenting a number of exemplary buildings, he tacitly prescribes an aesthetic for architecture in which the directive is to achieve "a revealed conjunction between, on the one hand, the rationality of normative technique, and on the other, the arationality



of idiosyncratic form[s];"<sup>1</sup> this is the way in which a critical regionalist architecture comes finally into fruition thus mediating between the global and local. The fact that some of the examples used by Frampton to support his thesis are also used by Latin American theorists such as Fernández and Browne in order to support their own theories demonstrates the close relation that exists between these two theoretical positions.

Experience proves that the complex and dynamic reality of Latin American cultures, as well as the multiplicity of forms of architectural production in the continent, escapes stratification, or, in other words, classification within static systems of differentiation. As mentioned above, the creation of referential systems of analysis occludes the realities of our cultures and the great diversity of architectures that coexist in the space of our cities. For this reason, it is necessary to develop new and more dynamic methods of architectural analysis. Not only would this be helpful to examine and achieve better understanding of architectures that are produced by paradigmatic architects such as Barragán, Dieste or Salmons, among others, but also to include non-dominant architectures produced by minority groups that have so far been neglected. As a result, the univocality of existing architectural discourses would be placed under scrutiny, and doors would be opened to engage with other areas of architecture that remain untheorized. However, in order to do so, we must depart from traditional structures according to which Latin American cultures and architectures develop taxonomically and unidirectionally in favor of models that allow for the inclusion of the notions of difference and multiplicity. For this reason, I will engage largely with cultural theory and postcolonial discourse, and use post-structuralist methods of critique, in order to create avenues of collaboration between two disciplinary areas that might appear to be thoroughly disconnected.

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<sup>1</sup> FRAMPTON, Kenneth, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in: FOSTER, Hal, editor, *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in the Postmodern Culture*,

The work of Homi Bhabha, along with that of other postcolonial and Latin American cultural theorists, will be central to the argument developed throughout this thesis. Bhabha's argument appears to be very complex. Nonetheless, it is based upon post-structuralist methods of critique. His point of departure is the existence of differences, cultural differences. This position allows Bhabha to challenge views according to which cultural identity is a fixed category, and nations are homogeneous, static formations [see chapter three]. Instead, Bhabha reveals that the coexistence of different cultures within the national space generates contesting positions that constantly struggle for survival producing liminal spaces where collective as well as individual identities are negotiated. As Bhabha himself explains:

The move away from the singularities of Class or gender as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions — of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation— that inhabit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond the narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on the moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference.<sup>2</sup>

The work of Bhabha, and other postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Tejaswini Niranjana, introduces transcendental political issues and brings the agency of minority groups to the forefront of sociocultural debate. Some Latin American theorists, especially diasporic figures like Román de la Campa, Rita De Grandis and Abril Trigo who work in North America, have elaborated extensively on postcolonial theory. Despite the fact that they heavily criticize its applicability in the Latin American context, they appropriate it due to its deconstructive capacity. Deconstruction is associated with postcolonial theory for it provides the theoretical means to dismantle hierarchical sociocultural structures that support claims for cultural authority. Additionally, deconstruction appears also to be useful in order to

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Seattle, Bay Press, 1983 p 22



examine the internal situation of contemporary Latin American cultures as well as their relations with the so-called centers and with other peripheries [see chapters two and three]. In the same way that Bhabha and Spivak, for example, advocate achieving a higher degree of political specificity, Latin American theorists claim that postcolonial theory needs to be used carefully when examining the particularities of our continent. This is because the historical experiences of Latin American peoples differ greatly from those in other contexts such as India and North America.

The use of cultural theory, postcolonial discourse, and post-structuralist methods of critique will allow architects and architectural theorists to visualize, from an architectural point of view, that Latin American cultures are dynamic, heterogeneous and complex formations with discontinuous histories, whose components maintain agonistic relations that never disappear in a fusion. [Although architects seem to be aware of these conditions, they have been unable to produce adequate theoretical and practical models in order to respond to these realities and to the complexity of architectural production.] This thesis will therefore open an avenue to link architecture with various areas of cultural theory. Such a connection will reveal numerous aspects that have not been thoroughly examined, and which, in some cases, have even been completely neglected because existing theories are not equipped with the tools to undertake such a task. By revealing areas that have so far remained invisible and untheorized, the possibilities for further development in architectural theory and practice will be enhanced. This is because, as I will argue in chapter five and in the conclusion, contemporary architectural practices have to be rethought if we want to respond more precisely and productively to the sociocultural and political situation of Latin American people and their conditions of life.

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<sup>2</sup> BHABHA, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994 p 1

Chapter one will provide a thorough analysis of the term transculturation, which is one of the most controversial terms that have been created in order to describe and analyze processes of cultural formation in Latin America. The term transculturation has an enormous value within Latin American theory because of all the terms that have been used, and which will be explored throughout this thesis, it is the only one that was produced in Latin America. It is therefore associated with a specific geopolitical context and with the particular conditions that surround Latin American cultures. Although it was created by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in order to study the cultural relations between Cuba and other cultures, the concept of transculturation has also been used to analyze the cultural conditions of the entire continent, and, most recently, other contexts. The term transculturation is therefore a primary tool to model the dynamic complexity of contemporary Latin American cultures with political specificity. In the first section of this chapter I will map the development of the notion of transculturation paying particular attention to the work of Fernando Ortiz, José María Arguedas and Ángel Rama and to the new political agendas that they introduce through their work. As they present it, the term transculturation challenges theoretical positions according to which cultures developed taxonomically and unidirectionally. By taxonomically and unidirectionally I refer to systems of classification based on linear tree-like structures that follow orderly lines in one direction. In other words, the concept of transculturation calls into question theories that consider Latin American cultures as the result of a simple and unproblematic fusion between Spanish and local indigenous cultures. Despite the fact that Ortiz, Arguedas and Rama succeeded in challenging previous hegemonic models of cultural interaction, their work presented a series of shortcomings mainly in the use of inadequate analogies and hyperbolic terminology. For this reason, in the second section, the notion of transculturation will be reassessed via post-structuralist theory. Here, I will elaborate on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's philosophy, especially the notion of the rhizome, which lies at the center of their work. In this way,



the notion of transculturation will be endowed with a renewed and more effective critical power to deal with the conditions that surround contemporary Latin American cultures. Some of these conditions may not have existed when the term was created. More than a cultural process, transculturation will be presented as a cultural condition that involves a multiplicity of cultures and implies the existence of numerous processes of cultural interaction.

Thus, in chapter two, I will examine the concept of translation. It will be understood as one of the processes that takes place within conditions of transculturation. The notion of translation stands to explain the transfer, displacement and transformation of culture across different and contesting cultural sites. It therefore acquires subversive connotations as it unsettles foundational structures based upon the law of origin according to which Latin American cultures are seen as copies of an original locus of enunciation: European culture. In order to analyze thoroughly the critical potential of the concept of translation, I will elaborate on the work of Walter Benjamin whose essay "The Task of the Translator" has become a landmark within translation studies. Benjamin's work on translation is important because he eliminates the hierarchical structures that give priority to the original over the translation. The work of Walter Benjamin leads to the work of another paradigmatic philosopher of the twentieth century who has also elaborated on the notion of translation, and who has also had a great deal of influence within recent architectural debates: Jacques Derrida. Derrida takes Benjamin's ideas on translation further by radically proposing that the translation becomes the original. In this way, he carries out a complete reassessment of the notion of originality in languages and cultures. Therefore, no language or culture could ever be seen as pure, homogeneous or complete in itself. Another important aspect of his work is the introduction of the notion of deconstruction, a notion that plays an important role within postcolonial discourse. In fact, Derrida's work will serve as a bridge to link literary with postcolonial theory.

Homi Bhabha and Tejaswini Niranjana are two postcolonial theorists who explore the deconstructive capacity of the notion of translation in order to examine the colonial situation. They add an important political component to the discussion of cultural translation revealing its subversive capacity. For them, translation is a deconstructive act of re-writing history from the perspective of previously colonized peoples. In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the work of some Latin American theorists who have appropriated translation theory in order to examine processes of cultural formation in the continent. It will also become clear at the end of this chapter, that translation is a term with extraordinary potential for the continued study of architectural practices in Latin America.

In chapter three I will undertake a comprehensive analysis of the notions of hybridity and hybridization within cultural and postcolonial theories. As in the previous case, hybridization is understood as one of the processes that takes place within conditions of transculturation. However, unlike translation, which has clear physical implications, hybridization is an abstract —although not necessarily intangible— process that explains what happens at the interior of every culture as a result of their constant and unavoidable interaction. This chapter starts with an analysis of the work of the Russian philologist Mikhail Bakhtin who used the notion of hybridization in order to analyze languages and literature. In examining the work of Bakhtin, I will pay careful attention to the notions of heteroglossia and dialogization. For the purposes of this thesis, heteroglossia is understood as a cultural condition rather than as an exclusively linguistic phenomenon. For this reason, the concept of heteroglossia appears to be similar to the notion of transculturation. I will then elaborate on the terms dialogization and hybridization in Bakhtin's work. These two terms explain the various processes behind the transformation of languages and cultures, and bring to the fore the agency of the author. The way in which Bakhtin works with the notions of heteroglossia, dialogization and hybridization is politically subversive in the context of



the Soviet nation because it contradicts the principle of cultural homogeneity. For this reason, some postcolonial theorists are indebted to the work of Bakhtin and to his notion of hybridization.

Any discussion about the concept of hybridization in the context of cultural studies would appear to be incomplete without a reading of Bhabha, the figure who has most notably developed the notion of hybridization in his writings on colonial and postcolonial discourse. In order to explain the dynamics of cultural hybridization, Bhabha devises the term cultural difference. Cultural difference replaces the term "multiculturalism" with which, according to Bhabha, the conflictive reality of the interaction between cultures is occluded. For the term multiculturalism suggests that diverse cultures coexist harmoniously within the space of homogeneous nations. Thus, the term cultural difference brings to the fore the tensions and agonistic relations that exist between and within cultures. As a result, the homogeneity of the nation is placed under scrutiny, and the agency of the minorities is also brought to light. Hybridization is thus a politically laden concept with an extraordinary potential for studying the situation of contemporary Latin American cultures. In the next section of this chapter, I will elaborate on the work of Néstor García Canclini and other Latin American theorists who use the concept of hybridization in order to analyze carefully processes of cultural production in Latin America.

From the work of the above-mentioned theorists, it will become clear that the notion of hybridization has been thoroughly mistaken within architectural debates. Architects and architectural theorists have used the notion of hybridization only to describe the physical and aesthetic characteristics of buildings and cities. In so doing, they remove most of the political potential that the term has gained in other disciplinary areas. For this reason, I will argue that in order to use the notion of hybridization to its full potential within architectural debates it is necessary to close the gap that

separates architecture from cultural theory. If used appropriately, the notion of architectural hybridization will make visible the full range of architectural practices that take place in Latin America —dominant and non-dominant.

Chapter four provides a careful analysis of the three most sophisticated architectural theses that have been produced in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. They are: *La modernidad apropiada* [Appropriated Modernity] by Cristián Fernández Cox; *Otra Arquitectura Latinoamericana* [Other Latin American Architecture], by Enrique Browne; and *Arquitectura descentrada* [De-Centered Architecture], by Marina Waisman. These theories will be examined in the light of the theories and ideas presented in the previous three chapters. The notions of transculturation, translation and hybridization provide sufficiently strong arguments to carry out a thorough assessment of the theses produced by Fernández, Browne, and Waisman. Although their work will be heavily criticized, the aim of such criticism is not to dismiss the value of any of their theories, nor is the purpose to render their theories inadequate. On the contrary, the use of the notions of transculturation, translation and hybridization helps to detect where their theories fail, and provide the tools to correct such failure and enhance their critical potential. It will therefore be proposed that Fernández's thesis can be enhanced via theories of translation, while the efficacy of Browne's notion of other Latin American architecture could be strengthened by using appropriately the concept of hybridization. Marina Waisman's work is found to be the most critically effective though incomplete due to her unfortunate and sudden death. For this reason, it is suggested that the post-structuralist methods of critique used throughout this thesis could help to develop her ideas further, and could also be used in order to test her theoretical proposal on the ground.



In addition to the previous three architectural theses, I will also examine the work of two Colombian theorists: Ricardo Castro and Carlos Rueda. On the one hand, Castro is an experienced theorist who has worked extensively on the *oeuvre* of Rogelio Salmona and has produced an interesting analytical model based on the notions of syncretism and the marvelous real. He is interested in the way in which different referents and architectural motifs coexist in the work of Salmona so as to produce a marvelous architecture that conveys a sense of wonder. Despite the fact that his theory will be found to be theoretically sound, it will be argued that he reduces architectural criticism to the analysis of forms. This renders his theory inadequate for the study of other cases. His success relies on the fact that he delimits the margins of his inquiry leaving aside other issues that might jeopardize his discourse. On the other hand, the work of Rueda will prove to be inhabited by multiple inconsistencies. Rueda has published very little work, and most of it relates to the notion of hybridization. However, his idea of hybridization appears to be reductive and politically ineffective. As mentioned above, Rueda uses the term hybridization only as a descriptive term but does not engage with its full cultural and political potential. Consequently, hybridization serves only to highlight the coexistence of different materials, architectural referents and motifs in the work of certain, exclusively selected, architects. Rueda does not attempt to examine the relationship that the so-called hybrid buildings that he uses as examples maintain with those which inform their architecture. In other words, the subversive value of the notion of hybridization is not explored so as to establish whether hybrid Latin American architectures challenge hegemonic architectural narratives. Another aspect that proves to be unsatisfactory in Rueda's work is the fact that he selects exemplary architecture to support his argument when, as mentioned above, the notion of hybridization brings to the fore the existence of cultural differences and the agency of the minorities. Thus, in chapter four, I demonstrate the reasons why none of the most sophisticated theoretical models produced in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth

century has been entirely successful. They have made visible the complex condition of architectural practices and have offered partial alternative solutions, but they have not been able to engage with the totality of architectural practices that exist in Latin America.

In chapter five, all the theories and concepts developed throughout this thesis will be put to work in order to analyze three cases in the context of Colombia. The reason why the critical territory is here geographically reduced to Colombia is because this will allow me to achieve greater political efficacy, an issue I will be advocating. Colombian architecture is also amongst the least theorized internationally. As with literature, music and other arts, Argentine, Brazilian, Cuban and Mexican architectures have received greater attention whereas the Andean region has not been sufficiently theorized. For this reason, it has been noticed that Colombian theorists, more than in other contexts, remain attached to traditional and inefficient methods of architectural critique that prevent them from engaging with the whole spectrum of architectural practices and with issues of paramount importance such as the architecture of the minorities. No recognized theoretical model has been produced in Colombia to allow the study in detail of non-dominant architectures and to challenge the univocal validity of dominant architectural narratives. It is my contention that the theoretical model that will be created in this thesis will not only reveal the totality of practices that participate in the development of Colombian cities but also provide the tools to analyze, historicize and theorize them properly.

In the first part of chapter five, I will undertake an alternative analysis of the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* designed by Rogelio Salmona. Theorists like Ricardo Castro and Germán Téllez have analyzed this building already. However, their main focus has been placed on questions relative to the form and function of the building. Making use of the notions of hybridization and cultural difference my analysis will reveal



various aspects of the museum that have never been theorized in the past. My intention is to assess whether, despite the spatial qualities of the building, which will at no point be scrutinized, the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* does in fact serve as a representative cultural center for the Quimbaya people and respond to their current needs and realities. In the second section, I will shed light on what I will call the performative temporality of architecture based on the work of Homi Bhabha. In this case I will not analyze a building, but the reaction of Germán Téllez, one of the most prominent architectural theorists in Colombia, to the way in which the community has appropriated a group of houses designed by Salmona. The analysis of this case, which will turn out to be dramatic, will help to prove that architectural theorists in Colombia continue to withdraw themselves from the realities of the social field. In the final section of this chapter, I will continue to look at the notion of architectural performativity. Yet, on this occasion, I will focus on the architectural practices of migrants who move to the main cities of Colombia and settle in areas commonly known as *invasiones*. *Invasiones* are not static conglomerations of migrants in the city; they are the beginning of a dynamic process of adaptation of the territory as well as of their own houses in order to achieve higher standards of living. Although Colombian architectural theorists have deprived minority practices of any architectural importance, I will use the concepts developed throughout this thesis to endow their practices with political and architectural validity. By the end of this chapter, I will have demonstrated that the notions of transculturation, translation and hybridization, along with the post-structuralist methods of critique, explored in this thesis reveal numerous areas that have not been studied before due to the lack of critical engagement with issues outside architecture.

The main objective of this thesis is therefore to engage with broader aspects of cultural and postcolonial theories in order to question the validity and sufficiency of existing methods of architectural analysis in Latin America. However, greater critical

engagement with issues outside architecture will not only serve to bring to light the shortcomings of existing methods of analysis, but also provide the means to correct and enhance them. Additionally, cultural and postcolonial theories will add a greater political component to debates on architecture. Consequently, new questions will be raised and numerous areas that have remained understudied will be revealed. In other words, the theoretical model that will be created in this thesis provides the means to carry out a continued and thoroughgoing analysis of contemporary Latin American architectures drawing on the entirety of practices that take place in the space of our cities and buildings.

I believe that connecting architectural debates with broader sociopolitical issues via cultural and postcolonial theory, as well as philosophy, is important in order to depart from the reductive formalism of existing architectural theory. However, I also believe that engagement with such issues from an architectural perspective will also contribute to the development of debates in other disciplinary areas. In other words, closing the gap and strengthening the link between architecture and other disciplines could be a mutually enriching process.

I will not attempt to provide prescribed solutions for the problems that will be found. The reason is simple: prescribed solutions defeat the argument of the entire thesis. It will become clear that the complexity and dynamism of Latin American cultures escapes stratification and homogenization. Therefore, generalized solutions contradict the realities of transculturation that affect Latin American cultures and architectural practices. This is precisely one of the reasons why previous attempts to theorize architectures in the continent have failed. Instead, I will offer flexible theoretical models and conceptual tools that will become useful for architects in order to respond to particular situations with political specificity.



## Chapter One: The Transcultural Phenomenon.<sup>3</sup>

Transculturation has proved to be a particularly polemical notion among Latin American scholars. The term was coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the early 1940s, and was created to explore in a critical manner the cultural dynamics in operation between Cuba and metropolitan centers. Since then the concept has been applied to the whole of Latin America, and latterly, it has also been used as a generic term in order to examine issues relating to the cultural economy between peripheries and centers. Given the complexity of the various processes of cultural formation constantly at work in Latin America, the notion of transculturation is used in order to defy the assumption that cultures develop taxonomically and unidirectionally. Transculturation refers to a multi-directional and endless interactive process between various cultural systems that is in opposition to unidirectional and hierarchical structures determined by the principle of origin that is always associated with claims for cultural authority. Thus, the term transculturation places the theorization of processes of cultural exchange between peripheries and centers on a more democratic basis. Moreover, transculturation is the antithesis of the notion of acculturation, which implies the supremacy of one cultural system over another, hence the ultimate elimination of non-dominant cultures.

However, the notion of transculturation has lost most of its epistemological and political potential. This could be attributed to the fact that it has been uncritically abused to the point that it has become merely a catchword associated with all kinds of cross-cultural relations. As a consequence, the term has been rendered inadequate to describe and analyze the convoluted condition of the Latin American

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<sup>3</sup> A shorter version of this chapter was published under the title of "The Transcultural Phenomenon, and the Transculturation of Architecture," in the *Journal of Romance Studies*, Volume 2; Number 3, 2003 pp 1 – 15 The article appeared as the introduction to the issue edited by the author of this thesis.

cultures and has subsequently been replaced by other terms that seem more versatile. The most notable amongst those alternative terms is hybridization. Although not unproblematically, hybridization has been used within postmodern, postcolonial, and cultural theory in order to rethink the dynamics of transcultural colonial and postcolonial relations. Hybridization finds its most powerful method of critique in the post-structuralist legacy, especially in its deconstructive practice (a detailed analysis of the notion of hybridization in the context of contemporary cultural and architectural theory in Latin America is provided in chapter three). Nonetheless, I have not found sufficient reasons completely to discard the term transculturation as a tool to analyze critically the complex and performative nature of processes of cultural interaction, especially in the Latin American context. Not only is the term semantically pregnant with possibilities for the continued study of cultural relations, but also the fact that it was coined in Latin America is significant so as to counterbalance terms like acculturation which first appeared in Euro-American academic contexts. For this reason, I will start this dissertation by reviewing the notion of transculturation and its applicability within architectural theory as part of a continued exploration of Latin American architectural practices. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to use more contemporary methods of critique in order to reassess the notion of transculturation so as to reconstitute its epistemological and pragmatic values in responding critically to the current realities of Latin American cultures.

In the first part of this chapter, I will map the development of the term transculturation paying particular attention to the appearance of the term itself and the characteristics of the new cultural politics that it generated. In the second part of the chapter, I will approach the notion of transculturation via post-structuralist theory. The aim of this section is to highlight the inherently subversive capacity carried in the notion's critical and political legacy, and its deconstructive theoretical potential. Having reassessed



the term transculturation via contemporary cultural theory, in the third part of this chapter I will use it in order to examine some contemporary Latin American cultural and architectural conditions.

## **1.1 Tracing Transculturation in Latin American Theory**

Since the notion of transculturation first appeared in the Latin American critical arena in the first half of the twentieth century, the term has undergone three major stages of development. This section will provide a critical insight into the first two of those stages mainly looking at the political implications of Fernando Ortiz's formulation, and Angel Rama's literary approach. I will then take a theoretical detour via post-structuralist theory so as to arrive at a more sophisticated interpretation of transculturation. This will allow me to return to the third stage of development, and to reassess the significance of the notion of transculturation based upon contemporary methods of critique.

### **1.1.1 The Politics of Transculturation: Fernando Ortiz and Cuban Theory.**

To take up the question of transculturation in Fernando Ortiz's work is in a sense to engage with discussions about the cultural politics between Cuba and the metropolitan centers. Although the notion of transculturation has also been used to examine Latin American relations with the centers, and relations amongst cultures in the broadest sense, it is necessary to make clear that it appears as a theoretical tool tightly related to the Cuban context. This does not mean that the notion of transculturation cannot be used to examine other contexts, but that in order to do so it would have to be redefined for each specific context. This is the reason why, in this

chapter, the notion of transculturation will be examined considering the various regions where it has developed. There was no impulse to follow a linear chronological development. Yet, it occurs, coincidentally, that the location of scholarship on the notion of transculturation varies almost in a centrifugal fashion as it evolves in time: from Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s, to the Andes in the 1960s and 1970s, and then to the United States and Europe during the 1980's to the present.

Historical evidence shows that Cuba, as well as most of the Caribbean, is a special phenomenon within Latin America. This is not only due to its insularity, but also due to the fact that almost the entirety of its indigenous population was wiped out by the European colonizer. This implies that the current population of Cuba and the Caribbean consists mainly of immigrants of various origins. Consequently, despite socio-historical similarities with other Latin American contexts, the way in which the cultures of the Caribbean have negotiated (and continue to negotiate) their differences among each other, with the centers, and with other peripheries is different from the way in which other contexts with larger residues of indigenous people have done. This is significant because in spite of transculturation's theoretical versatility it loses its epistemological and its pragmatic content through decontextualized misuse.

As is now well known, the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined the term transculturation in the early 1940s in reaction to the notion of "acculturation" that was in vogue at the time amongst North American anthropologists. In theory, the term acculturation was supposed to "comprehend those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous firsthand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups."<sup>4</sup> Although it has been defined as a process that connotes a certain mutuality,

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<sup>4</sup> SPITTA, Silvia, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*, Houston, Rice University Press, 1995 p 3



acculturation, as Ortiz understood it, was rather different: it was a culturally motivated *misunderstanding* of the term in the sense that, for him, acculturation implied the unidirectional imposition of one dominant culture upon another. His interpretation derives from the fact that, in practice, anthropologists generally studied the impact of acculturation on the colonized, and not on the colonizer. Thus, acculturation actually signifies the loss of culture of the subaltern group. In other words, acculturation is seen here to correspond to modern Euro-American cultural and political homogenizing agendas, and as reductive in its approach to cross-cultural encounters, whereas transculturation is offered as a more dynamic theoretical model in keeping with the reality of such encounters. Transculturation is held to overcome the hierarchical implications of the previous term. By 'transculturation', then, Ortiz means that a factual process of mutual interaction exists between cultures, despite the unequal distribution of power characteristic of transcultural relations.

One of Ortiz's most important theoretical moves was the inclusion of the African component with which he added a higher level of complexity to the processes behind the formation of Cuban culture. In other words, according to traditional theoretical models, Cuban culture, in particular, and Latin American culture in general, were genealogically conceived as the result of the straight mixture between the Spanish and Indigenous cultures. The various African groups that also participated in the process of colonization were never considered an essential component in the process of cultural formation in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. The reason could be that, as subaltern, those groups were also expected to conform to the European cultural cannon. Thus, since all subaltern groups would eventually become homogenized they would be unable to affect each other's culture. Only from this simplistic hierarchical perspective could the importance of African groups be overlooked. The acknowledgement of a third heterogeneous cultural body not only overturns simplistic genealogical structures of cultural originality, but also turns the

question of colonial cultural formation into a much more complex one. I have used the word heterogeneous to describe African cultures because some Latin American theorists who elaborate on the inclusion of African slaves as a third key factor in the process of cultural formation, most notably Silvia Spitta and Abril Trigo, somehow tend to generalize black African culture(s). Therefore, it could be said that to some extent they suffer from the same problem they criticize in dominant constructions of Latin American histories, that is: the simplification of heterogeneous indigenous cultures into one homogeneous body. Historical evidence, as Ortiz himself points out in *Cuban Counterpoint*, proves that black African slaves did not come from one single location but from different places across the African continent. Knowing the vast cultural richness of Africa, it would be easy for us to assume that black African slaves cannot be considered as one homogenous body since their cultures were as fragmented as those of our local Latin American indigenous peoples.

Transculturation's main theoretical and political contribution is seen in the way Ortiz demonstrates that cultures affect each other to a similar extent even if the distribution of power is unequal and unbalanced as in the case colonial relations. Thus, transculturation undermines Western hegemonic claims. To prove this point, Ortiz made use of various examples ranging from the quotidian to the highly theoretical. If transculturation is true, then, it happens at all levels in culture: language, music, everyday objects, literature, politics and architecture. The most representative of Ortiz's metaphors is found in his *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y del azúcar* [translated into English by Harriet De Onis as *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*], in which the term transculturation appears published for the first time. Although the counterpoint metaphor has been heavily criticized, the process of mutual transformation amongst cultures suggested by the notion of transculturation is



eloquently underlined. Since the counterpoint has been described and analyzed by many authors, for the purposes of this thesis, I will simply provide an overview.<sup>5</sup>

The sugar and tobacco *contrapunteo* is situated simultaneously in various contexts and involves social, racial and economic processes that arise out of the production of sugar and tobacco in the island of Cuba. Tobacco is a dark endemic crop, gendered male by local custom, traditionally grown by indigenous peoples on small farms along the banks of rivers. Sugar, for its part, was brought by the European during the colonial period, is colored white and its gender is indefinite. Sugar is grown in large plantations and requires an enormous labor force at the time of the harvest. In fact, Ortiz argues that precisely for this reason black African slaves were brought into the island. While attending to and processing tobacco requires practically no machinery at all, the processing of sugar required enormous machines that eventually brought a precarious industrialization to Cuba. As Ortiz himself puts it, "in agriculture: tobacco brings mini-states and sugar creates latifundia. In their industrial aspects tobacco belongs to the city, sugar to the country. Commercially, the whole world is a market for our tobacco, while our sugar has only one market [the USA]. Centripetalism and centrifugation. The native versus the foreigner. National sovereignty as against colonial status. The proud cigar as against the low sack." <sup>6</sup> In the end, sugar changed the social, political, and economic habits of the whole island, but tobacco changed the leisure habits of the entire world. In this way, the tobacco and sugar counterpoint metaphor highlights the multidirectional nature of transcultural relations in colonial

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<sup>5</sup> For further information about this metaphor see: ORTIZ, Fernando, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onis, Durham, Duke University press, 1995. Specific analysis can also be found in BEVERLEY, John, *Subalternity and Representation: Arguments in Cultural Theory*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1999; DE LA CAMPA, Román, *Latin Americanism*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1999; SPITTA, Silvia, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*, Houston, Rice University Press, 1995

<sup>6</sup> ORTIZ, Fernando, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onis, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995 pp 6 - 7



Cuba since the production of both sugar and tobacco forced the interaction and transformation of at least three different cultural groups.

Although the tobacco and sugar counterpoint metaphor successfully depicts the complex characteristics of the Cuban-Spanish colonial relation, Ortiz also used other metaphors that proved to be less successful and could, to some extent, be considered counter-productive. On the one hand there is the use of the notion of *contrapunteo* itself. Despite its semantic adequacy, the notion of counterpoint is tightly attached to the European musical tradition, specially to the Baroque compositions of musicians such as Bach. For this reason, Ortiz has been criticized for choosing a notion that would eventually reconstitute the foundational authority of European culture.

The use of counterpoint, no matter how well it may serve Ortiz' project, is, however, deeply problematic. For the musicologist, counterpoint pertains specifically to Western polyphonic music, particularly, for example, the compositions of Palestrina and Bach. In this sense, Ortiz' discussion of polyrhythmic Afro-Cuban music in terms of counterpoint seems hardly apt. But more importantly, perhaps, counterpoint in music theory refers to a distinctive characteristic of the notes or melodies that through their tension fuse into a musical composition: their equality. Counterpoint then would seem to be a singularly inadequate metaphor through which to explore transculturation, since it invariably precludes attention to unequal relations of power.<sup>7</sup>

As Spitta suggests, Ortiz's notion of transculturation is put under scrutiny due to the inappropriate use of the term counterpoint and its attachment to the European musical tradition. However, without entirely disagreeing with Spitta, I would rather take as Ortiz's main theoretical problem the fact that the term counterpoint connotes the combination of notes and melodies in a way that tends to occlude hierarchical differences. The ambiguity between fusion and creative coexistence is also clear elsewhere in Ortiz's work. Using biological terms, Ortiz refers to the newness and

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<sup>7</sup> SPITTA, Silvia, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*, Houston, Rice University Press, 1995 p 6

differential character of Cuban culture, employing another metaphor that reconstitutes genealogical structures that he had previously tended to deconstruct. Ortiz maintains that the identity of Cuban culture is comparable to the genetic identity of a child in relation to his or her parents. As Ortiz himself puts it: "the offspring always has something from both parents, but is also always different from each one of them."<sup>8</sup>

I believe that Ortiz did not wholly ignore questions to do with imbalances of power in the colonial relation as Spitta suggests. Yet, I do notice a certain contradiction of terms in Ortiz's discourse. The actual counterpoint of tobacco and sugar seems to suggest that the multidirectional character of the colonial relation, in which not only two but at least three different cultures were involved, would not produce a "new" culture nor would it be possible for the process to come to an end. Notwithstanding that, Ortiz insists on the emergence of a new entity, through metaphors such as a mode of musical composition brings together distinct melodies, or the child who combines features from both parents despite possessing a separate genetic identity. This is problematic because although it undermines cultural hegemony it validates the genealogy and finalizability of cultures. It is my contention that transculturation implies the mutual and constant transformation of each group involved in the transcultural process. In this way, newness will be found in the renovation of every cultural system and not in the appearance of yet another system.

In sum, the main theoretical value of the notion of transculturation in Ortiz's work lies in the fact that it creates a new form of cultural dynamics that understands cultural productivity not in binary terms but as a fluid complex operation amongst differing and contesting cultural sites. In addition, transculturation has a powerful political

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<sup>8</sup> ORTIZ, Fernando, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onis, Durham, Duke University Press, 1995 p 103



potential that undermines hegemonic and homogenizing claims that aim at the ultimate elimination of cultural difference. I hope to have demonstrated in this section that despite transculturation's various theoretical shortcomings, it remains a primary theoretical tool to examine the complex dynamic implicit in the interaction between cultures and the continual redefinition of cultural contexts that it brings about. In the next section I will explore other approaches to the notion of transculturation developed in the Andean region before I look at its more contemporary readings.

### **1.1.2 Transculturation Theory in the Andean Region.**

Unlike in Cuba and the Caribbean where almost the totality of the indigenous population was systematically eliminated, in the Andes indigenous peoples did not entirely disappear. According to historical statistics, it is assumed that 30% of the original indigenous population of the Andes survived the first most dramatic 80 years of Spanish conquest and colonization. Since then, Andean indigenous groups have managed to thrive despite adversities. It is therefore clear that transcultural processes in the Andes differ from those in the Caribbean. In the Andes, studies of transculturation have to look in detail at the dynamics of imposition, resistance, selection, and reconversion of cultural elements in a situation of extreme cultural inequality.

The Peruvian ethnographer and novelist José María Arguedas appropriated Ortiz's notion of transculturation in an insightful analysis of the fragmented nature of Peruvian culture. In order to do so, he had to redefine the term so as to respond to the socio-cultural particularities of Perú. Arguedas pays particular attention to the practices that have allowed indigenous groups to survive, and even to thrive, after



years of brutal miscegenation. Here transculturation is seen positively as an essential process in the 'survival' of cultures.

Through his comparative ethnographic studies, Arguedas attempted to prove that sustained close contact between cultures made it easier for indigenous groups to survive.<sup>9</sup> His examples show how these groups that kept themselves isolated from the influence of the Colonizer disintegrated with the arrival of a new social order and new technologies. On the contrary, groups that had maintained close contact with European cultures after colonization developed antibodies that allowed their survival and further development. Amongst these latter groups there were the rural indigenous who migrated to the cities. Arguedas maintained that rural immigrants regrouped themselves in the cities according to origin, which permitted them to continue to live similarly to the way they lived in their original communities although in a translated and displaced space; from the rural to the urban. In the cities, the space of mass culture, indigenous groups had to reconfigure their identities in order to survive.<sup>10</sup> Surprisingly, these questions have never been critically addressed by architects and architectural theorists in any of the major theoretical projects produced during the second half of the twentieth century. Mass migration into the cities has always been negatively seen from an architectural perspective as it obfuscates architects' and planners' projects to keep cities free from contrasting spatial and aesthetic differences. From a different perspective, the existence of numerous socio-

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<sup>9</sup> See: ARGUEDAS, José María, *Formación de una cultura nacional indoamericana*, México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975

<sup>10</sup> In his book, Arguedas discusses the way Peruvian indigenous peoples have adapted themselves to the urban spaces of the city carrying with them their traditions and social practices. Arguedas also predicts the time when indigenous peoples will no longer be "noticed" as strangers in the city: "Y el mestizo o el indio, encontrará barrios formados por individuos pertenecientes a todos los grados de cultura y condición económica y social. Pasará desapercibido en la ciudad hasta cuando lo desee; pero podrá también abrigarse de la compañía de gentes oriundos de su propio distrito o hacienda, entre gentes de la misma habla, de idéntico status, movidos exactamente por los mismos propósitos, arrojados a la ciudad por causas semejantes. Y llegada la oportunidad revivirá en la ciudad, sin vergüenza y públicamente, las fiestas de su pueblo, y podrá bailar en las calles a la usanza de su Ayllu

cultural differences coexisting in the urban space of Latin American cities can be seen as a condition pregnant with opportunities for architectural exploration.

Although Arguedas also refers to musical rhythms such as Chicha, for example, in order to exemplify the phenomenon of cultural adaptation to the conditions of urban living, it is his work on cities which will be kept at the center of this discussion. The musical analogy, as in the case of Ortiz's counterpoint and in certain Brazilian rhythms such as Samba, proves to be highly problematic. Not only do these examples suggest a process of radical fusion that gives rise to such synthetic rhythms, but they also highlight their subaltern origin in the sense that synthetic Latin American rhythms have to conform to Western musical canons if they are to have any musical repercussion in other contexts. Despite the flaws in Arguedas musical analogy, his work on migration can be seen as a major breakthrough in Latin American cultural studies. Arguedas proved that, contrary to the elite's perception, indigenous minorities and other popular classes were not a homogeneous mass, and that it is the permanent interaction between these heterogeneous and often contesting groups what permits their survival.

Another interesting facet of Arguedas work was his interest in the formal evolution of cities. He saw the configuration of Andean cities as being substantially determined by the various and continuous processes of transculturation that had taken place throughout their history. In what can be seen as an archaeological study of coastal Peruvian cities, Arguedas examines how the colonial city that was conceived as a homogenous symbol of European superiority —a center of absolute power— mutated dramatically with the arrival of a multiplicity of minority groups. Cities became culturally and socially heterogeneous, the urban fabric became fragmented,

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nativo o sumarse a las fiestas y bailes indígenas de la propia ciudad, pues no será extraño a ellas (p 139)."



and the whole image of cities like Lima became "Andeanized." As Spitta puts it in her commentary on Arguedas:

Before these migrations the center of the city coincided with the center of power —the "ciudad letrada." Today, the centers of power have been displaced to the suburbs, and the centers of the city have been taken over by Andean immigrants whose commercial activities take place on the sidewalks next to the big banks, yet operate in the margins.<sup>11</sup>

Arguedas' most important contribution is that he puts under scrutiny the univocal authority of the mestizo elites by highlighting the fact that cultural subjectivity and identity have to be "understood as historical and cultural constructs that are always in flux, split between two or more worlds, cultures, and languages."<sup>12</sup> Arguedas work, carried out in the 50s and 60s, can therefore be taken as a prelude not only to Canclini's work on Latin American urban *hybrid* cultures, but also to other theorists like Bhabha whose work refers to other contexts.

### 1.1.3 Narrative Transculturation.

The work of Arguedas was the point of departure for the Uruguayan theorist Angel Rama to redefine the notion of transculturation in an attempt to analyze Latin America literatures. For Rama, Latin American literatures are situated in a liminal space between various ethnicities and different linguistic traditions. Like Arguedas, Rama understood the heterogeneous and fragmented nature of Latin American cultures, especially in the Andean regions, and proposed that there are two different forms of transculturation that always take place simultaneously. The first form of transculturation occurs mainly between the metropolitan centers and the Latin

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<sup>11</sup> SPITTA, Silvia, *Between Two Waters: Narratives of Transculturation in Latin America*, Houston, Rice University Press, 1995 p 8



American urban centers. The second occurs between the Latin American urban centers and the internal regions. In other words, Rama argued that there are both external and internal processes of transculturation that happen at the same time. However, he gave priority to the second form of transculturation as the most original and specifically Latin American.

Rama's notion of transculturation can be understood as a process of "reconversion"<sup>13</sup> through which "modernizing impulses mediated through the cities were able to be integrated within the regions' own rearticulated structures."<sup>14</sup> In order to support this idea Rama makes use of Vittorio Lanternari's notion of "cultural plasticity," which appears as an alternative to both "cultural vulnerability" and "cultural rigidity." Cultural vulnerability implies the renunciation to one's own culture almost without struggle, whereas cultural rigidity occurs when a culture becomes [self]isolated and rejects contributions by external sources. Cultural plasticity, in Rama's words, is the process:

Whereby a culture is skillfully able to integrate into one product both the traditional and the new. In the latter [cultural plasticity], the most relevant is the attitude of those who do not limit themselves to a syncretism that merely brings together aspects from each culture, but realize that each being a structure, the incorporation of new elements from external sources can be achieved only through the re-articulation of their own (regional) cultural structure whilst appealing to new ways of looking and focusing in their tradition.<sup>15</sup>

However, from the ambiguity of Rama's explanation it becomes clear that the notion of cultural plasticity seems incapable of mediating between the various contesting cultural systems that coexist in every one of the Latin American nations, and which Arguedas had already brought to the forefront of sociological debate in his

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p 8

<sup>13</sup> Reconversion, in Canclini's terms, is the process of adaptation of diverse cultural elements so as to make them compatible with, or respond to, changing cultural, social, commercial, and/or political exigencies.

<sup>14</sup> RAMA, Angel, "Processes of Transculturation in Latin American Narrative," trans. Melissa Moore, in *The Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 1997 pp 155 - 171

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p 158

comparative ethnographic studies.<sup>16</sup> At first, cultural plasticity seems to suggest that cultures are not rigid but instead have a certain flexibility that allows them to reshape themselves so as to respond to ever renewed cultural exigencies brought about by constant transcultural flux. Yet, in the previous quotation, Rama refers to the fusion of cultural elements within binary relations. Although he maintains that cultural plasticity is not limited to a synthesis, his definition starts by showing how cultural plasticity refers to the "integration into one product" of both the traditional and the new. The contradiction between synthesis and continuous renewal remains unresolved in Rama's discourse and cast doubts on the adequacy of appropriating Lanternari's terminology in order to support the notion of transculturation.

Considering that his was essentially a literary theory and not a highly elaborated cultural theory, Rama concentrates on various Latin American writers of the boom period who appear to be useful to develop his notion of transculturation. He called these authors "los transculturadores" —José María Arguedas, Augusto Roa Bastos, Gabriel García Márquez, João Guimarães Rosa, and Juan Rulfo among others. Rama maintains that they appropriated a European genre like the novel in order to write about indigenous local traditions, lifestyles, and myths. In this way, the transculturators radically altered the European realist and naturalist novel genre. In other words, not only did they consciously appropriate and alter the European novel but also advanced a new literary style through their work. In Rama's own words:

The transculturators worked within its [rural] linguistic tradition, not trying to imitate a regional dialect from outside, but elaborating one from within for literary purposes. From the moment [they] felt [they were] insiders and accepted this wholeheartedly and without shame, [they] no longer tried to emulate with careful precision the irregularities and variations from a presumed academic norm, but began to disregard them as a native speaker would do.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See: ARGUEDAS, José María, *Formación de una Cultura Nacional Indoamericana*, México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p 161



Thus, the transaculturators are inserted within the second form of transculturation, or internal transculturation. Nonetheless, in a way that reminds us of Adorno's artistic autonomy<sup>18</sup>, Rama swiftly suggests that the authors of transculturation were able to develop a certain literary autonomy that became an authentic Latin American literature. For this reason, Rama's notion of transculturation can be seen as heir to the Latin American autonomist position and runs the risk of becoming a claim for a Latin American literary independence lacking in critical content.

In his final and conclusive paragraph of "Processes of Transculturation in Latin American Narrative," Rama writes:

It could be said that these works situate themselves in a Latin American intra-reality, bringing together an enormous range of contradictory elements and attempting to channel them harmoniously, retrieving the past and advocating a future which furthered the expansion of a new authentic and integrated culture. They are therefore, works which reveal to us the originality of Latin American culture at a new stage of its development.<sup>19</sup>

The notion of transculturation in Rama, as well as his work on the transculturators, can therefore be seen as a teleological construct leading to a kind of declaration of Latin American literary autonomy. However, whether transculturation refers to a process of internal cultural rearticulation of regional cultures resulting from their interaction with external and other internal systems, or whether it implies a process that makes possible the integration into one product of both the traditional and the new, is a question that remains unanswered. Another problematic aspect of Rama's discourse is the unnecessary call for literary and cultural autonomy and the production of a new and authentic original culture. By using terms such as

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<sup>18</sup> In fact, both Román de la Campa and Abril Trigo establish a critical theoretical relation between Rama and Adorno. See: DE LA CAMPA, Román, *Latin Americanism*, Minneapolis – London, Minesota University Press, 1999, and TRIGO, Abril, "Shifting paradigms: From Transculturation to Hybridity," in DE GRANDIS, Rita, and BERND, Zila, *Unforseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, 2000 pp 85 - 111



authenticity and originality, Rama reconstructs categories that had previously been eliminated both by himself at other moments of his discourse and by other theorists before him like Ortiz and Arguedas. Rama produces a systematic picture of the way in which different literatures, both central and peripheral, constantly interact, inform each other, and always renew themselves. Yet he does not significantly contribute, in critical terms, to the further development of the debate at a broader cultural level.

#### **1.1.3.1        The Lettered City.**

In his posthumous book *La Ciudad Letrada* [The Lettered City], Angel Rama attempts to study the relation between writing and urbanism in Latin America. Although Rama does not provide an innovative critical insight into the city as an architectural product (this was clearly not his main intention as he was not an architect) he does engage with important debates that require the attention of Latin American architects and architectural theorists. Rama explores the way in which imbalances of power between the colonizer and the colonized became a decisive factor in the shaping of most Latin American cities. This issue has never been addressed in any of the most remarkable architectural theories produced in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century as will be shown in chapter four. This line of inquiry would quite certainly open up doors for urban and architectural research into the dynamics of city growth in Latin America. Yet, this avenue would require architects and architectural theorists to abandon their traditional formalistic approach to the study of cities. It is not my intention in this section to produce an in-depth analysis of Rama's *The Lettered City*, but to bring to the fore the potential that this book has to bridge the gap that separates architecture from cultural theory in the Latin American context.

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<sup>19</sup> Op.Cit. p 170

Rama's decision to highlight the relationship power-knowledge at the basis of structures of social order is clearly a Foucaultian method of critique. He argues that Latin American cities were the result of an emergent rationalism that took place in Europe during the Baroque period. The newly discovered territories provided the first opportunity to build perfectly organized cities that reflected the emergence of a new society. Since the construction of such new cities was not possible in Europe "where the stubbornly material sediments of the past encumbered the flight of a designer's fancy,"<sup>20</sup> this dream was translated to the Americas. There, the use of a perfect rational grid would be the tool to build not only ordered cities but also ordered societies thereby reiterating the authority of the colonizer.

Cities first appeared in the newly discovered territories as a focus of ongoing colonization. Therefore, cities' primary function was to acculturate through evangelization and education. In other words, the city was the place where the savage could be "elevated" to the level of a rational Western world. The "use" of the city as an acculturating device and as a manifestation of power can be seen in the fact that Latin American cities appeared in a process that is opposite to the way European cities were created. Instead of being the result of pre-existing agrarian systems, for example, that slowly generated a center for the commercialization and the consumption of goods, cities in the Americas were founded in order to undermine all pre-existing social patterns and generate a new social order. In other words, cities in Latin America were founded in order to create in the Americas the systems that gave rise to European cities, and modern societies. However, cities did not destroy existing indigenous economic systems but took advantage of them.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> RAMA, Angel, *The Lettered City*, trans. John Charles Chasteen, Durham - London, Duke University Press, 1996 p 2

<sup>21</sup> See RAMA, Angel, *The Lettered City*, pp 2 - 15



This socio-political struggle becomes apparent in the development of the urban form of American cities. The use of an orthogonal grid can therefore be seen as the materialization, or spatialization, of the new social order envisaged by Baroque European politicians, thinkers, and planners. In order to explain this idea, I will quote Rama at length:

From that flow of knowledge sprang forth the ideal cities of the Iberian empires' American vastness. Their ordering principle revealed itself as a hierarchical society transposed by analogy into a hierarchically design urban space. It was not the real society that was transposed, of course, but its organized form, and not into the fabric of the living city, but merely into its ideal layout, so that into the geometrical distribution we can read the social morphology of the planners. This convention was made possible by the advancing project of rationalization. The untrammelled rationalizing urge demanded similar flexibility in the order of signs. Rationalization also required a concentration of power to implement the directives of the rationalizers. That power was already visibly temporal and human, although it cloaked and legitimated itself ideologically in celestial absolutes, as power will do.<sup>22</sup>

Rama is mainly interested in studying how the principles that determined the form of Latin American cities as a materialization of the desired social order were transmitted from the governing head in Europe to its representatives in the colonies. Rama argues that the whole series of rules, norms and directives behind the urban form of Latin American cities traveled from Europe in written form. These cities of the imagination were first "written cities" before they became spatial realities. The written word was the only way the conquerors could assure themselves that the cities in the New World would fulfil their social aspirations and would secure their immutability through the years. For this reason, the written word prevailed over the spoken word, which belonged to the realm of the uncertain. It reinforced the superiority of the European cultures over the mainly oral Latin American tradition.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p 3



As Rama himself clearly puts it, the social morphology of the colonizer can clearly be read through the geometrical layout of the Latin American cities. Anthropologists, sociologists, archaeologists, and cultural theorists, among others have addressed issues arising from this analysis. However, architects and architectural theorists in Latin America have scarcely paid attention to the socio-cultural connotations that the imposition of a rigid urban form has had in the development of our cities, or, if so, their inquiries have never gone beyond the limit of the merely formal. The work of Angel Rama in *The Lettered City* sheds light on a series of unstudied architectural issues regarding the conflicts produced by highly hierarchical —socially repressive— urban structures that tend to obliterate the social heterogeneity characteristic of Latin American cities.

Cities in the Americas were structured with complete disregard for preexisting social systems. In fact, as Rama demonstrates, they appeared as strategies of control and domination and did not acknowledge the existence of local indigenous cultures nor did they acknowledge the demands of other cultural groups that participated in the conquest of the Americas. Not surprisingly, the colonial grid that has been maintained throughout the centuries as the underlying urban structure of most Latin American cities has failed to respond to the complexity of our contemporary societies. One of the most poignant problems in Rama's argument is precisely the fact that he does not respond to such complexity by looking only at the Spanish and the indigenous groups. He constantly uses the term "disglossia" to picture the linguistic relation between Spanish and the language of the indigenous. This term seems inappropriate to picture the heteroglossia<sup>23</sup> that results from the enormous variety of indigenous and black African groups involved in the shaping of what he calls the "new" Latin American Spanish language. This is a problem that seems to be

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<sup>23</sup> An extensive analysis of the term "heteroglossia" is provided in chapter three based on Bakhtin's literary work.

consistent in all of Rama's work, yet one that had already been overcome by Ortiz several years before and by Arguedas in Perú by bringing to the fore the numerous socio-cultural groups —with their inherent cultural languages— that coexist within the space of every Latin American nation.

In the same way that Rama looks at the highly hybridized<sup>24</sup> languages that result from the constant interaction between various cultural groups, architects should look at the emergence of highly hybridized urban forms that result from the permanent superimposition, juxtaposition, and interaction of various systems and urban structures. The appropriation of modes of thought from contemporary cultural theory would give architects the tools to undertake a more appropriate analysis of Latin American cities. Taking the necessary precautions, Angel Rama's book could help to bridge the gap that separates both disciplines in order to carry out such an ambitious project. The current urban situation of major Latin American cities proves the inadequacy of traditional methods of urban planning to resolve the problem of accommodating the diversity of social and cultural groups that inhabit our cities.

The use of the city as a totalizing mechanism of social control that is presented by Rama in a Foucaultian fashion does not apply only to the colonial city. During the last fifty years there have been numerous urban projects to "shape" and control the growth of Latin American cities. Yet, despite the time, effort, and economic investment, most of these projects have been unsuccessful in eliminating the existing heterogeneity of our societies and its effect in the urban form. The appearance and growth of *favelas* in Brazil's most important cities (Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasilia), the "invasiones" [illegal settlements] that have developed in most of the

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<sup>24</sup> I refer here to a hybridized form of language not in the same way as Rama, but as a conflictive coexistence of differing cultural forms that share the same cultural space forcing each other to re-new themselves yet never fusing and disappearing. To understand better this concept of hybridization see chapter three.



Andean main cities, and the uncontrollable growth of México City are clear examples of the failure of strategies of master planning and social control. Such failure makes clear the urgency to produce more appropriate methods of urban planning that account for the heterogeneity of Latin American cultures and societies.

In Colombia, for example, the "Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial" [Plans for the Ordering of Territories], have been oblivious to the heterogeneous realities of our culture. The POTs have been the tool for regulating the growth of the city, to accommodate rural immigrants, and to relocate informal street sellers regardless of the fact that, according to the latest statistics provided by DANE [Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística], they represent 35% of the urban economy. Nonetheless, informal street vendors are constantly relocated following governmental planning policies that attempt to "clean the public space" instead of creating adequate policies and architectural responses to deal with such a reality. Colombian architects, planners, and the authorities in charge of city planning continue to conceive the city as a totality, and our cultures as homogeneous constructs. There seems to be a generalized reluctance to accept that the utopian modernist project to build homogeneous nations, societies and cities never did materialize. Consequently, cultural differences are seen as a negative feature of our societies, and their effect on the image of the city is considered disastrous. An example of this position is found in a recent article published in *El País*, one of the largest newspapers in Colombia, on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2002 in which Benjamín Barney Caldas wrote:

En Colombia, y en Cali en particular, debido a nuestras múltiples hibridaciones sociales y culturales, agravadas por una precaria, incompleta y mal entendida modernización, infortunadamente *no nos fue posible un proceso simple y homogenizador, pero tampoco una nueva sociedad cosmopolita incontaminada de lo local y lo anterior*. Al establecerse una transculturación entre muy desiguales elementos surgieron combinaciones nuevas, y no una simple sumatoria, fértiles para la confusión cultural y esas falsas identidades que originan

nuestros deformados gustos y la necesidad de cada grupo de imponer su versión a los demás.<sup>25</sup> [My Italics]

[It was unfortunate that in Colombia, and in Cali in particular, a *simple homogenizing process never took place, nor was a new cosmopolitan society uncontaminated by the local and historical traditions ever achieved*. This was the result of multiple socio-cultural hybridizations that became more acute due to the arrival of a misunderstood and incomplete modernization. *Due to the transculturation between very diverse elements, new combinations appeared, instead of a simple summation*. Such combinations generate social confusion and are fertile for the emergence of false identities. At the same time, those false identities gave rise to our deformed taste, and the necessity for every different group to impose its tastes on the rest. My translation - My Italics]

It is apparent here that Barney Caldas has a limited understanding of debates outside architecture and of the complexity of notions such as transculturation and hybridization within the larger context of cultural studies. There is an evident lack of rigour in the way all these terms are used and mixed, and they are obviously understood as negative phenomena. The closest Barney Caldas comes to understanding the complexity of these terms is when he affirms that transculturation is a constant process that produces multiple results. Yet, in the very next sentence, he claims that the problem of transculturation is precisely that it does not bring about a summative homogeneous by-product. This kind of misuse accounts for the way that terms such as transculturation and hybridization lose their enormous epistemological and political value. Another aspect that deserves attention is the somewhat naïve idea that a new 'cosmopolitan' society 'uncontaminated' by local traditions and by elements derived from our historical past never materialized. Most alarming, however, is the fact that an architect of Barney Caldas's reputation and influence within the architectural educational network, goes so far as to suggest that 'it is unfortunate' that our societies were never homogenized.<sup>26</sup> Not only does Barney

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<sup>25</sup> BARNEY CALDAS, Benjamín, "El Interior de la Publicidad Exterior," *El País*, Cali - Colombia, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2002

<sup>26</sup> Benjamín Barney Caldas was Head of the School of Architecture of the Universidad del Valle, in Cali, Colombia, between 1991 and 1996. After his retirement he has continued to



call this an unfortunate experience, but also criticizes the fact that there are differing and contesting identities whose coexistence in the space of our nation is seen as negative. Clearly, Barney Caldas fails completely to understand the complexity of the context in which he himself lives. He does not explain why is it that our different and contesting identities that result from the various processes of transculturation that have occurred throughout our history are false. Nor why is it negative that different socio-cultural groups manifest their beliefs and "tastes" in the public arena. It may be that Barney does not understand that the elimination of differences in the social context is equivalent to the elimination of democracy and the reconstitution of structures of cultural domination.

It stands to reason that processes of transculturation have also occurred within architecture, giving rise to a kind of "transarchituration" that has affected buildings as well as cities. It is therefore necessary to extend debates about new cultural forms such as art, literature, and linguistics, into architecture. This may imply, on the one hand, constant interdisciplinary cooperation, and, on the other, a highly theoretical effort. However, the aim of such efforts should lead to the production of alternative and differential architectural practices that respond more adequately to the conditions of Latin American cultures.

## **1.2 Becoming Transcultural: A Post-Structuralist Approach**

Contemporary cultural theory finds its most powerful method of critique in the legacy of post-structuralism. Post-structuralism offers ample possibilities to dismantle and transgress structural methods of theoretical analysis for it is understood that natural

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teach at various schools of architecture across the country, and writes a weekly column in *El País* through which he has access not only to an architectural audience but also to the

systems, such as social systems, do not evolve following premeditated orderly lines. On the contrary, they manifest multiple and often unpredictable patterns of becoming. An illuminating way to model those patterns of becoming is to draw on the notion of the rhizome. Therefore, this section pays particular attention to the notion of the rhizome as elaborated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. The rhizome is a figure appropriated from biology but used within philosophical discourses in opposition to traditional tree-like structures of analysis. The latter are determined by the principle of origin and follow a certain linearity. If the tree represents a foundational, linear, and highly hierarchical structure, the rhizome represents a dynamic structure that has no point of origin and is capable of establishing multiple connections with any other kind of systems while at the same time avoiding stratification. Thus, the notion of the rhizome serves to place under scrutiny notions like origin, foundation, centralism, and hierarchy.

It has been explained thus far how the notion of transculturation brings to the fore the dynamism that characterizes cultural contacts, and how such contact affects all cultures involved in the process to a similar extent. Transculturation is therefore a multidirectional phenomenon constantly at work in our globalizing culture and not only within colonial situations. During the twentieth century, debates on the concept of transculturation attempted to dismantle foundational and hierarchical structures that validated claims for Euro-American cultural authority, yet their success was very limited. The purpose of this section is to review the notion of transculturation via Deleuze and Guattari's work, so as to reassess transculturation's critical and epistemological value.



### 1.2.1 The Rhizomatic Model of Becoming.

In recent years, the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have elaborated on a series of notions with enormous potential to describe and to analyze all the phenomena that take place in contemporary culture. Their philosophy departs from the principle that the multiple comes before the one. Therefore, the idea of purity, or pure origin, is categorically dismissed; unities and totalities are replaced by multiplicities. For multiplicity and fluctuation are characteristics of all natural systems, and included amongst those natural systems are social systems. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that the multiple is not the result of a process of addition and complication, which would eventually demonstrate that there was once unity. On the contrary, they argue that unity is not possible —if achievable, unity can only be the result of a power takeover so as to eliminate multiplicities. Yet, Deleuze and Guattari affirm that the multiple has to be made, “not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available — always  $n - 1$ .”<sup>27</sup> A system of this kind, say Deleuze and Guattari, could be called a rhizome.

A rhizome is a structural model in analogy to nature, but in opposition to traditional tree-like or root-like structures. A rhizome can establish all kinds of connections because it develops unrestrictedly following no order or any given set of rules. It never generates unity nor does it follow any kind of binary synthetic logic. Neither has it a clear origin, nor does it point towards a particular end. It is always in a middle —a “*milieu*”— from where it establishes multiple connections and continues to grow.

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<sup>27</sup> DELEUZE, Gilles, and GUATTARI, Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London, Atholone Press, 1998 p 6

According to Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomes are characterized by certain approximate features. Amongst those features there is the *principle of asignifying rupture* according to which a rhizome cannot be destroyed. Wherever a rhizome is broken or shattered, it starts up again. Its capacity to connect unrestrictedly at any point with other systems allows it to restart every time that it is disrupted. Rhizomes are also characterized by the *principles of cartography and decalcomania*, which imply that, due to their dynamism, it is impossible to trace rhizomes. Since rhizomes are antigenealogical, they can be mapped, but not traced. For "what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. ...The map is open and connectable in all its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification."<sup>28</sup> In other words, the map differs from the tracing because the latter suggests a linearity of evolution always based upon a number of certainties.

However, there are three features which become central to our inquiry because they help understand the relation between the rhizome and sociocultural apparatuses. They are the principles of connection, heterogeneity, and multiplicity. The first two principles examined by Deleuze and Guattari are *connection and heterogeneity*. These two principles imply that rhizomes can be connected to *anything other*, and, in fact, *must be*. Rhizomes are capable of connecting to other systems different from rhizomes; they can change in nature in order to make connections with anything other. In addition, due to their heterogeneity, they are capable of establishing multiple connections simultaneously. Therefore, rhizomes are diametrically different to tree-like or root-like structures. In the latter structures, there is a clear origin that sets the rule for possible future developments. Contrary to what Bakhtin believes (that binary logics are too abstract, see chapter three: Cultural Dialogics), Deleuze and Guattari criticize binary logics not because they are too abstract, but because they are not

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p 12



abstract enough. They affirm that such binary tree-like systems “do not reach the abstract machine that connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field.”<sup>29</sup> Here, it is implied that binary logics are not capable of representing the dynamism, heterogeneity, and unpredictability with which sociocultural formations establish connections within themselves and with others. The reason why rhizomes achieve a higher degree of abstraction is because they are alien to any idea of genealogical axuality. Binary logics are abstract, yet they represent an idealized natural order that does not adequately respond to the real complexity of natural systems. In other words, they are abstract but reduce the possibilities of becoming to taxonomic organizations that limit the potential to multiple connectability inherent in all living systems. They belong to the order of a totalizing macropolitics that is opposite to the differential specificity of rhizomatic micropolitics. The rhizome, for its part, does not fix represented systems to foundational structures, and maintains a dynamic middle point of permanent becoming.

An important political component appears with the *principle of multiplicity*: power. According to this principle, it is argued that unity does not exist and that all we have are multiplicities which remain in permanent transformation. Only a power takeover can disrupt the heterogeneity and connectability of a rhizome in order to impose apparent unity. Otherwise, a rhizome would ceaselessly establish connections between “semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to arts, sciences, and social struggles.”<sup>30</sup> Because multiplicity is the primary condition of all systems, unity is only achieved when it is imposed. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p 7

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p 7

The notion of unity (*unité*) appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier or a corresponding subjectification proceeding: this is the case for a pivot-unity forming the basis for a set of biunivocal relationships between objective elements or points, or for the One that divides following the law of binary logic of differentiation in the subject. Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered (overcoding).<sup>31</sup>

It becomes clear that multiplicity, as a principle of the rhizome, is what saves it from overcoding. In other words, a rhizome never becomes overcoded or saturated because it is always being re-coded. The above paragraph also reinforces the notion that power influences the connection making process of all systems, primarily in the case of social systems.

Power is an important component that conditions the notion of rhizomatic becoming. In this sense, it is accepted that cultures have rhizomatic characteristics: they are assemblages of multiplicities that are always in a middle, always in a process of becoming. In their process of becoming, cultures establish simultaneous multiple connections with other cultural formations. As a result, cultures regenerate, change in nature, and re-create themselves constantly. However, these processes are conditioned by institutions of power. Such institutions have a great impact on the way connections are established, and the very notion of unrestricted connectability can be jeopardized by power formations that tend to construct a model of order by stratifying everything. This is what occurs in the majority of transcultural relations: there is a power takeover that disrupts the rhizomatic nature of processes of cultural becoming by stratifying everything within foundational and totalizing systems.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. pp 8 - 9



### 1.2.2 The Analogy with the Orchid and the Wasp.

Although the notion of the “rhizome” serves to maintain that all cultural systems are connected —and, in fact, have always been— it also helps not to deny the existence of differences between interconnected cultures. In their analogy with the orchid and the wasp, Deleuze and Guattari explain the way in which both, orchid and wasp, create a rhizomatic system of dependency while maintaining their biological independence. There seems to be an exchange of sorts that makes their existence possible, but at no point do they cease to exist as separate entities.

The orchid deterritorializes forming an image, a tracing of the wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome.<sup>32</sup>

This analogy appears to be based upon the fact that the wasp is attracted by the orchid's scent and appearance. For this reason, the wasp lands on the orchid in order to feed and rubs its abdomen against the surface of the orchid, as in the process of copulation, from where pollen is attached to the body of the wasp. The latter then flies away to land on another orchid producing the pollination of the second. The wasp can therefore be considered a surrogate sexual partner of the orchid. By this means, both the orchid and the wasp influence each other to the same extent and establish a relation of mutual reciprocity; both need each other in order to continue to exist.

Despite the fact that the orchid duplicates the image of the wasp, deterritorializing itself in the process, and that the wasp becomes a part of the orchid's reproductive apparatus, also deterritorializing itself as such, there is much more at stake than the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p 10

merely superficial imitation of each other's image. Both deterritorialize themselves only in order to be reterritorialized elsewhere invigorating their individual processes of becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari themselves put it:

At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. Each of these becomings bring about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, the existence of a relation of mutual dependence between the orchid and the wasp does not imply that they cease to exist as individual and independent organisms. Quite the opposite: by means of their rhizomatic relation, they reaffirm their identity as separate beings, and contribute to their individual processes of permanent rhizomatic becoming. Because being is not considered a fixed given condition, but a dynamic process of permanent becoming. This is similar to the process of creative understanding as elaborated by Bakhtin (see chapter three). Yet, due to the rhizome's capacity to establish multiple simultaneous connections, Deleuze and Guattari take Bakhtin's idea much further because it does not reduce the relation to only two participants as implied in the notion of dialogue. More importantly, in spite of being independent living organisms, neither the orchid nor the wasp is here seen as a complete system in itself, but as systems existing through interaction with other systems in a process of constant becoming.

It would be wrong to assume that the analogy with the orchid and the wasp is only applicable to the relationship between insects and not to other kind of non-biological organisms. Deleuze and Guattari use the notion of rhizomatic becoming to elaborate on the relation that exists between the book and the world. They argue that there exists a similar rhizomatic relation between the two: "The same applies to the book



and the world: contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is a parallel evolution of the book and the world."<sup>34</sup> The model of rhizomatic becoming can, by the same token, be extended to the relation between cultural systems, which, as living social systems, remain in constant flux, in a process of permanent becoming. Paraphrasing Deleuze and Guattari, it could be said that there exists a rhizomatic relation amongst cultures since they maintain parallel becomings.

#### **1.2.2.1 The Concept of Becoming.**

At this point it is necessary to review the concept of becoming which appears to capture the dynamism of rhizomatic connectability. For it has already become clear that the process of rhizomatic becoming always implies a process of mutual interaction. For this reason, it is never limited to one individual entity alone. The difference between the model of rhizomatic becoming and linear or genealogical evolutionary models is that the former is not based on descent lines or filial roots.

Becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation. Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation.<sup>35</sup>

There are two issues that deserve attention in this passage. the first, is that becoming is the process through which rhizomes remain in constant motion regenerating themselves at every stage and establishing connections with other

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p 10

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p 11

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p 238

rhizomatic systems while, at the same time, resisting stratification. In other words, precisely because rhizomes are dynamic structures they cannot be stratified nor can they be confined within rigid systems of control. Second is the use of the notion of symbiosis. This notion is interesting because its semantic meaning is the mutually advantageous association between different organisms. In so far as it is opposed to terms such as mixture, fusion, synthesis, or syncretism, symbiosis seems not to suggest the end of permanent processes of becoming. On the contrary, it implies that association and interdependence are continuous processes from which the various structures involved can benefit mutually. The notion of symbiosis is also important because it has been used within contemporary Latin American architectural theory. In chapter four, I will elaborate on the work of the Argentine theorist Marina Waisman and the notion of architectural symbiosis.

It becomes clear that the notion of rhizomatic becoming, as elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, offers numerous possibilities for the reassessment of the term transculturation within contemporary cultural theory. According to Ortiz, transculturation implies that constant interaction is necessary for cultures in order to survive. Without transculturation cultures would soon reach a state of saturation and finitude. Consequently, it can be affirmed that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of rhizomatic becoming can contribute to enhance the debate about transculturation. In so doing, I propose to carry out a transculturation of the term itself by establishing a rhizomatic relation between the notion of transculturation and the notion of the rhizome which originated in a different sociocultural context and disciplinary area. Both concepts share the view that cultures are assemblages of multiplicities always in contact with other assemblages of the same kind. They also share the view that such contact does not eliminate cultural differentiation, but highlights cultural interdependency as the means of cultural becoming. Only a power takeover can limit the number of transcultural connections that one single culture can make in order



achieve homogenization; as in the case of colonialism, nationalism, or dictatorship. However, the notion of rhizomatic becoming responds better to the condition of contemporary cultures. By suggesting a rhizomatic relation between these two notions, I do not suggest replacing one by the other, but establishing a relation of theoretical and critical complementarity in order to respond to different yet specific contexts and subjects of criticism.

#### **1.2.2.2 Power and the Majorities.**

It has been argued that all cultures and social systems necessarily maintain a rhizomatic relation and that only a power takeover can disturb, or eliminate, such relations and patterns of becoming. For this reason, it becomes necessary to elaborate on the notion of power. I will therefore examine this notion in the context of Deleuze and Guattari who work on the question of power in relation to social minorities, which is an issue of paramount importance in Latin America. The concepts of power, the majorities, and the minorities appear always to be related to one another. In most cases, following the principle of democracy, power is exercised by the majorities, yet it does not imply higher quantities. The concept of majorities is determined by the access that those groups have to the institutions of power. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

When we say majority, we are referring not to a greater relative quantity but to the determination of a state or standard in relation to which larger quantities, as well as the smallest, can be said to be minoritarian: white-man, adult-male, etc. majority implies a state of domination, not the reverse.<sup>36</sup>

This implies that the minorities do not exist as fixed categories. Consistent with the equation of  $n - 1$  through which rhizomes are made, Deleuze and Guattari argue that

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p 291

minorities also have to be constituted by subtraction. In other words, in order to be minoritarian it is necessary to become so in relation to a majority. And, in the process, both the majority and the minority are affected to the same extent. Deleuze and Guattari explain how Jews have to become-Jewish or women have to become-woman, yet the process of becoming affects both Jews and non-Jews as well as women and men. "In a way, the subject in a becoming is always 'man,' when but only when it enters a becoming-minoritarian that rends him from his major identity."<sup>37</sup> This process questions the authority that results from being majoritarian in a way that is very similar to Bhabha's notion of the minorities as an ambiguous performative space. Bhabha maintains that minorities are produced through a process of double rejection that renders the authority of the majority ambivalent (see chapter three). This Lacanian approach to the problem of becoming-other allows Bhabha as well as Deleuze and Guattari to reverse hierarchical structures of social authority.

If Jews themselves must become-Jewish, if women must become-woman, if children must become-child, if blacks must become-black, it is because only a minority is capable of serving as an active medium of becoming, but under such conditions that it ceases to be a definable aggregate in relation to the majority.<sup>38</sup>

Minorities are here seen as undefinable "aggregates" in constant becoming —a performative space, as Bhabha puts it— and not as a fixed or completed category in relation to a referential majority. In this way Deleuze and Guattari subvert the foundational structures that give power to the majorities and render their authority immutable. Thus, the potential of the rhizomatic model of becoming to reevaluate the notion of transculturation becomes clear. Not only can this be seen in the fact that according to this model all systems involved interact and affect one another to the same extent, but also because it is an incursion into a political dynamics by which both minorities and majorities are constituted. In other words, this could be seen as a

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p 291

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. p 291



critique of traditional macropolitical and macrohistorical methods of analysis that focus their attention on the question of how to obtain a majority. Here, on the contrary, attention is primarily given to the question of how to become-minority in relation to a becoming-majority thereby placing such "categories" under scrutiny. Majorities and minorities are considered to be interconnected and in flux so that the validity, and the very possibility, of a totalizing macropolitics is undermined.

Despite the fact that the notion of rhizomatic becoming provides sufficient material to reevaluate the epistemological and political values inherent in the concept of transculturation, it has to be approached with extreme caution. The notion of rhizomatic becoming has an immense potential for the continuous exploration of the relation that exists between Latin America and the centers (as well as other peripheries), but its very immensity makes it difficult to embrace. Another aspect that requires caution when appropriating Deleuze and Guattari's discourse is that the vastness of their work generates problems of inconsistent terminology that makes the ground slippery for debate.

### **1.3 Rethinking Transculturation.**

It became clear that the term transculturation was created in order to unveil the interactive reality of cultural relations. Contrary to the concept of acculturation that implies the imposition of superior cultures over those considered inferior, transculturation makes visible how cultures become mutually affected as a result of their interaction. In so doing, the theorists of transculturation attempted to dismantle genealogical and hierarchical structures that underpin the colonizer's claim for cultural authority. However, it also became clear how the work of Fernando Ortiz, José María Arguedas, and Ángel Rama proves unable to eliminate completely such

structures. Their failure could be due to the fact that their criticism is still tightly attached to structural and positivist methods of critique. That is probably the reason why they always used faulty metaphors in order to explain the actual process of transculturation itself. Metaphors such as the child and his or her parents may even have a counter-productive effect. Instead of illustrating the dynamism of transcultural relations, these metaphors suggest that transculturation is a finalizable process that leads to the production of static results. The work of Ortiz, Arguedas and Rama represents an important break-through for Latin American cultural and literary theory in an attempt at analyzing the nature of our differential cultural identities. However, it is necessary to reassess the concept of transculturation not only in order to respond to the new realities of our contemporary cultures, but also to return to the notion the critical and political values that it has lost due to uncritical misuse. The work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari serves as a basis to undertake such a task. As demonstrated in the second part of this chapter, in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, especially the notion of the rhizome which lies at the center of their work, there are plenty of possibilities to endow the notion of transculturation with a renewed and more effective critical power. If transculturation is understood as the constant process of interaction between cultures, then Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome is helpful to understand the way such interaction occurs and how different cultures can maintain their separate identities despite existing in constant interaction with other cultures.

In this section I will elaborate on the work of contemporary Latin American theorists, based mostly in the United States, who use the term transculturation in order to examine the conditions of contemporary Latin American cultures in relation to other cultural systems —central as well as peripheral. I will also elaborate on the notions of migration and consumerism as two aspects that have so far been under-theorized but which require attention if the notion of transculturation is to respond to



contemporary cultural conditions. In this way, I will establish what the current situation of the transcultural debate is today while, and, at the same time, I will suggest theoretical strategies to provide the notion of transculturation with a renewed critical and epistemological value.

### **1.3.1 Reconciling Transculturation.**

Ever since the publication of Ortiz' *Cuban Counterpoint*, many theories have been produced regarding the cultural identity of Latin America. Some of them have been ephemeral, whereas others have gained great currency throughout the years. The notion of transculturation seemed to have been one of those which were rendered obsolete due to the extraordinary proliferation of terms apparently capable of replacing it. However, today, due to the increasing interest that cultural and postcolonial theories have placed on questions about processes of identity formation and differential identities, the term transculturation has returned to the center of theoretical debate. Nonetheless, it now has to respond to new sociopolitical circumstances to which, in its original form, it is unable to respond. I will now elaborate on some of the circumstances which I consider most relevant in relation to the problems of (national) identity and architecture.

#### **1.3.1.1 Displacements: The Problem of Migrations.**

Already in the 1960s, José María Arguedas had pointed out the effects of indigenous rural migration into the main cities of Perú. This phenomenon has occurred in most Latin American countries and its effects in cities and their urban cultures have been, to some extent, similar. Today the problem of mass migration has reached larger

dimensions, and the reasons behind the constant movement of masses inside and outside Latin American nations are somewhat different. In the 1950s and 1960s large numbers of people moved from the countryside into the main cities attracted by the emergence of a precarious industrialization. Although rural peoples still continue to migrate to the cities attracted by the possibility of working in the factories, today, there are other reasons behind their displacement. In the case of Colombia, Perú and some parts of México, for example, rural peoples migrate into the cities because they believe that there they will find social facilities and the security that cannot be granted to them in the countryside. In these countries, violence is one of the most important reasons behind the displacement of rural peoples. In addition to this kind of internal migration that generates what Ángel Rama refers to as internal transculturation, there is an enormous number of people who move outside the region to places such as the United States, and Europe. Argentines, Brazilians, Mexicans, Venezuelans flee their countries due to economic instability and unemployment, whereas Colombians, Peruvians, and Nicaraguans leave their countries due to violence and insecurity as well as economic problems. These are individuals who remain always on the run, even in those cases in which they establish permanent residence in other cities or countries. These types of migrants can no longer tell straight narratives about their cultural identities. For them, culture acquires rhizomatic characteristics as opposed to linearly or genealogically rooted forms of cultural evolution.

Some of these migrants move daily across national borders and, with the same facility, transit mentally across cultural borders without belonging specifically to any one. The most dramatic case is perhaps the US-México border that is legally and illegally transgressed by thousands a day.<sup>39</sup> But the borders between Colombia and Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador, Argentina and Chile, Brazil and Argentina, or Brazil and Paraguay are also affected by similar phenomena. For these migrating



subjects cultures are not synthesizable. They are transculturated subjects but, at the same time, they are agents of transculturation. They are like wasps that land on different orchids and together form a rhizomatic relation. Migrants consciously deterritorialize themselves in their migration and create a trace of the other culture as a strategy for survival, but it goes beyond an external imitation of image. It requires a complete re-codification of values, a veritable becoming. As a consequence,

Migrancy acquires a cultural dimension exceeding mere geographic translation (city-country, interior-exterior, periphery-center, and vice versa), and it articulates an enunciative, portable, unstable locus, from which particular uses of the culture(s) at hand are generated, and in which diffuse, heterogeneous, disintegrated subjects are constituted always anew.<sup>40</sup>

In order to respond to this reality, transculturation can no longer be considered as a two-dimensional notion that relies heavily on binary methodological structures as in the case of Rama, nor can it rely on theoretical methods that lead to the synthesis of diverse elements as in Ortiz. The concept of transculturation has to be forced to respond to the dynamics generated by the permanent transit of people across different cultural sites. Since these dynamics constantly reproduce differing and often contesting cultural activities and identities no longer reducible to one, the notion of transculturation has to be seen not as a descriptive tool to portray the phenomenon of migration, but as a critical term that allows for negotiation amongst different and antagonistic voices. Its political value depends on its capacity for making audible the voices of those minorities that speak from within the Latin American nations but also those that speak from many different locations outside the continent. Transculturation can therefore be understood in a way similar to the notion of *transnational transculturation* proposed by Abril Trigo. Following Ernesto Laclau and Chantal

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<sup>39</sup> It is estimated that 300 million people cross the US – México border every year.

<sup>40</sup> TRIGO, Abril, "Shifting Paradigms: From transculturation to Hybridity," in DE GRANDIS, Rita, and BERND, Zila, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, 2000 pp 85 - 111

Mouffe, Trigo explains this notion "as a point of departure, as the cultural production of hegemonic articulations, processes in which antagonistic social agents negotiate new, inherently unstable, politico-cultural formations of impossible suture."<sup>41</sup> The new hegemonic articulations which Laclau and Mouffe refer to are anti-hegemonic in the sense that they render the foundational and univocal Western hegemony inappropriate while producing a new kind of cultural dynamics that result from the interaction of "subaltern" agents, or, as they put it: "a surrogate hegemony." However, it seems to be quite unclear why Trigo adds the term transnational to transculturation especially if, within the context of migration, it already implies transnationality. It may be that he wants to enhance Rama's notion of modernizing transculturation by introducing it within the context of globalization without realizing that the use of the term transnational removes value from internal processes of transculturation that are equally important. For the epistemological and political connotations of the notion of transculturation within Latin American cultural theory have to be developed via critical discourses, and not through the addition of affixes.

Another aspect closely associated with the question of migration that requires the attention of cultural and architectural theorists alike, is the emergence of advanced communication technologies. Since the arrival of (satellite) television, fax machines, and the internet, all of which reached Latin American societies only during the past twenty-five years, physical displacement has become no longer necessary in order to transgress cultural and national frontiers. Advanced mass communication technologies facilitate access to other cultures, even those that are geographically inaccessible while at the same time accelerating the flux of information globally; making it readily available. New communication technologies have also raised questions about global cultural simultaneity as they provide the possibility for people today to locate themselves virtually in various cultural contexts simultaneously. The

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. pp 106 - 107



consequences of this phenomenon, not only within the sociocultural field but also within architecture, have to be addressed urgently. Not only do advanced mass communication technologies imply a form of transcultural dynamism that did not exist at the time of Ortiz, Arguedas and Rama, when the notion of transculturation was first produced, but they also raise new questions about the practice of architecture that have not been seriously addressed within the Latin American context. However, this is an area of the debate that will have to be left outside the margins of this thesis as its vastness opens a whole new line of inquiry that escapes the reach of the current research. I simply want to make clear my awareness of this aspect of the debate and draw the attention of other scholars to this matter.

#### **1.3.1.2 The Question of Consumption and the Dynamics of Transculturation.**

Consumption is an aspect of transculturation that was never thoroughly developed by Ortiz and appears to have been forgotten by Arguedas and Rama. The notion of transculturation has normally been used only to describe the interaction between Latin America and the centers. Such interaction is culturally productive, and its productivity is mostly seen in the work of artists and writers. However, the fact that the consumption of art as well as other goods is a decisive part within the process of transculturation has been considerably overlooked.

However, post-structuralist methods of critique, such as those explored throughout this chapter, which underpin contemporary cultural criticism, permit the restoration of consumption as a decisive moment within transcultural dynamics. One of the critics who has shed light on the lack of scholarship on the question of consumption is Neil Larsen. He compares Ortiz' notion of transculturation with Andrade's *Antropofagia* in order to bring to the fore a practice to which he refers as *consumptive production*.

According to Larsen, consumptive production explains the manner “whereby the metropolitan cultural import, rather than being simply recoded and then abruptly reinserted into the same exclusive network of cultural distribution, undergoes an even more radical subversion by being directly appropriated as simply one motif of a dynamic, postcolonial *mass* culture that can consume without losing its national-cultural identity.”<sup>42</sup> This idea appears to follow closely the work of Michel de Certeau who examines in detail the various instances of the production-consumption process. De Certeau advances a theory according to which, in our mass culture, cultural commodities become the raw materials of a second instance of cultural production that takes place at the moment of consumption. In other words, today the consumer ceases to be a passive receiver of cultural goods and is endowed with productive attributes. This second instance of the cultural production chain is what Larsen calls *consumptive production*.

However, Néstor García Canclini is the critic whose work engages more carefully with the problem of production-consumption (and re-production) in Latin America although he discards the term transculturation. Instead, Canclini prefers to use terms such as hybridization or cultural reconversion. Since I will examine the work of García Canclini and the notion of hybridization in chapter three, I will now focus on his ideas on consumption as presented in his books *Cultura transnacional* and *Consumidores y ciudadanos* only. Canclini maintains that the citizen becomes a consumer in a system in which market structures replace the state apparatus, even if only partially, by providing spaces for the negotiation of national identities. Considering his earlier work, especially his book *Hybrid Cultures*, negotiation in this case is not conducive to the homogenization of the cultural field. On the contrary, it means that popular traditions survive through the hybridization with markets in the

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<sup>42</sup> LARSEN, Neil, *Reading North by South: On Latin American Literature, Culture, and Politics*, Minneapolis - London, University of Minnesota Press, 1995 p 122



global system. In this way, Canclini arrives at his provocative redefinition of the nation as an "interpretative community of consumers."<sup>43</sup> Not only are cultural identities negotiated within these complex transnational market structures of production-consumption as Larsen maintains, but also the univocal Western—understood as Euro-American—cultural hegemony is thereby undermined. Despite the originality and relevance of Canclini's reconsideration of the citizen as consumer, some scholars criticize his ideas for being of little applicability due to the fact that he only ever reaches obvious conclusions. Abril Trigo maintains that "for Canclini, consumption continues to be, at heart, an instance determined by and from a production (and its hegemonic agents) that, lacking productivity, cancels out any room for emancipation. His reformulation of the question [of consumption] as a social, no longer solely individual and cultural, in addition to economic, phenomenon does not, obviously, resolve the problem [of emancipation]."<sup>44</sup> It is clear that the separation between his vast and complex theoretical work, and his pragmatic/anthropological dimension is one of Canclini's major problems [see chapter three]. Yet, we cannot deny that his theoretical work opens up new avenues of inquiry into the implications that consumption has on transcultural processes of identity formation.

It thus become clear that in order for transculturation to stop being a merely descriptive theoretical tool, it also has to respond to questions related to the consumption and re-production of cultural goods. This is an aspect of transculturation that has direct implications for architectural debates. For architects and architectural theorists tend to look at the dynamics of architectural production yet not to the problem of the consumption and further re-production of architecture by users. In

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<sup>43</sup> See: GARCIA CANCLINI, Néstor, *Consumidores y ciudadanos: Conflictos multiculturales de la globalización*, México, Editorial Grijalbo, 1995 pp 65 - 71

fact, the result of the interaction between people and buildings is radically dismissed by architects and architectural theorists, as I will demonstrate in chapter five.

The importance of the question of architectural consumption becomes evident with even the most superficial glance at the evolution of any of the most paradigmatic architectural projects of the twentieth century in Latin America. This would be sufficient to understand how consumers are not passive receivers of architectural goods, but active and aggressive producers. If in a first instance architects produce buildings and urban spaces for a *utopian* homogenous society, there is also an instance in which consumers appropriate and re-produce such "goods" advancing a transculturated version of architecture that no longer belongs to the original instance in the architect's mind, but forms part of a different architectural/cultural temporality. I will refer to this as the performative temporality of architecture based on the work of Homi Bhabha [see chapters three and five]. Although I will not produce a detailed account of the analysis of architectural performativity at this point (for a deeper analysis of various case studies will be provided in chapter five in order to further explain this notion), I will mention a few projects that exemplify this phenomenon: Brasilia and Cidade dos Motores (Brazil), Ciudad Bolivar (Bogotá - Colombia), Nueva Floresta (Cali - Colombia), or Puerto Ortiz and Ciudad Pilar (Venezuela). These are all examples of how consumers become active, and in most cases aggressive, producers by taking architectural products into a different transcultural temporality. The consumer becomes the producer of a transcultural architecture.

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<sup>44</sup> TRIGO, Abril, "Shifting Paradigms: From transculturation to Hybridity," in DE GRANDIS, Rita, and BERND, Zila, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the*



### 1.3.2 Transcultural Architecture.

Despite the importance of the notion of transculturation within Latin American cultural theory it has not permeated into architectural debates. Instead, it has only been used in order literally to describe the coexistence of different sociocultural groups within the space of the Latin American nations but not in order to theorize them from an architectural point of view. Perhaps due to the lack of a rigorous critical approach, architects and architectural theorists tend to understand notions such as transculturation and hybridization in a negative way.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, none of the main architectural theories produced in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century has seriously engaged with these notions with the aim of analyzing the social, cultural, or political circumstances that affect the development of our cities and buildings. Neither do they engage with the work of Latin American cultural theorists like Ortiz, Rama, Arguedas, nor with that of more contemporary scholars such as Román de la Campa who has himself explored the impact of Latin American citizens in the main cities of the United States.<sup>46</sup>

Throughout this chapter I have shown that in order to respond to the realities of contemporary Latin American cultures, architects have to create a new and more dynamic agenda for all the practices included within the discipline of architecture. This is a threefold agenda that includes: first, the reconsideration of traditional architectural practices in Latin America; second, the development of new methods to conceive cities and buildings and the means with which to theorize them; third, a re-examination of the methods used to teach architecture in schools throughout the

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*Americas*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, 2000 p 99

<sup>45</sup> In fact, it seems that in the whole of the Andean region transculturation and hybridization are understood as negative processes that threaten the homogeneity of the nation and the achievement of modernization as the access to circles of globalization.

<sup>46</sup> See: DAVIES, Mike, and de la CAMPA, Román, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US Big City*, New York, Verso, 2001

continent. The notion of transculturation, as well as post-structuralist methods of critique, such as the one presented in this chapter, possess an enormous potential to drive forward this task and to rethink architectural practices in the Latin American context. Yet, it is important to proceed with extreme caution to avoid making the same mistakes that have jeopardized previous appropriations of philosophical and cultural theories within architectural circles.

One such case was deconstruction, now considered an embarrassing impasse in the history of twentieth-century architecture. The problem has always been the fact that external discourses, especially those that arrive from other disciplines, such as philosophy, are appropriated literally and uncritically. In the case of deconstruction, for example, the enthusiasm with which architects like Peter Eisenman and Bernard Tschumi received Derrida's ideas drove the philosopher himself to contribute to the loose appropriation of deconstructive thought.<sup>47</sup> Only when the "style" of deconstruction had already been rendered unfashionable within architectural circles did an architect produce a rigorous analysis of the values of deconstruction within architecture. In *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*, Mark Wigley asserts that deconstruction offers radical possibilities to rethink architectural practices but that it cannot be taken literally with the aim of validating formal explorations. Unfortunately, his book came out after the architecture of deconstruction had already become just another ephemeral moment in the annals of twentieth-century Euro-American architectural history with very little repercussion outside the margins of the industrialized world.

However, the failure of architectural deconstruction and its generation of architects, has encouraged younger architects to explore other discourses in search of



alternative architectural practices. The work of Deleuze and Guattari appears to be the most celebrated amongst the various discourses explored within architecture today. Nonetheless, it seems that despite the cautious approach of those who engage with their work, the tendency continues to be towards the validation of new architectural forms and technologies. The California based architect Greg Lynn can be taken as an example. In his book *Folds, Bodies and Blobs*, Lynn appropriates Deleuzian discourse in an attempt to elaborate a new kind of interactive architecture that responds to external forces. Such external forces are not only natural (wind, light, gravity, and the like), but also social forces. However, the problem lies on the fact that Lynn pays great attention to questions regarding architectural form while leaving important sociopolitical issues aside. Or, to put it in a different way so as to be fair to Lynn whose work is certainly of great quality, there seems to be a separation between the theoretical dimension of his inquiry and the formal architectural applicability of the theory. It seems that, when he moves from his compelling analysis of Deleuze and Guattari's work into the designing of buildings, theory serves only to validate formal explorations and the use of advanced computer aided methodologies. I find it important to emphasize at this point that the work of Deleuze and Guattari does offer tools of enormous potential to carry out a radical rethinking of architectural practices but only in relation to the entire spectrum of social, political, and cultural practices with which architecture is inherently related. The literal and uncritical appropriation of their ideas to validate formal explorations alone would carry the risk of reducing the sociopolitical content of both Deleuze and Guattari's work and architectural practices.

As with the notion of transculturation, the work of Deleuze and Guattari has not yet appeared within contemporary Latin American architectural debates. However, there

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<sup>47</sup> Here I refer to the collaborative work between Derrida, Eisenman, and Tschumi that led to the participation of Derrida in the design of the *Parc de la Villette* in Paris (with Bernard

seems to be a growing interest in their work amongst architects and architectural theorists who work outside Latin America. Although Deleuze and Guattari's work has not been directly appropriated in order to examine the characteristics of Latin American architectures, it may have informed the work of at least one Latin American architectural theorist within the past fifteen years. This is the case of the Argentine theorist Marina Waisman and her use of the term symbiosis. Despite not making explicit reference to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Waisman's studies show certain methodological similarities with it that allow us to presume that she is aware of their complex notion of rhizomatic becoming. Waisman maintains that the *symbiosis* of diametrically dissimilar elements results in the production of an *original* architecture that responds more appropriately to the heterogeneous sociocultural conditions of Latin America. The problem in Waisman is that she leaves two key questions unanswered. On the one hand, there is the question of whether the original architecture which she refers to, resulting from the process of symbiosis, is a third and finalized separate byproduct. In which case there is a tacit reconstitution of taxonomic lines of becoming that are in opposition to symbiosis in Deleuze and Guattari's work. On the other hand, the question of whether symbiosis serves to establish a rhizomatic relation whose components remain independent yet associated is also left unanswered. In this case, different elements would constantly renovate themselves; their individual identities would always remain in flux, but would never disappear in a synthesis. The first alternative would appear to be contradictory because it suggests a fusion that puts an end to the permanent process of becoming. The second alternative appears to be more appropriate, but Waisman does not elaborate on the notion of the rhizome.<sup>48</sup> Despite this theoretical impasse, Waisman's use of philosophy and cultural theory appears to be more focused on the interpretation of sociocultural conditions that may affect architectural practices rather

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Tschumi), and to the publication of the book *Choral Works* (with Peter Eisenmann).



than on the validation of forms. In this sense, I would venture to affirm that her use of discourses outside architecture is more appropriate than that of Greg Lynn since her effort is aimed at elucidating how the heterogeneous nature of Latin American cultures affect architectural practices having a great deal of influence on the development of cities and buildings. However, due to her unfortunate and sudden death, the practical dimension of Waisman's work was never tested on the ground.

The concept of transculturation opens up a whole new area of inquiry for Latin American architects and architectural theorists. It provides the theoretical tools required to challenge conventional approaches to the city as a homogeneous and immutable entity —as a given, vertically imposed, cultural construct brought by the European colonizer in order to exercise social and political control. It makes visible the sociocultural diversity that coexists in the space of our cities and nations, and makes audible the voices of such diverse elements. Furthermore, the notion of architectural transculturation refers to the constant and unavoidable rhizomatic interaction through which these elements evolve. Different cultural elements do not coexist passively but maintain agonistic relations that affect each and every one of them without leading towards their elimination. On the contrary, as in the notion of rhizomatic becoming, they continue to exist and evolve as separate entities but only in relation to one another.

If the notion of transculturation were used to examine contemporary Latin American architecture, traditional architectural practices would immediately be put under scrutiny. Thus, transculturation can be seen not only as a useful and interpretative term but also as a whole new agenda for Latin American architecture. Under the critical notion of transcultural architecture, practices such as master planning, for

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<sup>48</sup> A closer examination of the work of Marina Waisman will be provided in chapter four so as to elucidate this theoretical impasse.

example, are rendered obsolete. Master plans for the partial or complete development of cities or parts of cities are perceived to be inadequate for they tend to ignore the realities of our cultures, as in the case of Brasilia. The inadequacy of master plans does not imply the elimination of urban planning altogether, but its necessary reassessment with contextual specificity. Additionally, standard architectural programs for the design of certain paradigmatic building types such as museums and art galleries would also require reassessment. In fact, the notion of transculturation offers the necessary tools to exercise a displacement of this type of building from the global symbolic network to which they belong into a differential and more specific micropolitical temporality. In the case of the museum, for example, the notion of transculturation can be seen as a tool of recodification, as an abstract concept, within a specific system of values. Instead of the traditional modern arts museum—a nineteenth-century European institution that works as a symbol of Western homogenization and authoritarian agendas—which almost every major city in Latin America has, and every minor city/town aspires to have as a sign of progress (or every architecture student has at least once designed as part of the five-year architectural curriculum), specific translations have to be developed. By specific translations I imply a process of reconfiguration, or re-coding, of sociocultural meaning and significance of the museum as an architectural type. That is, for example, the creation of more culturally specific types that respond more appropriately to the conditions of Latin American cultures i.e. "museum of contemporary black art of the Pacific coast," or "museum of indigenous art of the high Andes." Such sociopolitical specificity implies that architects (and architectural students) have to respond to the particularities of specific cultural contexts within the space of specific Latin American nations. Additionally, architects and architectural students have to rethink the concept of the museum as a global institution when facing the problem of design. This might be conducive to architectural design becoming interdisciplinary. But, above all, this implies the relocation of architectural



practices within an innovative cultural micropolitics whose content goes far beyond the limits of previous architectural models like critical regionalism which proved unable to respond to the realities of different cultures. The point is that this kind of sociopolitical response not only requires contextual specificity, but also opens doors for continued formal exploration.

At this stage it is necessary to explore the process of translation. Translation does not replace the whole complexity of the notion of transculturation. It is one of the processes through which transculturation is practically achieved. It refers to the pragmatic dimension of transculturation and adds to its epistemological value. I will therefore elaborate on the question of translation in the following chapter.

## Chapter Two: Translation and the evanescence of the Category of the Original.<sup>49</sup>

The task of the architect in postcolonial contexts is comparable to the task of the translator. Today, due to innumerable factors such as advanced mass communication technologies, global corporate capitalism, and tourism among others, our cultures have become a complex web of social interaction. For this reason, the work of the architect becomes very complex: to mediate between one culture and all the others in his or her attempt to produce adequate spaces to satisfy the needs of our current societies. Architects have to work within cultures that are not static in order to articulate them with other non-static cultural formations, and therefore their mediation becomes a dynamic operation. If the task of the architect shares something with the task of the translator, it is because the architect has constantly to perform a *multiple simultaneous cultural translation*.

Translation is a critical process in operation within the conditions of transculturation that have affected colonial and postcolonial Latin America. Translation has been explored as a bilateral operation in order to theorize the relation between Latin

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<sup>49</sup> A shorter version of this chapter was presented at the *Habitus 2000: A Sense of Place* conference that was organized by Curtin University of Technology in Perth, Western Australia, between the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> of September 2000. The complete version of this paper



America, as a periphery, and the metropolitan centers. As a critical process, translation has also served to disrupt theoretically the traditional structures of cultural domination that have always operated in postcolonial contexts. It will be argued throughout this chapter that processes of translation open up liminal spaces between and within cultures that bring to light the fissured nature of all languages and cultures. As a result, they disturb the recognition of cultural authority, and unsettle structures of cultural domination. In the case of Latin American architecture, translation implies a critical process that leads to the creation of new architectural objects, new spatialities, and also new theories of architecture that respond more accurately to the complex reality of our cultures.

In the first section of this chapter, I will elaborate on the notions of literary and cultural translation mainly in the light of the work of Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida. Their ideas on translation put under scrutiny the traditional assumption that gives priority to the original over the translation. In this section, it will be demonstrated that languages and cultures are in a constant process of change making the act of translation both impossible and necessary. In the second section, I will work on the way postcolonial theorists approach translation theory. Here, an important political component is introduced so as to challenge situations of cultural inequality in previously colonized contexts. Consequently, translation becomes synonymous with transgression and disruption. In the final section of this chapter I will elaborate specifically on the way Latin American theorists approach the notion of translation in order to explore the dynamics of transcultural exchange between Latin America and the centers. Towards the end of this chapter it will become apparent that processes and practices of translation are conducive to a state of hybridity and to processes of hybridization.

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was refereed and published in the conference proceedings under the title of "The Translational Dimension of Latin American Architecture."

## **2.1 On the Notions of Literary and Cultural Translation.**

The notion of translation in literature and in culture has always been a matter of intense debate. It has to do with the questions of meaning and significance, and also with questions regarding the appropriation, displacement and transmission of cultural elements across contesting cultural sites. Translation, as a process, also raises questions about the relation that exists between the original and the translation, as product. For these reasons, debates on translation have transgressed the boundaries of the merely linguistic and have become central to various areas within contemporary cultural theory.

In the first part of this section I will carry out an analysis of Walter Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator," which has become a text of paramount importance within the continued analysis of the practice of translation. I will then introduce the work of other theorists in an attempt to unveil the relevance of the notion of translation within contemporary cultural theory and politics —as in the case of postcolonial discourse where translation acquires serious political connotations— and architecture.

### **2.1.1 Unsettling the Primacy of the Original.**

It is inevitable to discuss the relation between the original and the translation every time translation, as a practice, becomes the central issue. Within traditional literary translation theory, the original has always been given priority over the translation. However, recent work tends to unsettle the primacy of the original. This does not mean that the original ceases to be important, for it "contains the law governing the



translation: its translatability.”<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, since languages are in a state of permanent re-creation, as is culture in general, the original itself proves to be an unstable entity —it is in a continuous state of internal translation. In other words, because cultures are no longer considered static categories but dynamic systems in constant flux, languages are required to undergo ceaseless processes of internal translation in keeping with the fluctuating cultural circumstances in which they are inscribed. This situation opens up doors for translation in the sense that the meaning and the significance of the original are no longer considered fixed qualities.<sup>51</sup> Translation can no longer be reduced to the transference of meaning from an original in a certain moment of its history to another system of meaning taken also at a particular point of its history due to the fact that both systems constantly mutate. Consequently, the transfer of meaning would never be total, and translation would always remain somewhat provisional, in a state of in-betweenness. For this reason, it has been argued that translation is never completed nor is it completely frustrated.<sup>52</sup>

In his essay “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin maintains that translation is not a passive one-way process that tends to reproduce inoffensively an original in another language. Quite the opposite, it is rather an active and aggressive process that challenges the purity and unity of the original. In so doing, the translator takes advantage of the internal conflict of languages and cultures, and their state of flux in order to re-create them.

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<sup>50</sup> BENJAMIN, Walter, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, in Hanna Arendt, *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken Books, 1968 p 70

<sup>51</sup> The difference between meaning and significance is that whereas meaning is seen as an intrinsic property of texts, as a primary quality of them, significance is about the relation that texts have with their contexts; it is subjective rather than objective. See Graham, J.F. *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985 pp 13 - 30

<sup>52</sup> See: WIGLEY, Mark, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt*, Boston, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1996 p 5

Since it is assumed that the original is always internally broken, Benjamin suggests that no text has ever been written in one single language, and also that both, languages and texts, are always fractured and impure.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the translator's task is to attempt to alleviate this situation by supplementing languages through translation. Benjamin's notion of supplementarity becomes clear as he maintains that "the life of the originals attains in them [the translations] to its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering."<sup>54</sup> In other words, if the translation can be seen as a supplement or complement to the original, "it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself."<sup>55</sup> Thus, Benjamin establishes that neither the original nor the translation is a monolithic and static entity. On the contrary, they are independent —yet interdependent— entities by nature, and both follow their own paths of historical becoming.

It could therefore be affirmed that the original becomes simply a point of departure for the translation after which the translation gains its own life. As Benjamin suggests:

Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point, with this touch rather than with the point setting the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity, a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of the sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux.<sup>56</sup>

If both, original and translation, follow their own independent paths of historical becoming and the relation between them is that of complementarity, then, we can assume that both are equivalent. Thus the relation between the original and the translation becomes symmetrical generating a radical modification to the structures

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<sup>53</sup> This shows similarities with the notions of polyphony and heteroglossia in Bakhtin. These two notions and the work of Bakhtin will be explored in the following chapter.

<sup>54</sup> BENJAMIN, Walter, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, in Hanna Arendt, ed., *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken Books, 1968 p 72

<sup>55</sup> DERRIDA, Jaques, "Les Tours de Babel," in GRAHAM, Joseph F., editor and translator, *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985 p 188

<sup>56</sup> Op. Cit. pp 80 - 81



that give priority to the original alone. The primacy of the original is therefore disrupted.

Some theorists find continuity between Benjamin's theory of translation and his theses on history. As Tejaswini Niranjana affirms, "the intertwining of the translation and history problematics is crucial to post-colonials who must find a way of accounting for the force of representations while taking into account the post-structuralist critique of representation in general."<sup>57</sup> Niranjana is interested in the idea of reversal implicit in the notion of translation viewed through a Derridean deconstructive perspective. She believes that in the same way that Benjamin deconstructs the relationship between the original and the translation —deconstruction understood primarily as reversal—, his notion of history might help deconstruct the structures that command historiographic views of the colonial past.

As Niranjana puts it:

The non-representational theory of translation and historiography that is no longer concerned with recording the past as it really was suggests a notion of reading that is not epistemological but political —in the sense of being deliberately interventionist and strategic. It is a kind of reading of Benjamin's own work on translation that can uncover the figure of historicity as a translation in translation.<sup>58</sup>

This clearly becomes a fundamental issue for the creation of a cultural politics of difference that is part of most postcolonial agendas. However, Niranjana works at the highest theoretical level far from any specific cultural, national, or geographical context. If translation as a practice laden with political agency is to have real sociopolitical connotations, then it requires contextual specificity. That is because the expected disruptive effects of the practices that she proposes will necessarily vary

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<sup>57</sup> NIRANJANA, Tejaswini, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford, University of California Press, 1992 p 161

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p 162

from one context to another, and what proves to be disruptive in one context may well not be so in another.

What becomes clear is that in current literary translation theory there is an attempt to disrupt the traditional relation between original and translation. If in traditional translation theory the original is given a certain priority and always remains at a higher level, more contemporary theoretical postures tend to eliminate these hierarchical structures and to place both in a similar position. This does not deny the fact that both are related to each other: it has been said that they are interdependent. What this theoretical posture suggests is that, due to the differences and fractures that exist between and within the languages of the original and the translation, the transfer of content can never be complete, and the process itself will always remain unfinished. Therefore, translation stops being only the transfer or transmission of form and content. Hence, translation can also be understood as transformation. For this reason, translation theory becomes fundamental for exploring the dynamics of contemporary cultural communication, especially in situations of cultural inequality. The notion of translation, as reversal and transformation, obtains a certain political value that becomes not only a vehicle, but also a fundamental tool for the continued exploration of culture in postcolonial contexts.

### **2.1.2 Translation as Transformation: Or Difference In Translation.**

If in the previous section it became clear that translation can also be understood as transformation, then the concept of difference in translation appears to become transcendental. In other words, the concept of difference turns out to be inherently related to the practice of translation, and difference appears not only between



languages, but also within languages as something that already exists in the original: an intrinsic fact of every language.

Following our interpretation of Benjamin, the original, from which the translation departs, is never complete in itself, never "identical to itself" and, therefore, is always already inhabited by differences. That is why the translation *may* become supplementary to the original so as to bridge the gaps that exist within it. I emphasize the speculative *may* for two reasons: first, because Benjamin also affirms that there are bad translations in which case supplementarity would not occur, and second because if translation may be supplementary, then, by the same token, the opposite becomes valid and translation *may* also affect the original in a negative way. Since this is an idea that will be explored later, with particular reference to architecture, I will now return to the idea of the original as an entity already inhabited by differences. In a deconstructive perspective, the myth of origin, as a complete and pure moment in the life of languages and cultures, is erased. Consequently, the translation can be understood as a new configuration that bears the traces of something anterior but which has been displaced both in space and time. After such displacement, the translation appears as something different. Here, the notion of *différance*, introduced by Derrida, may become useful.

Derrida affirms that "in a language, in the system of language, there are only differences."<sup>59</sup> This affirmation not only reinforces the idea of origin as an incomplete and unfinished moment, but also suggests the elimination of the notion of origin as such, or, if not, a complete theoretical re-conceptualization of it. *Différance*, as Derrida puts it, is the "nonfull, nonsimple, structured and differentiating origin of

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<sup>59</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques, "Différance," in KAMUF, Peggy, editor, *Derrida: A Derrida Reader*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991 p 64

differences. Thus, the name *origin* no longer suits it."<sup>60</sup> Consistent with the post-structuralist approach of other French thinkers like Deleuze, for example, who affirms that all there are is multiplicities, Derrida maintains that every system of referral is constituted historically as a weave of differences. Deleuze and Derrida also agree that differences have to be produced —in Derrida's own words, differences "are produced effects." Such an assumption paradoxically seems to reconstruct a certain linearity based upon a cause-and-effect dialectics. The idea that differences are produced effects suggests that there is an origin, a cause, which is in opposition with his theoretical deletion of the notion of origin. How is it that differences are effects without a cause or origin? Derrida is aware of this paradox and offers the notion of "trace" as a possible solution, although one that remains unresolved in the text on *différance*.<sup>61</sup> As Derrida explains, trace "is no more an effect than it has a cause, but which in and of itself, outside its text, is not sufficient to operate the necessary transgression."<sup>62</sup> More elaboration on this enigmatic analogy would be necessary to unveil Derrida's use of the notion of trace as a way out of this closure.

Instead of expanding on the notion of trace that leads to a more complex philosophical debate, I would like to bring in Derrida's essay "Des Tours de Babel." Here Derrida elaborates primarily on the notion of translation, but also, more clearly than in other work, he elucidates the idea of *différance* in analogy with the story of Babel. In fact, Babel could be seen as the proper name of *différance*. It is important not to forget that what Derrida is trying to shed light on in this essay is "the necessary and impossible task of translation," or as he says it, "its necessity as impossibility."<sup>63</sup> The analogy with Babel serves to figure the original moment of differences: precisely

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p 64

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp 61 - 77

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p 64

<sup>63</sup> DERRIDA, Jacques, "Des Tours de Babel," in GRAHAM, Joseph F., editor and translator, *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1985 p 171



the moment of *différance*, in the sense of difference and deferral, a configuration of spatial and temporal difference.

The reason why this tremendously complex analogy becomes relevant is because it opens doors for the exploration of issues within postcolonial theory and also within architecture. In order to understand Derrida's view of Babel, I will now quote him at length:

In seeking to make a place for themselves, to found at the same time a universal tongue and a unique genealogy, the Semites want to bring the world to reason, and this reason can signify simultaneously a colonial violence (since they would thus universalize their idiom) and a peaceful transparency of the human community. Inversely, when God imposes and opposes his name, he ruptures the rational transparency but interrupts also the colonial violence or the linguistic imperialism. He destines them to translation, he subjects them to the law of translation both necessary and impossible; in a stroke with his translatable-untranslatable name he delivers a universal reason (it will no longer be subject to the rule of a particular nation), but he simultaneously limits its very universality: forbidden transparency, impossible univocity. Translation becomes law, duty and debt, but the debt one can no longer discharge.<sup>64</sup>

The Babel analogy is an ambitious attempt to produce a framework in order to cover all the theoretical problems of translation at once. Hence, it becomes necessary to identify different aspects within it and consider them separately yet not in isolation. One issue that requires consideration is the use of the notions of colonialism and imperialism in his work. Based on the biblical story, Babel does refer to a situation of colonialism. However, this story cannot be directly introduced into postcolonial theory as various authors have quite simplistically suggested.<sup>65</sup> This is because, on the one hand, it is unlikely that Derrida, in this particular piece, used these two notions within a postcolonial theoretical framework. On the other hand, because it could also be argued that the interruption to which Derrida refers above can be understood as the origin of colonial violence. In other words, if the transparent universal language is

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p 174

interrupted, destining all nations to translation, then violence might become necessary as a means of communication between nations. Since in "Des Tours de Babel" Derrida does not elaborate on issues regarding postcolonialism or imperialism, as he does in other texts, one may argue that, in this case, they are outside the margins of his argument. Therefore, if the Babelian analogy were to be appropriated within postcolonial theory, careful elaboration would be necessary. Nonetheless, the analogy with Babel sheds light on the heterogeneous and split nature of cultural languages and the consequent impossibility of homogenizing them in order to achieve a peaceful transparent human community —an imagined community. This becomes another reason why the Babel analogy cannot be directly appropriated within postcolonial theory. The impossibility of a peaceful and transparent human community may be tied to the unequal distribution of power, be it cultural, political, financial, or military that is not addressed by Derrida. Power, therefore, is another factor that contributes to the ambivalence of translation.

In "Des Tours de Babel," Derrida addresses the question of translation as a "system in deconstruction." The story of Babel stands for the:

Irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system and architectonics. What the multiplicity of idioms actually limits is not only a 'true' translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression, it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct.<sup>65</sup>

Derrida's essay can be understood as an intertextual *translation* of Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator" through the narrative of Babel; an addition to and a critique of Benjamin's work —a constructive abuse. Intertextual in the sense that he does not only focus on just one text but connects the whole of Benjamin's work in an attempt to interpret one particular text. Complementary in the sense that Derrida's re-

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<sup>65</sup> See, for example, the work of Nelly Richard and Ella Shohat.



interpretation of Benjamin's text is then connected to a series of other texts outside the literary field in order to expand its theoretical repercussion. In connecting Benjamin with psychoanalysis, for example, Derrida takes the original text into a much broader theoretical and critical realm. Thus, Derrida translates Benjamin following Benjamin's own posture and proves that translation goes far beyond the transmission of subject matter. One could read Benjamin through Derrida although the texts are different in form, content and significance. As to the practice of translation itself, the deconstructivist approach is seen in the fact that the transcendent value of the original work is refuted so that translation, as self-translation, is the nature of languages. Consequently, translation between languages becomes an impossible but necessary practice. Its necessity relies on the fact that it has to be permanent.

Another interesting aspect of Derrida's discourse is his use of the words: architecture, edification, structure, and construction. He obviously identifies himself with an architectural lexicon, but it seems that, here, architecture serves as a negative analogy. That is, architecture and all the architectural words he uses, stands for the opposite of what he is trying to demonstrate, namely the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, and of completing something. Architecture, on Derrida's usage, would therefore imply a system of totalization, and the very possibility of achieving completion —which appears to be the way architects themselves understand architecture. However, working within an enhanced architectural field —architecture as a cultural practice and not merely as the *art* of building— Derrida's ideas open up doors for the study of architecture and its intertextual ways of interexpression. The notion of *différance* and the analogy of Babel will become useful to explore the notion of architectural hybridization as it occurs within conditions of transculturation in Latin America.

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<sup>66</sup> Op. Cit. pp 165 - 166

## **2.2 The Case of Postcolonial Translation.**

Due to its disruptive capacity, the question of translation has been constantly addressed within postcolonial discourse. It becomes a tool for critically, and meticulously, examining the nature and dynamics of contemporary transcultural communication. Maintaining continuity with the highly abstract ideas introduced in the previous section, I will now bring into the discussion the work of various postcolonial theorists who endow translation with political agency. In this context, translation serves to put under scrutiny the "originality" of European cultures, and, thereby, their "superiority" with regard to non-European cultures. In other words, translation helps the creation of a more democratic space for the transfer of elements across cultural sites.

### **2.2.1 Translation as the Performative Nature of Cultural Communication.**

The notion of translation as studied so far, and the notion of *différance*, have been appropriated by cultural theorists in order to set the ground for debates on cultural difference within postcolonial contexts. As has been argued, translation is an essential practice within transcultural negotiations. Cultural translation does not equal transculturation nor does it replace the complexity of the entire process of transculturation. Translation is only one of the processes that takes place within it. Cultural translation is not a tangible process between languages or cultures, it is rather an intangible but constant process between conflicting historical experiences that enables the transformation of cultures.

Any discussion on issues of cultural translation within postcolonial contexts would be incomplete without a reading of Bhabha's work on the term itself. Bhabha introduces



the notion of cultural translation in the light of Benjamin's previous exploration of the task of translation. His reading of Benjamin is intertextual, following the same route as Derrida. Bhabha also uses psychoanalysis in order to enhance Benjamin's literary work and connect it with a larger sociological context inserting also some political ingredients. Bhabha maintains that:

Benjamin's argument can be elaborated for a theory of cultural difference. It is only by engaging with what he calls the 'purer linguistic air' —the sign as anterior to any *site* of meaning— that the reality-effect of content can be overpowered which then makes all cultural languages 'foreign' to themselves. And it is from this foreign perspective that it becomes possible to inscribe the specific locality of cultural systems —their incommensurable differences— and through that apprehension of difference, to perform the act of cultural translation.<sup>67</sup>

It becomes clear from the above that Bhabha assumes a position similar to Derrida in the sense that translation becomes an impossible but necessary task. What Bhabha suggests, seeing Benjamin through a Derridean lens, is that one way to understand the specific locality of cultural systems is by being aware of the broken and performative nature of cultural languages within themselves. He affirms that "in the act of translation the 'given' content becomes alien and estranged; and that, in its turn, leaves the languages of translation *Aufgabe*, always confronted by their double, the untranslatable —alien and foreign."<sup>68</sup> This, therefore, would make translation between cultural languages both impossible and necessary.

It is in the realm of the untranslatable where Bhabha finds the political content of translation. The elements of resistance that render cultural translation irresolvable and liminal —what Benjamin calls "the element in translation that does not lend itself

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<sup>67</sup> BHABHA, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994 p 164

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p 164

to translation"<sup>69</sup>— become the basis for Bhabha's notions of cultural difference and hybridity that will be explored in the next chapter. It is important to highlight, at this stage, the way in which the process of cultural translation, as a two-way mode of cultural negotiation, helps to produce cultural "newness." Bhabha looks at the situation of minority diasporic groups living in the centers as well as at the postcolonial relation between the centers and the peripheries at large. He proposes that, since cultural translation can never be total, the elements that do not lend themselves to translation remain in a state of in-betweenness, as hybrid stubborn chunks that never blend with others and that can never be reconstituted as they previously were. These elements do not seem to belong to any particular cultural formation but exist in all of them as new cultural elements that are both different and differential. They highlight the foreignness of cultural languages, and, at the same time, demonstrate the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference.

The notion of cultural difference implies that translation is necessary, while the ambivalence of every cultural language within itself suggests that translation is impossible. That is why Bhabha concludes that "translation is the performative nature of cultural communication."<sup>70</sup> Bhabha's intention is to use the notion of translation to unsettle the hierarchical structures that determine transcultural relations in postcolonial contexts. Cultural translation, he maintains, "desacralizes the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy."<sup>71</sup> Cultural superiority is here relocated within a more democratic structure of cultural communication in which no culture overcomes another. On the contrary, cultures are seen to complement one another in an agonistic relation. By eliminating cultural superiority, Bhabha

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<sup>69</sup> BENJAMIN, Walter, *The Task of the Translator*, trans. Harry Zohn, in Hanna Arendt, *Illuminations*, New York, Schocken Books, 1968 p 75

<sup>70</sup> BHABHA, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994 p 228

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p 228



undermines the cultural homogenization that results from the influence that central cultures exercise over peripheral ones. Within this theoretical non-hierarchical structure, inevitable transcultural relations do not result in the elimination of incommensurable cultural differences, but in the negotiation amongst them so that they survive homogenization. For the aim of cultural translation is precisely to produce cultural differentiation in the midst of our current state of global cultural merging.

However, Homi Bhabha has not been the only theorist who has worked on the notion of cultural translation, cultural difference and *différance* within postcolonial contexts. In the following section, I will elaborate on other postcolonial approaches to the work of Bhabha, which operate theoretically in different ways, and pay attention to other cultural contexts.

### **2.2.2 The Disruptive Capacity of the Notion of Translation in the Postcolonial Context.**

From the work analyzed thus far, it becomes clear that translation is not only an interlingual process, but a larger cultural matter. In the previous section the notion of translation was taken into the realm of culture in general, and then introduced within postcolonial discourse. In this context, the notion of translation raised important political questions regarding the unequal distribution of power characteristic of the colonial situation in which (traditional) translation was largely used to reinforce the hegemonic position of the colonizer. Since the non-European Other did not historically exist before it was discovered and colonized, its coming into being as historical subject within universal history occurred only through the language and culture of the European. In other words, it appears that for the colonizer, the non-

European Other only attained historical subject-hood and voice after a period of apprenticeship in which the people of the colonies learnt the European language(s) and culture(s). Here translation —mainly literary, but always between differing and contesting cultural sites— serves to affirm the culture of the colonizer as the original. It becomes clear that the practice of translation was an intrinsic part of the strategies employed both to construct and dominate colonial subjects. As Niranjana says: "translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism."<sup>72</sup>

For this reason, the total rethinking of translation within postcolonial contexts becomes an important and urgent task. The aim of rethinking translation is precisely to interrupt the effects of colonial translation through strategies of reversal that eliminate the colonizer's cultural authority. In other words, the objective of translation within a postcolonial theoretical agenda is to substitute its subjectification effect for a strategy of resistance.

The rethinking of translation becomes an important task in a context where it has been used since the European Enlightenment to underwrite practices of subjection, especially for colonized peoples. Such a rethinking —a task of great urgency for a postcolonial theory attempting to make sense of "subjects" already living "in translation," imaged and re-imaged by colonial ways of seeing— seeks to reclaim the notion of translation by deconstructing it and reinscribing its potential as a strategy of resistance.<sup>73</sup>

If colonial translation is understood as a strategy of domination that serves to erase the violence of colonialism, then postcolonial translation can be seen as the possibility of leveling the ground on which contemporary transcultural relations take place.

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<sup>72</sup> NIRANJANA, Tejaswini, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford, University of California Press, 1992 p 2



However, this reversal should not be confused with essentialist calls for a return to a culturally uncontaminated moment prior to colonization that are so common in nationalist discourses. The emotional rather than critical position of many nationalist discourses that propound a return to the lost past —the origin— occludes the violence of the colonial encounter and, therefore, ignores the contesting historical voices attempting to be heard within Western dominated colonial and postcolonial history. The suppression of cultural heterogeneity as intended by nationalist essentialist discourses is comparable with universalizing discourses of the centers in the sense that both tend to the homogenization of the cultural field. Consequently, nationalist discourses, instead of establishing differences between the colonizer and the colonized, may be complicit with imperialist narratives of universalization. The process of colonization, and more contemporary modes of transcultural interaction that result from advanced communication technologies, the globalization of markets, tourism, and diaspora, among others, produced and continue to produce cultural differences that are unavoidable and undeniable. Therefore, instead of propounding a return to lost origins, the postcolonial theorist must engage in a re-writing/translation of history that challenges hegemonic interpretations of Western historicity. This is a deliberate and interventionist —deconstructive— act of translation of history that is no longer concerned with the universalizing and homogenizing agenda of Western cultural-politics, but with the acknowledgement of differences within a more democratic cultural field. As Niranjana says: "perhaps postcolonial theory can show that we need to translate (that is, disturb or displace) history rather than interpret it (hermeneutically) or "read" in a textualizing move."<sup>74</sup>

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the notion of translation serves to construct a critique to the notion of origin, and, from it, to carry out an anti-essentialist and anti-

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p 6

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p 38

hegemonic re-writing/translation of history. This is the point of confluence of the various theoretical positions explored so far: the Benjaminian way of reading and translating history presented in the first section of this chapter, the post-structuralist critique (mainly introduced through Derrida's theory of deconstruction and *différance*), and finally postcolonial discourse. Benjamin offered us a view of translation that challenges the unity and purity of the original. Derrida offers a much more complex theoretical insight that allows for the dismantling of Western hegemony. Postcolonial discourse combines these different but correlated theories in a twofold attempt to: a) make legible areas of difference, contradiction and resistance, and b) create a space for negotiation amongst those areas of difference and contradiction without striving to eliminate them. Within this frame of ideas, translation becomes a complex culturally disruptive *practice* consisting of a radical re-writing of history from the perspective of the previously colonized peoples.

In most postcolonial theorists, translation leads to questions of hybridity and hybridization which imply a constant multiplying of differences that escape the surveillance of the discriminatory eye, or, as Niranjana puts it, "hybridi[zation] can be seen as the sign of a postcolonial theory that subverts essentialist models of reading while it points toward a new practice of translation."<sup>75</sup> The notions of hybridity and hybridization will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter. However, in the following section I will study the way in which Latin American theorists use the notions of translation studied so far.



## **2.3 Cultural Translation in the Latin America Context.**

The notion of translation has also had great impact within Latin American cultural theory. It was used by the colonizer to exercise control over different indigenous groups, and played a central role in the transmission and imposition of culture. It has, therefore, not only been a tool to analyze the transmission of language. Various cultural theorists in Latin America make use of the theories and methods of critique examined above in order to describe and analyze with political specificity the formation of Latin American cultures. In this section, I will examine the work of various Latin American theorists who work with the notion of translation in order to demonstrate that in Latin America translation also implies transgression.

### **2.3.1 Appropriating, Translating, and Transgressing in Latin America.**

In previous sections, it became clear that literary translation theory served as a basis for the development of a much larger and more complex inquiry within contemporary cultural theory. The work of Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida and Homi Bhabha, among others, endows translation with a subversive capacity that challenges the category of the original which will no longer have a dominant position within the translational relation. For Benjamin, the translation is associated with the after-life of literary works. That is, through translation, the original is taken to its latest and most abundant flowering. For Derrida the translation becomes the original thereby deleting the notion of the latter as a pure, unified, and superior category. Bhabha and Niranjana introduce the notion of translation into the postcolonial context as a tool to examine the dynamics of cultural communication in situations of inequality. Based mainly on the theoretical work of the previous two thinkers, Bhabha and Niranjana

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p 46

highlight the relevance of translation theory in the study of colonial/postcolonial relations because it serves to challenge the superiority of the European culture that has always been regarded as the original. It is therefore possible to affirm that colonization always happens within the realm of translation, and the colonies are always considered as copies of the European original —or the effort is to make them into copies. The colonies, as copies, would hence be diminished and evaluated as inferior. This is the reason why Niranjana affirms that the colonial practice of translation shapes and takes shape within asymmetrical relations of power.

For this reason, and despite the fact that postcolonial discourse has not been very popular in the Latin American context, translation theory has been used as a theoretical tool to examine the relation between the Latin American cultures, as part of the periphery, and the cultures of the centers. In the light of the ideas elaborated by the theorists and philosophers mentioned above, translation is seen as a bilateral operation crucial to processes of identity formation. Translation has also become a critical discourse of enormous help for the theorization of those processes. That is why it has acquired political connotations, or has been the result of sociopolitical circumstances particular to Latin America.

Writers and theorists in Latin America have strong views about translation. Octavio Paz, who in 1992 stood at the front of the celebrations of the 500 years of the discovery of America in México, wrote extensively on issues of postmodernism, hybridity, and translation. Although his work on hybridity, which was heavily influenced by the recently published book of Néstor García Canclini, did not have any major political repercussion within the academic arena, his work on translation did. Particularly because it was in keeping with the agenda of most Latin American scholars who were seeking alternative theoretical positions to examine the relation



between Latin America and the European colonizer. In 1992 Octavio Paz said that the world appears to us as an accumulation of texts:

Each slightly different from the one that came before it: translations of translations of translations. Each text is unique, yet at the same time it is the translation of another text. No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation —first from the non-verbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase.<sup>76</sup>

Paz' position seems to share with Derrida the idea that languages and texts have been constituted historically as a weave of differences, but written history has been the vehicle for the repression of such differences. However, his explanation resembles more the Deleuzian model of the rhizome in its interminable interconnectability within an undifferentiated and nonhierarchical field. Thus, by highlighting the rhizomatic relation between texts, Paz challenges the notion of the original, and thereby the superiority of the European text in relation to the [Latin] American.

One of the most appropriate ways to explain how the translational practice has operated within the Latin American context is through the cannibalistic metaphor used by the Antropofagia movement in Brazil during the early 1920's. Although the case is well known in literary circles, a brief introduction here may be helpful. Some time in the sixteenth century, in the current territory of Brazil, members of an indigenous tribe called Tupinamba devoured a catholic priest. The event horrified European society, however for the Tupinambas it was an act of homage: "after all, one does not eat people one does not respect, and in some societies the devouring of the strongest enemies or most worthy elders has been seen as a means of

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<sup>76</sup> PAZ, Octavio, "Translation of Literature and Letters," trans. Irene del Corral, in SCHULTE, R. and BIGUENET, J. (editors), *Theories of Translation from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992 pp 152 - 163

acquiring the powers they had wielded in life.”<sup>77</sup> It was also a logical interpretation of the Christian rituals in which the devouring of the body and blood of Christ is an important part of the regular practice.

This event was used three centuries later by Oswald de Andrade as a basis for his *Manifesto Antropofago*. The devouring of the catholic priest served as a cultural metaphor to represent the construction of an identity via the appropriation of cultural elements from other contexts. Devouring implies the selection of what one eats and the subsequent process of digestion. In other words, the actual devouring becomes a violation of the European code, while, at the same time, being an act of homage. The digestive process implied by this cannibal metaphor suggests that, despite the fact that elements have been appropriated, they undergo transformation. Therefore, those “copied” or appropriated elements unsettle the implicit superiority of the European original. As Else Vieira says, “translation entails a double dialectical dimension with political ingredients; it unsettles the primacy of origin, recast both as donor and receiver of forms, and advances the role of the receiver as a giver in its own right, further pluralizing (in)fidelity.”<sup>78</sup> It is important to stress that the devouring of the other in order to construct an identity of the self —Brazilian identity in this case— is not a call to return to a lost and unrecoverable past. Identity here is more dynamic as it is seen to be in a constant process of becoming rather than as a fixed state of being in the world. This dynamic identity results from the interaction between Brazil and the cultures of the centers in an era in which transcultural relations are unavoidable. As Stuart Hall puts it:

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<sup>77</sup> BASSNETT, Sussan, and TRIVEDI, Harish, editors, *Post-Colonial Translation; Theory and Practice*, London, Routledge, 1999 p 1

<sup>78</sup> VIEIRA, Else, “Liberating Calibans: Readings of Antropofagia and Haroldo de Campos Poetics of Transcreation,” in BASNETT, Susan, and TRIVEDI, Harish (editors), *Postcolonial translation: Theory and Practice*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999 p 95



Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have a history. But, like everything that is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being externally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and positioned ourselves within, the narratives of the past.<sup>79</sup>

For as Hall affirms, cultural identities rather than essential are unstable points of identification, and imply "a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic transcendental law of origin."<sup>80</sup>

Hall's view is important to this analysis of the notion of translation in Latin America because he sees our identities as *becoming through translation*, which is conducive to a state of cultural hybridity. Translation has both literal and metaphorical significance within his discourse. Hall understands the importance of the role of linguistic translation in the process of colonization, but also maintains that nations in Latin America and the Caribbean share a common history of displacement, transportation, colonization, and even slavery. This common history not only unifies us across our differences but also indicates the translational character of our cultures. However, despite the fact that most Latin American and Caribbean nations share a similar history, "we do not stand in the same relation of otherness to the metropolitan centers. Each has negotiated its economical, political and cultural dependency differently."<sup>81</sup> Therefore, special attention has to be paid to each particular cultural context. This is an alert to theorists who generalize the Latin American cultural territory, which places under scrutiny most of the architectural work

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<sup>79</sup> HALL, Stuart, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in WILLIAMS, Patrick and CHRISMAN, Laura (Editors), *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994 p 394

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p 395

developed by Latin American theorists during the past two decades. Architectural theorists have demonstrated that they are still committed to the search for a classificatory definition of our architectural identity. They seem to be oblivious to the manifold incommensurable differences that coexist within our cultures. That is why it is urgent that architects and architectural theorists engage with different aspects of cultural theory in order to escape from the severely enclosed and self-isolating realm of architecture. This would allow architects to respond more accurately to the reality of Latin American cultures not only theoretically but also in practice.

In sum, I want to suggest that translation, in the Latin American context, does not only imply transformation but also, and more importantly, *transgression*. It stresses the need for the creation of a cultural politics of difference in order to undertake the complex negotiation among the different sociocultural and political positions that coexist within our own cultural space, and between Latin America and the metropolitan centers. By stressing difference, this cultural politics destabilizes the binary structures that determine the cultural economy between Latin America, the centers and other peripheries. Translation here is also associated with a re-reading and re-writing of history so as to bring to light the non-linear course of our own history and the fragmented nature of our cultures. This translational understanding of our history, as illustrated in the case of Antropofagia, moves us towards the construction of more dynamic identities that challenge the notion of fixity and essentialism which are complicit with the political agenda of Western cultural domination.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p 396



### **2.3.2 From Cultural Translation to Cultural Hybridization: The Unfinalizability of the Process.**

I hope to have made clear throughout this chapter how and why translation, both as a concept and as a practice, becomes crucial within conditions of transculturation as analyzed in the previous chapter. Transculturation emphasizes the multi-directional nature of the cultural economy between the peripheries and the centers as a response to the notion of acculturation that implies only a one-way relation and hence the deletion or dismissal of the cultures of the peripheries. Fernando Ortiz and Ángel Rama demonstrated how the nature of this cultural exchange affects all parties involved in the operation [see chapter one]. To some extent, it is implied that there is a series of processes within the whole dynamics of transculturation capable of exerting a reversal within the cultural economics that determine the inequality of global cultural positions.

Translation serves to explore the processes of transfer, displacement and transformation of culture across differing and contesting cultural sites. As stated above, it serves to deconstruct the structures that value peripheral cultural manifestations as inferior. However, one point has not been discussed yet and that is the need for a translator. Perhaps due to the fact that postcolonial theorists engage with the notion of translation as an abstract cultural process and also as a notion that so accurately serves to elaborate on questions of transcultural exchange, the role of the individual translator seems to lose importance. I would like to bring the translator back to the fore. The reason is that I believe that the translator is the agent who renders the translation political. The need for a translator implies that translation cannot be spontaneous, it has to be performed by an agent. Therefore, it is the *task* of the translator, as Benjamin and Derrida affirm, to perform the operation and purposely to alter the languages and cultures that participate in the process. In other

words, the transgressive value of translation lies in the hands of the translator, for whom transgression becomes his or her task. The political *task* of the postcolonial cultural translator<sup>82</sup> in Latin America is to make evident the inherent ambiguity of the discourses used to construct unifying or monolithic static identities. In other words, to prove that myths of origin and of univocal identities do not apply to the complex reality of the Latin America cultures. In so doing, the translator inscribes difference at the origin of our cultures, and, thereby unsettles the superiority of European cultures. It thus becomes clear that the translator can be seen as the agent who introduces political agency to the process of translation. Furthermore, if, as mentioned above, translation is conducive to a state of cultural hybridization,<sup>83</sup> then it also becomes a major political component within the process of hybridization. This is because the agency implicit in the translational operation renders hybridization intentional as opposed to unintentional or spontaneous, to use Bakhtin's terms.

To this point, translation has been seen as a process that serves to uncover the instability of the cultures of the centers that were presented as the originals during colonization. At the same time, it proves that calls for a return to an alternative original moment prior to colonization are inappropriate and unnecessary. This is because our identities exist already in and through translation. Consequently, "our search should not be for origins or essences but for a richer complexity, a complication of our notions of the self, a more densely textured understanding of who

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<sup>82</sup> I specify the postcolonial cultural translator, as opposed to the translator alone, only to broaden the field on which translation operates. That is, to engage with the whole spectrum of transcultural dynamics and not only with the translation of languages with which the translator alone would be directly associated.

<sup>83</sup> Hybridization could then be seen as a result of the process of translation, but it does not mean that hybridization is not a cultural process itself, it is a process nonetheless, although on a different cultural level.



we are."<sup>84</sup> This, therefore, becomes the basis for the construction of a hybrid and more dynamic sense of identity.

Taken into the architectural field, the concept of translation can be seen as a helpful tool in order to question theoretical positions that tend to homogenize Latin American cultures. One case is Brasilia, for example, in which the cultural heterogeneity of Brazil was deliberately ignored. Despite the quality of its modern architecture, Brasilia brought to light the tensions and conflicts that exist between the country's multiple sociocultural groups and which are the result of the unequal distribution of power characteristic of Latin American societies. As a translation, Brasilia became supplementary to the European modern architectural discourse, even if only by bringing to light the failures of the modernist discourse. Other similar cases can be found in La Havana (Cuba), Cidade dos Motores (Brazil), Puerto Ortiz and Ciudad Pilar (Venezuela), Cali, Medellín and Tumaco (Colombia), Lima (Perú). These were modernist architectural projects conceived during the first and the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, a period when Latin America saw the emergence of a "developmentalist" belief according to which the shameful colonial past and present underdevelopment could be overcome through modernization and industrialization. However, in the haste of this urban change, the sociocultural realities of every Latin American nation were thoroughly overlooked. The dominant classes, whose members had, and still continue to have, easier access to the cultures of the metropolitan centers, aimed at transferring Euro-American models of social order into the Latin American societies. Political leaders and dominant classes (two categories that cannot easily be separated in Latin America) were oblivious to the impossibility of transferring such models of order —social, cultural, economic and political— without appropriate strategies of cultural translation. In the case of

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<sup>84</sup> NIRANJANA, Tejaswini, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, Los Angeles - Oxford, University of California Press, 1992 p 186

architecture, only the formal dimension of the modernist project could be transferred because its inherent socio-political agenda did not respond adequately to the new contexts. It therefore becomes apparent that modernizing projects —urban and architectural— were based upon the assumption that cultures and nations in Latin America were homogeneous, or, if not, could be homogenized through industrialization, the building of urban infrastructure, and education. Yet, it was these same projects which eventually made visible the complex sociocultural reality of all Latin American nations. Our nations were found to be politically, socially and culturally unstable, as well as fissured, due to the diverse practices and historical experiences of the peoples who inhabit them. Consequently, it became clear that neither could the colonial past be deleted, nor could Latin American cultures be homogenized.

A more contemporary example can be seen in Colombia through the proliferation of "Unidades Residenciales" that, as a second generation of the mass speculative housing projects of the sixties and seventies, respond to large sections of the society whose stratification is only based on annual income statistics. Although architects do respond to the particular geographical and climatic conditions of Colombia and produce interesting formal innovations, most of their projects are based on *transliterated* Euro-American architectural models that do not respond appropriately to the heterogeneous cultural reality of the Colombian context. Consequently, these projects do not resist reality for long, which is demonstrated by the promptness with which alterations take place making obvious the underlying diversity of Colombia's cultures and revealing the performative temporality of architecture. As Niranjana suggests, translation is a tool of great help in the search for a richer and more complex notion of ourselves. This renders inappropriate searches for a genuine national identity in the past architectures of indigenous peoples who inhabited the current territory of Colombia, or anywhere in Latin America, prior to colonization, as



well as uncritical appropriations of foreign homogenizing architectures. The task of the architect would therefore be comparable to the task of the postcolonial translator, in the sense that he or she has to intervene in order to bring to the fore the ambivalent and heterogeneous nature of our cultures. It will open up doors for the creation of richer and more complex architectures and architectural theories that will not only respond more accurately to the realities of our cultures, but will also challenge hegemonic Euro-American architectural discourses.

It has been underlined in this chapter that translation leads to hybridization. However, it is necessary to insist that although hybridization may be produced, among other means, through translation, it does not mean that hybridization is a static result or an end to the process. It will be demonstrated that hybridization is also an unfinalizable cultural process. The reason why hybridization can be seen as being produced through processes of cultural translation is because, as shown above, the practice of translation opens spaces of liminality [in-]between and within languages and cultures. These spaces of irresolution in-between cultural languages are spaces of hybridity inhabited by those untranslatable cultural elements that refuse binary classifications of belonging. It is the space where the diversity of cultures as multiple polarity is turned into an area of democratic negotiation among and across differing cultural sites. This permanent negotiation among contesting cultural sites is what we will now call hybridization. Although translation and hybridization refer to a common ethos of complex dynamic cultural interaction, hybridization differs from the concept of translation because it does not connote the same physicality inherent in the notion of translation understood as transfer, displacement, and transformation. Hybridization is therefore a more abstract process that examines the effect of cultural interaction at the interior of different cultural formations. In the next chapter, I will explore the notions of hybridity and of hybridization first in various areas of cultural theory and later within the Latin American context.

### **Chapter Three: The Cultural Politics of Hybridization.**

The notion of hybridization has certainly reached its highest point within contemporary cultural theory, especially in relation with debates concerning identity formation, postcolonialism, and globalization. It is not surprising that the hybridization debate has also been appropriated within architectural circles to theorize the effect that the above-mentioned phenomena have had on cities and buildings. Architectural theorists as varied as Charles Jencks, Kenneth Frampton, or Chris Abel in the metropolitan centers, and Gulsum Baydar Nalbantoglu, Cristián Fernández Cox, or Carlos Rueda in the so-called cultural peripheries have made use of the term hybridization in their analyses of architectural practices and buildings around the world. However, their use of the notions of hybridity and hybridization appears to be reductive in the sense that it helps only to describe architectural works that combine different forms, materials, or decorative motifs. Despite their effort to engage with broader cultural issues, theorists have until very recently remained somehow detached from other cultural debates and theories which offer tools to engage with the whole spectrum of social, political and cultural practices with which architecture is inherently related. For this reason, in this chapter, I will elaborate on the notions of hybridity and hybridization within contemporary cultural theory leading towards an analysis of the possibilities that these two notions offer for architecture.



Rather than linear, this chapter will have a rhizomatic structure in the sense that I will move backward and forward in the [recent] chronological history of the terms hybridity and hybridization, and will constantly jump between geographical and disciplinary contexts where scholarship on these terms has developed. In this way, I attempt to produce an intertextual analysis in order to re-assess these two notions in a way that they can be used to analyze architectural practices in the Latin American context.

In the first section of this chapter I will therefore examine the terms heteroglossia, dialogics and hybridization in Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work on language, literature and the novel has set the ground for theorists to develop these concepts into other aspects of cultural theory. In the second section, I will elaborate on the notions of hybridity and hybridization within postcolonial theory. Here, hybridity and hybridization acquire an important political value similar to the notion of transculturation studied in chapter one. Hybridity and hybridization are seen as theoretical tools useful to carry out a thorough revision of the structures that determine cultural relations between the centers and the peripheries. Finally, the third section sheds light on the way scholars who work on Latin America, both within the continent itself but also from outside, use these notions in order to examine the current condition of our cultures. As in the previous two chapters, in this chapter Latin American cultures are understood as entities that are complex, fragmented, and unfinished. The term hybridization is nonetheless not equivalent to transculturation nor does it replace the physicality of processes of translation. In chapter one, transculturation was understood as a cultural condition with rhizomatic characteristics that affects all cultures, while, in chapter two, translation was taken to represent some of the processes of displacement, transmission and transgression that take place within conditions of transculturation. In this chapter, the term hybridization will be explained as another process that occurs within conditions of transculturation.

Hybridization stands as the process through which cultures change as a result of their constant interaction. While this is not an innovative theoretical achievement, its translation into architectural theory is. Therefore, the use of concepts such as hybridity and hybridization within Latin American architectural theory highlights the need to reevaluate architectural attitudes and governmental policies towards the city. At the same time, they bring to the fore the necessity of generating renewed architectural practices in accordance with the realities of Latin American social, cultural, and political practices and histories.

### **3.1 Cultural Dialogics.**

One of the reasons why many attempts to theorize the complex nature of sociocultural relations have been unsuccessful is because they tend to reduce these types of relations to rational systems of opposite codes. Mikhail Bakhtin was an incisive critic of rational systems of abstraction such as semiotics and Hegelian dialectics. As an alternative, he created a series of complex notions in an attempt to respond more appropriately to the heterogeneous nature of our cultures. Today, these ideas appear to be strikingly similar to those of various contemporary thinkers. It could be said that Bakhtin anticipated to a great extent post-structuralist and postmodern thought. He saw the world as a “messy” assemblage of different and unequal “fields” which are not necessarily antagonistic, but coexist in an agonistic relation. The sometimes contradictory and confusing character of Bakhtin's numerous analogies renders his discourse ambiguous and somewhat cryptic. In fact, differing interpretations are abundant among Bakhtin's scholars. However, Bakhtin's theory serves to make clear that reductive and empty binary systems of oppositions are not suitable for dealing theoretically with the complexity of our cultures and societies.



Therefore, new and more creative theoretical models are badly required to examine the characteristics of our current culture.

If there is one distinctive attribute in the work of Bakhtin, it is that his concepts and ideas have a certain *translational* dimension. In other words, the very notion of "unfinalizability" that Bakhtin proposes for language, the novel and for culture in general, applies also for his own work. As if his work were an ongoing process waiting to be taken, appropriated, translated and used to explain and understand other aspects of our cultures that remain unresolved. The translational dimension inherent in Bakhtin's concepts allows us to migrate from the discipline in which they were initially conceived to other disciplines in order to face more contemporary cultural questions. Not only can we translate his concepts to other disciplines, but to different geo-political contexts where they may find new areas of development, or may even be re-created. This latter possibility becomes particularly viable when we enter into territories that were untheorized by Bakhtin, as in the case of Latin American postcolonial discourse and architecture.

The notion of unfinalizability that is central to Bakhtin's discourse is the result of his understanding of sociocultural environments. For him, the incommensurable differences that exist in our heterogeneous cultures prevent order, unity, and finalization. Therefore, the unfinalizability of cultural processes becomes more important than the transitory results, or as Bakhtin would put it: the "sclerotic deposits" and "crystallizations" of such unfinalizable processes. This gives rise to two of his most notorious notions: heteroglossia and dialogization. For heteroglossia is a notion that explores the diversity of languages, experiences and views of the world that coexist in our cultures, and dialogization is a term that explores the process of interaction among the diverse languages, experiences and world views of

heteroglossia. Heteroglossia and dialogism are correlated terms to analyze in depth both the formal and the social aspects of cultures and languages respectively.

This section will be focused on three main notions that help understand the nature of transcultural relations. First, I will elaborate on the notion of heteroglossia, which originates and explains the coexistence of multiple cosmologies and systems of logic within particular cultural contexts. This notion foregrounds the heterogeneity of our societies, and attains anti-hegemonic connotations. Second, I will discuss the notions of dialogue and dialogization. Here, I will provide a negative definition of what dialogue and dialogization are by stating what, according to Bakhtin, they are not—that is monologization. Finally, I will explain the importance of the notion of hybridization in Bakhtin as the essential process behind the evolution of languages and cultures. This section should provide the ground for further analyses of the notion of hybridization in the postcolonial context and in Latin America.

### **3.1.1 Heteroglossia as a Cultural Condition**

Heteroglossia is an extremely complicated term that has been translated by Todorov<sup>85</sup> as "diversity of languages." This translation could be literally accurate, but it also reduces the complexity of the term to the simple coexistence of different languages within a given social context. In fact, heteroglossia is a term that attempts to encompass the agonistic, unfinalizable interaction among differing and conflictive worldviews that cannot be thoroughly defined. Perhaps its very meaning lies outside the word itself in the diversity of social contexts from where it emerges and which it

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<sup>85</sup> See TODOROV, Svetan, *Mikhail Bakhtin; The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1995 p 56



tries to depict. For heteroglossia is more a cultural condition than a linguistic phenomenon.

Bakhtin affirmed that language is always languages. This is not only because there are always distinct linguistic dialects, but, above all, because “there always are many different ways of speaking, many languages, reflecting the diversity of social experiences, conceptualizations, and values.”<sup>86</sup> People who belong to different generations, ethnic groups, or even different professions, genders and so on, would have their own way of speaking each one translating their views and experiences of the world into words. These individuals do not exist in isolation, they are in permanent contact with one another. Their differing ways of speaking and different views of the world intertwine at every moment. Hence, their interaction creates not only a multiplicity of languages, but also a multiplying of languages never reducible to one.

This is the reason behind Bakhtin's fierce attack on linguistics, poetics, and stylistics: he always maintained that these disciplines cannot appreciate that diverse social groups speak differently. Furthermore, such differences cannot be recorded in a dictionary nor can they be reduced to any logical system of meaning. The reason why the languages of heteroglossia cannot be reduced to one, Bakhtin would say, is because it is not a matter of linguistics, it is rather something extralinguistic:

What constitutes these different languages is something extralinguistic: a specific way of conceptualizing, understanding and evaluating the world. A complex of experiences, shared (more or less) evaluations, ideas, and attitudes “knit together” to produce a way of speaking.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> MORSON, Gary, and EMERSON, Caryl, *Mikhail Bakhtin; Creation of Prosaics*, California, Stanford University Press, 1990 p 140

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p 141

For this reason, it was affirmed above that heteroglossia is not a linguistic phenomenon but a cultural condition. Culture, then, is understood as a heterogeneous whole, "it is a growing together of numerous elements which have themselves been formed by inosculation, that is, by a daily process of adjustment and growth."<sup>88</sup>

Consequently, the languages of heteroglossia coexist simultaneously at different levels, and cannot be reduced to one homogeneous language because they are specific forms of conceptualizing the world in words. Consequently, not only will there always remain incommensurable cultural differences that will keep languages apart, but also, due to the cultural dynamism in which they are inscribed, any system of totalization is predestined to fail. Languages interact and may originate even more new languages, but they can never be homogenized<sup>89</sup>. More importantly, for Bakhtin, these irreducible differences are both constitutive of each other, and constitutive of culture.

Although Bakhtin did not thoroughly develop this argument himself, he was aware that there are constant efforts striving towards the unification and homogenization of cultures especially within nationalist and colonialist political agendas. Yet, for Bakhtin, this could never be thoroughly achieved. For unity and order are constant and ever unfinished projects "always opposed to the essential messiness of the world."<sup>90</sup> The notion of messiness serves to describe culture's complex nature, its variability, and unpredictability, but also to avoid the term "chaos" and its negative implications. The use of such a colloquial term, messiness, could also reflect

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p 141

<sup>89</sup> This is an argument that Homi Bhabha resumes and takes further when he elaborates on his idea of the antagonistic moment of the colonial relation. This would originate new hybrid cultural designations that are different and differential due to the incommensurable differences that keep them apart.

<sup>90</sup> Op.Cit. p 139



Bakhtin's own desperation to describe something that appears to be indescribable. Yet, Bakhtin sees messiness as an essential constituent of the world. The only way to eliminate messiness would be if external forces were applied to the world to produce order and unity. Here we find a certain similarity between Bakhtin's notion of a basic messiness that can only be eliminated via a forceful power takeover and the concept of rhizome in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy explained in chapter one. It is by no means being suggested that Bakhtin directly influenced the work of Deleuze, but that both were concerned with the existence of intrinsic differences in all cultures and languages. This is not only seen in the fact that both share the view that the multiple comes before the one, but also that unity can only be reached if there is a power takeover in the multiplicity in order to stratify everything and produce a determined order. In this case, Bakhtin sees nothing wrong with trying to produce unity, but affirms that it would only be an unfinalizable project. There will always be forces whose purpose is to create order in culture, yet the project will never be completed since differences are an essential quality of the world and cannot be eliminated.

There is no doubt that the subversive content of Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia is closely related to his experience in the Soviet Union and Stalinism. Heteroglossia can be understood as an oppositional discourse against the hegemonic project of the Soviet nation and its official culture. It foregrounds the irreducible plurality of social relations, with all its conflictive views of the world and antagonistic patterns of historical becoming. Official homogenizing discourses posit themselves against the ubiquitous decentralizing forces of culture<sup>91</sup>. Both are in permanent conflict and remain always unresolved:

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<sup>91</sup> I consider it important to note that the difference between heteroglossia and monoglossia as both cultural condition and cultural project respectively is analogous to Bhabha's notion of the performative and the pedagogical temporalities of the nation that will be elaborated in the following section.

[Bakhtin's] theory of social hegemony is written almost exclusively from the standpoint of a perennial counter-hegemony always in the making —always having the last laugh as it were on the monoglot powers-that-be but never *winning* in any properly political sense. In other words, the true priority of heteroglossia is never realized as decisive victory: the forms of its militant self-assertion constantly imply that priority which the monoglot and centralizing forces have constantly to posit themselves against; they never secure for it the reward of power.<sup>92</sup>

Although several aspects in Bakhtin's political approach remain unresolved, and no thorough anti-hegemonic theory is ever elaborated, heteroglossia proves to be helpful to explore and better to understand the cultural struggle in postcolonial situations. Heteroglossia has the potential for becoming a highly oppositional notion. It unsettles the stability of hegemonic discourses, sociocultural hierarchies that have placed peripheral cultures below central ones. Hence, it becomes essential to discourses focused on trying to find a way out from structures of colonial and neo-colonial dependence. Precisely for its anti-hegemonic potential, the notion of heteroglossia can be translated into the Latin American geo-political context, and postcolonial discourse.

The case to be made is that by understanding heteroglossia as a cultural condition rather than as an exclusively linguistic phenomenon, it would help to analyze a situation that is intrinsic to each culture, but one that is also replicated among different cultures. For diverse cultures exist in a permanent communicative relation that forces them to interact and eventually to change. This would imply that what applies within any given culture also applies between cultures themselves. Cultures constantly interact but their incommensurable differences will never disappear; they establish a dialogical relation.

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<sup>92</sup> PECHEY, Graham, "On the Borders of Bakhtin," in HIRSCHKOP, Ken and SHEPHERD, David, editors, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1989



### 3.1.2 Dialogue and Dialogization

The notions of dialogics and dialogization appear as a response both to semiotics and to Hegelian and Marxist dialectics. Bakhtin criticized Marxist dialectics because it implies a sterile synthesis. Bakhtin always maintained that contacts between people or cultures could not be equated to the mechanical contact of logical oppositions that produce some inert synthesis. For Bakhtin, this model systematizes and finalizes dialogues.

A dialogue, for Bakhtin, is a cultural metaphor; to live means to communicate, one always lives in a permanent dialogue with oneself and with others. And because people and cultures are endowed with particular evaluations of the world and individual agencies, this dialogue is not a sterile system of question and answer. For it is precisely the different voices, intonations, emotions and judgments, which provide meaning to dialogues. Dialogues cannot be deprived of these characteristics. When this happens, there occurs what Bakhtin calls: monologization. Dialectics, affirms Bakhtin, is one of such monologizations.

Dialectics reduces everything to a contact of things rather than people. For dialectics ignores the diversity of voices and languages that coexist within our cultures, it is an impoverishment. "If we transform dialogue into one continuous text, that is, erase the divisions between voices (changes of speaking subjects), which is possible at the extreme (Hegel's monological dialectics), then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we reach the bottom, reach a stand-still)."<sup>93</sup> Clearly, for Bakhtin the complexity of our social world is not reducible to what he sees as the lifeless system of oppositions represented by Hegelian and Marxist dialectics.

Bakhtin also criticizes semiotics as another deadening system of thought. He suggests that semiotics takes life out of language and culture. For culture is a messy amalgamation of collective practices, experiences, and procedures accumulated historically. But centripetal forces in the world tend to codify everything by turning it into fixed sets of rules. Codification would serve to prevent change ignoring that it is a natural condition of culture. The problem that Bakhtin sees in disciplines such as semiotics is that they take the codification for the "reality." Those historically inherited practices, experiences, and procedures provide the context of our current cultural practices, and, at the same time, current practices serve to set the ground for future activity. Bakhtin affirms that "discourse lives as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object; if we wholly detach ourselves from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or fate of a given word in life."<sup>94</sup> It is clear that for Bakhtin languages are the result of sociocultural struggles, and, therefore, cannot be detached from them.

Since a dialogue requires at least two participants<sup>95</sup>, the idea of dialogism implies that the communicative relation between them does not lead to inevitable synthesis, but, on the contrary, to the permanent reevaluation of their worldviews. Such reevaluation might not be harmonious but could generate tension and conflict, which is also conducive to the inconclusiveness of dialogues. For individual dialogues may break off, yet dialogue itself always continues. Dialogism becomes an open-ended model for the interaction amongst individuals, languages and cultures that, therefore, avoids synthesis.

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<sup>93</sup> MORSON, Gary, EMERSON, Caryl, *Mikhail Bakhtin; Creation of Prosaics*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1990 p 57

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p 141



Communication is an essential activity for all psychological entities. There is no other way to exist than in a permanent communicative relation with others, and also with oneself. In other words, for dialogics "dialogue" is a model of the world. Bakhtin's real proposal is an innovative way of understanding language by taking its primary manifestation —Dialogue— as a point of departure. The act of speaking becomes more important than the language that is used to speak. In other words, it is in the process of speaking that the real content of language lies and not in the isolated words that become empty when detached from the sociocultural environment that provides their content. Dialogics, then, can be said to be a model for understanding the world starting with the act itself, rather than with its theoretical transcriptions.

This model also suggests that individuals live in a never-ending interactive relation with others. "To be" Bakhtin points out, "means to be for another, and through the other for oneself."<sup>96</sup> For this reason, numerous thinkers maintain that dialogism functions as a principle of radical otherness that applies both to individuals and to cultures. If to be is only possible for and through the other, then understanding is also only possible through the exteriority and heterogeneity of the one with regard to the other. Here, Bakhtin challenges the notion of oneself as an entity that has a sovereign internal territory. For him, individuals and cultures are always on the boundary, neither completely inside, nor entirely outside.

One must not, however, imagine the realm of culture as some sort of spatial whole, having boundaries but also having internal territory. The realm of culture has no internal territory: it is entirely distributed along the boundaries, boundaries pass everywhere, through every aspect.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Although Bakhtin would argue that even monologues acquire dialogical characteristics since a monologue implies a dialogical relation with oneself.

<sup>96</sup> Op.Cit. pp 50 - 51

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p 51

Bakhtin attempts to prove that both individuals and cultures require permanent contact among themselves; without such contact cultures would degenerate and die. In a dialogue, the participants deterritorialize into one another. Not by merging or by losing one's own individuality, but by bringing into interaction both perspectives: that of the other and one's own. Once again, Bakhtin's discourse shares something with the Deleuzian notion of deterritorialization. As in the analogy with the orchid and the wasp analyzed in chapter one, there is an exchange of sorts that makes their existence possible, but no one ceases to exist as a separate entity. "In this process one simultaneously renounces and exploits one's surplus."<sup>98</sup> There is a becoming-other of the one and a becoming-one of the other.

Deterritorialization, in Bakhtin, is the process of actively entering and leaving others' individuality. This notion is further explained through his suggestive model of "creative understanding." Contrary to the notions of syncretism or cultural merging (so largely used to describe the process of historical becoming of Latin American cultural identities), creative understanding does not imply any kind of loss. It has been suggested that in order to understand the other's view of the world it is necessary to merge with it; a process that Bakhtin calls "empathy." But if that happens, all one would see and know of the world would be the same as the other, it would not be productive. In this case, it is better to remain outside. The model of creative understanding becomes a more thorough alternative. Bakhtin suggests that the above-mentioned procedure is necessary, but that the process must not stop just there. Otherwise the result would be a mere duplication of the other's view, and nothing new or enriching would have been entailed. One must enter actively into the other and bring into interaction both perspectives and knowledges. And, since the other is not a passive entity, it would, at the same time, enter actively into the one. This simultaneous operation allows for productivity and innovation. For creative

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p 54



understanding allows the understanding of other cultures without renouncing one's own culture.

*Creative understanding* does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. In order to understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*.<sup>99</sup>

This concept supposes an idealistic model for cultural encounters. That is, it would allow one to understand others' cultures and to use such understanding in the evaluation and recreation of one's own culture. The necessity of locating oneself simultaneously outside and inside is suggestive as it creates the possibility of a dialogue that would reveal meanings within one's own culture that remain hidden. "For any culture contains meanings that it itself does not know, that it itself has not realized; they are there, but as a potential."<sup>100</sup> Creative understanding would become a process of mutual cultural enrichment in which both parties learn from each other and from themselves. It does not only help learning from others, but helps activate potentials within the self, and maintains the possibility of future dialogue.

However, this model also presupposes that cultural encounters occur in a vacuum. It fails to consider the problems of cultural, economic, and political authority and/or superiority, that might interfere in the relation between cultures. The model applies perfectly to horizontal encounters, but it would not apply in the same way to oblique or vertical cultural encounters. To proceed dialogically in the way Bakhtin proposes, it is necessary that both sides taking part in the operation are at the same level, and both are willing to be altered by such an encounter to the same degree. If that is

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p 55

possible is a question that remains to be answered. Cultural encounters generally take place in situations of inequality. Therefore, the mutual enlightening dimension of dialogical contacts is jeopardized by the inevitable superiority of one of the parties involved in the operation. For instance, if Bakhtin's ultimate goal is the reciprocal enrichment of two cultures, that is impossible in cases of colonial, or even neo-colonial, relations where the dominant culture exercises a power takeover by which the dominated culture might be forced to renounce itself, to lose its own place in time, and either to adopt or to merge with the "superior" culture.

If it is true that dialogism in Bakhtin would lead to the production of a kind of egalitarian hybrid that contributes towards a mutual and permanent enrichment of languages and cultures, it fails because of its detachment from the structures of power that determine cultural dialogues. Although, dialogics acknowledges that the participants of a dialogue are phenomenological entities with different world-views, it ignores the problem of the unequal distribution of power that exists in most transcultural relations.

### **3.1.3 Hybridization**

Since Bakhtin affirms that languages perpetuate and evolve through processes of hybridization this notion becomes central to his discourse. However, Bakhtin is always very vague in his explanations, and hybridization is a notion that remains unclear. Although he specifies that there exist various kinds of hybridization, the question of whether it means a fusion or simply the coexistence of different social languages and worldviews is never resolved. In fact, Bakhtin moves back and forward between these two positions. This section is an attempt at briefly explaining

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p 55



the sense of Bakhtin's notions of intentional and unintentional (or organic) hybridization in order to unveil the significance of the notion of hybridization in general.

As Bakhtin argues, the multiplicity of factors that coexist within the social space are in constant interaction. As a result of such interaction different factors transform each other. Consequently, both languages and cultures change, and hybridization is the process behind their evolution. However, hybridization may occur in different ways. It could be intentional or unintentional. The former occurs when an individual intentionally produces a mixture of his or her own languages, views and experiences of the world in order to represent it; that is, to create his or her own image of it. In intentional hybridization there is always an author who produces the hybrids. The latter also derives from the mixture of different cultural factors, but this occurs organically. Organic or unintentional hybridization may be a collective process rather than an individual one, and its participants may, or may not, be conscious of their role as agents of such hybridization.

In his *Discourse of the Novel*, Bakhtin elaborates extensively on the notion of intentional hybridization. In the novel, he says, the author mixes the different languages of heteroglossia that he or she has available. Nonetheless, these languages come already historically hybridized. What the author does is to "detect and explore the implications and potentials of old and new hybrid languages."<sup>101</sup> The author, therefore, is the agent behind this type of hybridization, and his or her work is decisive in the historical evolution of languages.

This is what distinguishes [hybridization] from the frivolous, mindless and unsystematic mixing of languages... characteristic of the mediocre prose writers. Such writers give us a random mix of elements out of

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid. pp 358 - 359

which languages are made, but they do not dialogize, orchestrate, and hybridize language.<sup>102</sup>

Clearly Bakhtin gives a great deal of importance to the process of intentional hybridization. However, this does not remove importance from the process of unintentional or organic hybridization. "In unintentional hybridization, speakers and groups come to mix existing discourses they know and encounter with each other in order to come to terms with changing daily experiences."<sup>103</sup> As mentioned above people always interact with and within many different groups, and also master a large variety of languages, therefore organic hybridization is a permanent process that is no longer detectable by its speakers. Despite being unintentional and unconscious, organic hybridization "is one of the most important modes in the historical life and evolution of all languages. We may say that language and languages change historically primarily by means of such hybridization, by means of various coexisting languages."<sup>104</sup>

If heteroglossia can be understood as a cultural condition in which the diversity of languages, views and experiences of the world prevail, and dialogization as the inevitable and unfinalizable contact among such diverse factors, then hybridization can be understood as the process through which these are altered individually. Or, as the way in which individual languages, views and experiences of the world change as a result of their inevitable and constant dialogization within heteroglossia. Hybridization implies an unfinalizable process of transformation through which languages evolve historically. Different languages interact and become powerfully affected by the other(s). This produces a change in all languages, they renovate and re-create themselves through this hybridization. Hybridized languages are always new, different from what they were before entering into contact with other languages

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid. pp 314 - 315

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p 342



yet also always different from them. However, hybrid languages could easily be taken as fusions, that is the mixture of two or more languages that produce yet another. It is precisely in this sense of fusion that the paradox lies because it seems to be contradictory with the notion of hybridization proper: "In hybridization proper, only one discourse is explicitly present; the dialogizing other discourse is felt in its effect on the first. It is sensed as the other language from which the image of the first language is made, but it is not itself directly visible."<sup>105</sup> In this case, hybridization seems not to imply a fusion or mixture of any kind, but the rather harmonious coexistence of different languages whose effect upon each other is simply sensed without direct presence. Although Bakhtin's notion of hybridization remains unclear, it would be possible to conclude that he sees the mutual interillumination of languages as the outcome of hybridization, or the evolution of one language by means of another.

At this point we return to the above-mentioned problem of power and authority. Despite its contradictions, Bakhtin presents hybridization as a rather harmonious natural process among different social languages. Heteroglossia implies the (co)existence of a diversity of elements, and dialogization and hybridization (which are different notions generally misinterpreted, and often equated) are processes that seem to take place on a horizontal field. However, it has been demonstrated in previous chapters that interaction among different members of a single culture or among cultures themselves tends to take place on an uneven ground. Different agents have different degrees of power and authority, and, therefore, some become dominant actors in the interaction among peoples and cultures. Bakhtin seems to acknowledge the existence of such a situation, even though it remains untheorized. As Ken Hirschkop maintains:

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p 342

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p 341

As we all know too well, the picking and choosing of language forms takes place not on a level playing field, but in an unevenly structured linguistic world, in which some speakers and institutions have great deal more influence than others. And that is why historical becoming, in actuality as opposed to Bakhtin's philosophy, consists of violent struggle as much as verbal give-and-take: because its narratives, *pace* Bakhtin, are made by turning-points and decisions which are often enforced on others by fiat rather than presented to them as gift.<sup>106</sup>

The reason for this inconsistency may be attributed to the fact that Bakhtin, as a philologist, directed his major effort to the analysis of language and of the novel. Although his discourse has important political connotations, he did not direct his major effort to the analysis of this social and political dimension. Indeed Bakhtin celebrates the diversity of social languages, views and experiences of the world, and highlights that they constantly interact, thus generating even more languages and experiences. This, Bakhtin affirms, is an unfinalizable process. Differences are constitutive of culture, and the struggle among them will never finish. Differences and multiplicities destabilize homogeneous and authoritative language or cultural constructs. This is perhaps the major political asset of Bakhtin's discourse. It also offers a fertile ground for the development of his ideas by postcolonial critics. More recently, various postcolonial theorists from different geographical contexts have appropriated Bakhtin's notion of hybridization to elaborate on the question of identity and historical becoming in contexts that suffered the experience of colonization.

### **3.2 Cultural Difference, Hybridity, and the Postcolonial Situation.**

Bakhtin brings to the fore the heterogeneity characteristic of all cultural formations. Although these conditions destabilize the hegemony of totalizing official cultural

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<sup>106</sup> HIRSCHKOP, Ken, *Mikhail Bakhtin; An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999 p263



projects, different voices are located on a horizontal ground. That is, or seems to be, that in Bakhtin differences coexist harmoniously within the space of culture, and are resolved spontaneously or in an unruffled consensus. However, it has been demonstrated that in many contexts there exist authoritative voices that tend to dominate in the process of historical becoming of languages and cultures. Authoritative voices dismiss the existence of other voices through a process of disavowal, and relocate them in a position of inferiority. The result of such displacement would be a much more complex struggle with political ingredients different from what Bakhtin, as a purist of difference, perceives.

Despite its shortcomings, Bakhtin's discourse sets the ground for further elaboration on the heterogeneity of cultures. This is the case of postcolonial theory, where various critics have engaged with Bakhtin to examine the characteristics of the postcolonial situation. The next section will focus on the notion of hybridity and hybridization as it appears amongst postcolonial theorists who use Bakhtin as a base, but who add a series of sociopolitical issues in order to explore further the uneven distribution of power characteristic of the colonial relation that allows the colonizer to claim authoritative cultural supremacy.

### **3.2.1 Multitemporal/Multidimensional: Building the Ambivalent Modern Nation.**

Homi Bhabha has criticized the notion that the nation is the space in which cultural differences are homogenized. On the contrary, Bhabha maintains that the space of the nation contains plenty of antagonistic positions whose differences can never be reconciled. This assumption shares something with the notion of heteroglossia as a cultural condition that was examined in the previous section, but, in this case,

Bhabha foregrounds the antagonism and contesting attitudes intrinsic to cultural differences. Here, Bhabha begins by questioning the integrity of the nation as a cultural formation. He maintains that being an unstable entity, with internal cultural differences and social struggles, any claim for cultural superiority becomes ambiguous. Therefore, the question of cultural superiority needs to be placed on a ground different from that of culture alone.

Two aspects are important while examining this approach: first is the idea of understanding the nation as a non-homogeneous entity, and second is the fact that such an understanding undermines discourses of cultural domination. The former is one that has been appropriated by several theorists in Latin America to understand the ambivalence of the continent's cultures although it has rarely been used by Colombian theorists in order to examine the situation and realities of Colombian cultures. It also offers an outstanding opportunity to elaborate on questions of architecture in Colombia where, still following a modernist approach, the national culture is understood as a homogeneous whole. Consequently, architects do not need to pay attention to the numerous fractures that exist *within* the national culture. On the contrary, they can concentrate solely on the production of aesthetically pleasing buildings for people who, based on the assumption of a homogeneous sociocultural nation, would live, think, and dwell in the same way. The second idea — namely that the non-homogeneous nation undermines discourses of cultural domination— allows for a critical questioning of the theoretical assumptions that locate Latin American architectures second to European or North American architectures by bringing to the fore the realities of the Latin American cultures. The second aspect found in Bhabha's approach serves to support the idea that Latin American architectures require a different approach congruent with the heterogeneous nature and dynamics of our cultures and societies. The present



chapter, then, becomes the theoretical basis for the architectural analysis in chapters four and five.

As Bhabha maintains, there are cultural differences within the nation that cannot be reconciled. Not only are there different social classes, but also racial, religious and gender differences that cannot be treated as social totalities, and, therefore, counteract the homogenization of national cultures. One of the major mistakes of the project for the construction of the modern nation has been the assumption that the nation is the space in which the struggle among those different spheres of the social will come to a halt. However, experience has proven the opposite: the nation requires alternative means of theorization that help understand and articulate its intrinsic differences without eliminating them. In fact, if one of the pillars of the modern nation is the principle of democracy, then differences are constitutive of the nation. The elimination of differences would imply the elimination of both the principle of democracy and the notion of the nation. For that reason, Bhabha argues that, instead of a homogeneous construct, the nation is an *ambivalent* entity.

The notion of ambivalence in Bhabha becomes central to his criticism of the notion of the modern nation and any claim for cultural superiority in the colonial relation. His notion of ambivalence derives from psychoanalysis, initially from Freud and later from Lacan. According to Freud, ambivalence takes place when pairs of opposing instincts develop to an almost equal extent. That would be the case of love and hate which occupy the same psychic space. Freud uses the case of the sociopolitical relationship between the Spanish and the Portuguese to exemplify ambivalent identification, the combination of love and hate that ties rival communities with adjoining territories together. This particular case illustrates the ambivalence of a process that involves both identification and rejection similar to that of the colonial relation. Bhabha also applies this analogy to the interior of the nation, for the nation comprises antagonistic positions that coexist in a process of identification and

disavowal that makes it ambivalent. However, Bhabha has been widely criticized for being unorthodox in his appropriation of psychoanalytic theory. The criticism is that Bhabha moves too hastily between Freud and Lacan, but that he also uses psychoanalytic ideas without sufficient rigour. Psychoanalytic scholars accuse Bhabha of being extremely teleological in reducing a problem that is broad and complex, with more to it than the coexistence of opposite instincts within the same psychic space, in order to suit his postcolonial theory.<sup>107</sup> I would say that their criticism does not invalidate Bhabha's discourse, but indicates the need for elaboration on an area that remains under-theorized by him. However, this is a problem outside my own area of expertise, and therefore I must leave this question open for further elaboration to experts in the area of psychoanalysis.

In what can be understood as a more democratic attempt to theorize the notion of the nation, Bhabha aims his attention at the people of the nation as it is the people who generate its ambivalence. This move also owes something to Bakhtin's interest in the social and the anthropological dimensions of culture. The nation may be theoretically conceived as a unitary entity and wholly manageable, but the people can never be apprehended this way. As Bhabha puts it:

The people are neither the beginning nor the end of the national narrative; they represent the cutting edge between the totalizing powers of the 'social' as homogeneous, consensual community, and the forces that signify the more specific address to contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population.<sup>108</sup>

The people, on whom the very notion of the nation is centered by definition, cannot be treated as a stable horizontal totality. People are always 'peoples' with different interests, political agendas, and temporalities. This split, between the nation as

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<sup>107</sup> See: LOOMBA, Ania, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London, Routledge, 1998 pp 133 – 151 or: PARRY, Benita, "Signs of Our Times. Discussions of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*," *Third Text*, Autumn-Winter 28/29, 1994 pp 5 - 24

<sup>108</sup> BHABHA, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, Rutledge, 1994 p 146



homogeneous and the nation as an unstable entity fissured due to the diverse practices and experiences of the people, gives origin to the two different temporalities of the nation to which Bhabha refers as: the pedagogical and the performative. The former responds to the official project of the nation as historicity and self-generation, whereas the latter responds to the people as conglomeration. A kind of conglomeration whose components survive in an agonistic relation, but never really mix. The performative temporality can be understood as an anti-official concept, or, as Bhabha maintains, a counter-narrative "of the nation that continually evokes and erases its totalizing boundaries —both actual and conceptual— disturbs those ideological *manoeuvres* through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities."<sup>109</sup> This is because the political unity of the nation resides on the permanent negation of its plurality, or, again, as Bhabha puts it, as the "continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space."<sup>110</sup>

A series of aspects turn out to be politically relevant from the previous affirmation. One significant aspect is that people can no longer be considered part of the national discourse of a homogeneous and horizontal community given their performative character. As a result the people of the nation destabilize the traditional concept of nation as imagined community. Cultural differences among people ensure that the nation remains unfinished. Another significant aspect is that the people's unfinalizability and heterogeneity contradicts the notion of unity and originality on which claims for cultural authority are based. This invalidates any political ideology that claims for transcendent metaphysical authority since the unity that allows for such claims proves to be broken and unstable.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p 149

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p 149

Despite Bhabha's criticism of Bakhtin, they both seem to share the view that cultural processes never end. In the case of Bhabha, it is the process of the construction of the nation that is important, and not its totalizing and static conceptualization. The nation is a project that will always remain unfinished due to the performative character of the people who make it up. The emphasis on the performative character of the people raises questions about minorities and cultural differences that will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.2.2 Cultural Difference and the Agency of Minorities.**

The concept of cultural difference emerges as an alternative to the term multiculturalism used traditionally to describe the coexistence of different cultures within the space of the nation. Multiculturalism has traditionally been encouraged in the construction of the plural modern nation. From this, it is clear that multiculturalism becomes part of the official discourse of the nation, in which the host society or dominant culture accepts the presence of a diversity of cultures as long as they conform to its own sociocultural parameters. In other words, the notion of multiculturalism implies a hierarchical cultural structure of dominating-dominated, or host culture and guest culture(s), the intruder(s). On the other hand, the notion of *cultural difference* emerges from the evolution of the concept of difference in post-structuralism (and, in the case of Bhabha, also from psychoanalysis). Cultural difference intends to conceive *culture as difference* following the principles of alterity and otherness.

At this point, we return to the place where we left the previous section. As indicated there, differences between cultures are irredeemable, and, therefore, cannot be accommodated within a holistic cultural framework. As Bhabha says, "different



cultures, the difference between cultural practices, the difference in the construction of cultures within different [social] groups, very often set up among and between themselves an incommensurability."<sup>111</sup> It would be wrong to normalize or homogenize such differences, or to pretend that they can harmoniously coexist. This position implies a subversive value with which to deny the unity of the national cultural project, and proposes instead a strategy to articulate cultural difference(s) without attempting to erase them. The notion of cultural difference resists totalization. Furthermore, the notion of cultural difference gives presence and provides cultural authority to minority positions that remain subjugated by official conceptualizations of the nation.

The notion of cultural difference creates a space for the minorities to speak. Cultural difference becomes complex because it simultaneously articulates two different layers of difference with regard to the nation: on the one hand there is the difference between the one (nation) and the external other, outside the boundaries of the nation. On the other hand, there are the differences that exist within the nation's space, or as Bhabha puts it, "it becomes the question of otherness of the people-as-one."<sup>112</sup> Hence, it becomes clear that not only the exterior other is important in conceiving culture as difference, but the diversity of cultures that already exist within the nation-space. This diversity consists of minorities such as ethnic groups, sexual minorities, exiles, and so on. "They no longer need to address their strategies of opposition to an horizon of 'hegemony' that is envisaged as horizontal and homogeneous"<sup>113</sup> because the notion of cultural difference dismantles such hegemonic structures and provides a space for minorities and majorities to negotiate.

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<sup>111</sup> BHABHA, Homi, "The Third Text," Interview with Jonathan Rutherford, in: *Identity; Community, Culture, Difference*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990

<sup>112</sup> BHABHA, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994 p 150

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p 150

Consequently, cultural difference not only focuses on the struggle that exists among large sociocultural formations, but also pays attention to those differences that exist at the interior of each sociocultural construct. The strategy of cultural difference therefore authorizes minorities as constituencies of the nation, gives voice to them in the construction of the nation, and the national culture. Therefore, these minority groups contest —both actively and by implication— the solidity of the traditional concept of the nation and culture. The notion of cultural difference generates, or provides space for minority discourses to emerge.

Minority discourse sets the act of emergence in the antagonistic *in-between* of image and sign, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy. It contests genealogies of 'origin' that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture —and the people— as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life.<sup>114</sup>

Cultural difference, then, becomes an extremely relevant concept for the examination of contemporary architectural discourses in Latin America, and, in particular, Colombia. In societies like the Colombian, multiculturalism has not been a major issue since it has been assumed that the vast majority of the population is mestizo, and transatlantic immigrants as well as indigenous have remained a low percentage of the whole population.

Other cultures have been virtually ignored by the dominant and ruling classes. Minorities were first taken seriously into consideration in the Constitution of 1991. Unprecedentedly, indigenous, black, and female peoples were represented in the preparation of the constitution. However, it has not yet been entirely accepted that the existence of such social groups within the space of the nation implies multiculturalism. As a result, it is not a surprise that architects have not paid any

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. p 157



attention to minority groups. The large housing projects of the 50s, 60s, and 70s that were designed to allocate migrants coming from the countryside to the big cities failed partly because they were homogenized as such: as 'migrants.' The differences among social groups and cultural backgrounds were ignored. They were expected to accommodate themselves to the parameters of the dominating mestizo middle and high social classes. This attitude corresponds to Bhabha's criticism of the notion of multiculturalism. Paradoxically, such a term was not even used to acknowledge the existence of different indigenous groups in the Andean South and on the Caribbean North coast, or of the black population on the Pacific and the Caribbean coasts, and/or of women with different social, racial and cultural backgrounds. Architects may be aware of social differences, but that is on a purely economic basis —the political division among classes based on annual income statistics. However, the above-mentioned sociocultural groups are not taken into account at the moment of social classification. In fact, social stratification —based on annual income, social security, and tax revenue— corresponds to the same homogenizing agenda in the sense that minoritarian groups are expected to fit within the established system. Consequently, architectural responses tend to homogenize and to totalize the national culture with complete disregard for its heterogeneous reality. In the light of these ideas, the majority of architectural discourses of the so-called first generation of modern architects in Colombia, amongst whom Rogelio Salmona is included, proves to be not only ill-equipped to deal with the nature of our culture, but, perhaps, to be misguided. Cultural difference, then, becomes an essential concept to address the problem of the coexistence of different cultural groups within architectural circles. As Bhabha radically affirms: "there is no reason to believe that such marks of difference cannot inscribe a 'history' of the people or become gathering points of political solidarity."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p 157

### **3.2.3 Hybridity and its Subversive Value.**

It has been demonstrated thus far that there exist cultural differences, and that different cultural systems coexist in permanent interaction amongst themselves in order to continue to exist. Without such interaction cultures would decay and die. What has not been explored yet is the effect of interaction at the interior of the particular cultures in conditions of transculturation. The notions of hybridity and of hybridization become a tool to explore the effects of such exchange within specific cultural contexts. However, these two notions have been used in so many contexts and with such diverse meanings that their definition has become unclear. In the following paragraphs, these notions will be examined following the same order in which they have been introduced, that is: hybridity first followed by the notion hybridization.

First, it is important to underline that both notions are concerned with the circumstances of power that surround transcultural relations. This is because power mandates the position that cultural designations are to occupy within the new contexts in which they are inserted. Colonial relations are a clear example of this phenomenon. In colonial relations, a power takeover occurs in which the colonizer introduces its own cultural designations in order to eliminate cultural multiplicity. This apparently homogenizes cultural differences and allows social and cultural domination. In contemporary transcultural relations the situation acquires much more complex characteristics. Unlike colonial relations where cultural influence and domination were unidirectional, in today's world, as a result of phenomena such as the global economy, communication technology, and patterns of migration, amongst others, influences have multiple simultaneous origins. Military and direct political domination might have come to an end in certain parts of the world, yet there still exists a hierarchical differentiation in current transcultural relations mainly based



upon economic structures, or upon the accessibility that non-dominant economic nations have to the global circulation of capital. Such hierarchical differentiation also tends to homogenize cultural multiplicity, and reconstitutes claims for cultural superiority. However, the notion of hybridity suggests that the sort of culture that results from contemporary cultural interaction does not necessarily replicate any given cultural model or dominant culture. The result of so-called contemporary processes of cultural merging is not exactly a synthesis, but a continued cultural re-creation that is what the term hybridization stands for —the constant articulation of heterogeneous elements within specific cultural formations that leads to the constant renovation of cultures rather than to their elimination in a fusion. By bringing to the fore the mutability of all cultures, cultural hybridization destabilizes systems of hierarchical differentiation.

Therefore, the notions of hybridity and of hybridization gain a subversive theoretical value with which it is possible to reevaluate situations of inequality and cultural domination. In Bhabha, the figure who has fully developed the notion of hybridization and its potential in his writings on colonial discourse, the whole strategy of colonial cultural domination “is achieved through a process of disavowal that denies the chaos of its intervention as *Entstellung*, its dislocatory presence, in order to preserve the authority of its identity in the teleological narratives of historical and political evolutionism.”<sup>116</sup> For the colonizer must become representative of the colonized body. Yet, the colonial authority *discriminates*, to use Bhabha’s own term, the cultural result of this merging; the culture of the colonized will never return to the status it had prior to colonization, neither will it ever achieve the status of the colonizer — it will be a mutation, a hybrid. This, in Bhabha’s discourse, causes an effect of splitting that affects the recognition by the colonial authority.

The subversive value given to the notion of hybridity appears in Bhabha's various explanations of the term although his always obscure prose makes the term confusing and, sometimes, even contradictory. For this reason, I will use two extensive quotations in order to illustrate my argument. The first citation is taken from his book *The Location of Culture* and provides an insight into his understanding of the notion of hybridity in the colonial context. The second quote is taken from his article "Culture's In Between." Although this is an earlier explanation, one of the clearest explanations he has ever given of his use of the concept of hybridity, here Bhabha also talks about hybridization as a process with more complex political connotations. The first citation reads as follows:

*Hybridity* is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; it is the name for the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal (that is, the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of authority). *Hybridity* is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back to the eyes of power.<sup>117</sup> [My Italics]

In this case, the subversive value of the notion of hybridity lies on the fact that the concepts of purity and originality that give authority to the colonizing power are denied. In other words, hybridity appears as the result of the ambivalence of the colonial relation in which the colonial power pretends to repeat itself by imposing its culture on the colonized, but at the same time never ceases to discriminate against it as different and inferior. Therefore, as explained above, the colonized culture never returns to its condition prior to colonization, nor does it ever achieve the same cultural status as the colonizer, it becomes a mutation. The fact that the resulting culture becomes neither one nor the other implies that it emerges as an autonomous

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<sup>116</sup> BHABHA, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994 p 111



cultural formation —a hybrid culture— that undermines the authority of the colonial power and its discriminatory strategies. However, hybridity here is understood as a result, a by-product, of the colonial situation. As such, its political content is perceived only in the sense that it serves to reverse the situation of cultural inequality, but it also appears static and in opposition to the notion of culture as performative that Bhabha had previously introduced. For this reason, the notion *hybridization* appears more adequate to deal with the performativity of culture since it implies a process and not a result. In an earlier article entitled "Culture's In-Between," Bhabha engages with the notion of hybridization in this way:

In my work I have developed the concept of hybridity to describe the *construction* of cultural authority within conditions of political antagonism and inequity. Strategies of *hybridization* reveal an estranging movement in the "authoritative," even authoritarian inscription of the cultural sign. At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of *negotiation* where power is *unequal* but its articulation may be *equivocal*. Such negotiation is neither assimilation nor collaboration. It makes possible the emergence of an "interstitial" agency that refuses the binary representation of social antagonism. Hybrid agencies find their voice in a dialectic that does not seek cultural supremacy or sovereignty. They deploy the partial culture from where they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy.<sup>118</sup> [My Italics]

In this case, hybridity is presented as a series of actions: construction, hybridization, and negotiation. It seems to become clear that hybridity is a process and not a finalized product, hence hybridization. The subversive value of hybridization relies on the fact that the permanent process of negotiation among cultures and the construction of culture as difference does not imply assimilation, imitation, or synthesis. On the contrary, it allows the emergence of differential cultural constructs that acknowledge the existence of their precursors but refuse cultural domination. In this second citation, hybridization is also presented as a 'strategy,' which implies an

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. p 112

agency. Although theoretically important, this assumption is also contradictory because in the first citation hybridity seems to be the spontaneous result of colonization, even though it serves the purpose of rescinding the authority of the colonizing culture. Yet, as a strategy, the subversive capacity of hybridization appears to depend on its intention to be subversive or to disrupt specific aspects of the hegemonic cultural power. Consequently, there would be no agency in any spontaneous hybridization. These two positions seem to be antithetical and unresolved in Bhabha. Here, we return to the problem of intentional and unintentional hybridization in Bakhtin that also remained unresolved and confusing. It is therefore my contention that they can be understood in the sense that the condition of hybridity is always subversive as it unveils the fissures that exist in all cultures and that, therefore, undermine the basis of the authority of the superior culture as pure and original. Nonetheless, as a process, hybridization implies an intention on the part of the one who hybridizes. This intention provides political agency to the process of hybridization as the articulation and negotiation of cultural differences and the ulterior elimination of cultural superiority.

But this debate raises another question that has troubled not only Bhabha but also many other theorists who work on the notion of hybridization. That is whether hybridization implies fusion, or whether it implies the mere coexistence of different cultural elements. In Bhabha, hybridity and hybridization can be understood as both. However, it could turn out to be problematic for it contributes towards the many (mis)interpretations of his discourse. Different theorists take different views of this issue so that it remains as the major problem in the question of hybridity. Patrick Williams, for his part, considers that hybridity implies the coexistence of different cultural elements although they do not necessarily mix or fuse. Their coexistence can be either harmonious or violent. Others like Néstor García Canclini, would not be so

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<sup>118</sup> BHABHA, Homi, "Culture's In Between," *Artforum*, September, 1993 pp 167 - 214



happy with this assumption, and would prefer to consider that hybridization leads to the fusion of elements into one. This latter position seems to be very popular among Latin American scholars, whereas the former seems to be preferred by European scholars who deal with questions of hybridization because of the theoretical context in which the postcolonial debate is inscribed and the use of post-structuralist methods of critique.

For the purposes of this research, hybridization is taken to imply a dynamic coexistence rather than a fusion. Nevertheless, as a permanent process, hybridization produces results which manifest synthetic characteristics, the hybrids. The results of constant processes of hybridization can be seen as a sort of fusion of various elements into one (as in the case of popular art and music pointed out by various authors such as Ortiz, Arguedas, or, more recently, Else Vieira).<sup>119</sup> But these results happen to be the crystallizations and/or sclerotic deposits, as Bakhtin would put it, of continuous processes of hybridization. In other words, hybrid syncretic manifestations imply that there is a different level where fusion never occurs. Different elements remain apart and perhaps not in harmonious coexistence, but in a permanent struggle for survival. Hybrid fusions, or hybrid static manifestations, may exist if, at a different level, the struggle among the elements that constitute them never ends. Therefore, I want to aim my attention at that other level where differences remain unresolved coexisting in an agonistic relation, and where claims for cultural superiority can be, at least theoretically, eliminated.

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<sup>119</sup> For more information about the fusion of musical rhythms, see: ORTIZ, Fernando, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet De Onis, Durham, Duke University press, 1995. Or: ARGUEDAS, José María, *Formación de una Cultura Nacional Indoamericana*, México, Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975

And: VIEIRA, Else, "Liberating Calibans: Readings of Antropofagia and Haroldo de Campos Poetics of Transcreation," in BASNETT, Susan, and TRIVEDI, Harish (editors), *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999.

Another difficulty becomes apparent as we return to Bhabha's discourse, that is his detachment from the sociocultural realities of different particular colonial and economic contexts. Bhabha's notion of hybridity becomes problematic since it generalizes on the characteristics of the colonial process and the colonial hybrid. He has been widely criticized because what is presented as a strategy of differentiation, ironically acquires universal and homogeneous characteristics common to the colonial relation *per se*. Consequently, the very notion of hybridity and its subversive value loses political efficacy.

This becomes a risk for those who work on the notion of hybridity in Latin America. The looseness of Bhabha's discourse on hybridity may be used erroneously when applied to questions of Latin American hybridization. For this reason, it is necessary to contextualize the debate within the margins of Latin America, and, perhaps for my purposes, within the margins of Colombia itself, to provide even more specificity. This would be the only way to regain political efficacy. But yet another problem would emerge at this stage due to the absence of Latin America from the international cartography of the colonial/postcolonial debate. Latin American scholars, as will be explained below, especially those who are based in Latin America, are reluctant to subscribe to postcolonial debates. One of the reasons for this attitude is the fact that the postcolonial discourse originated in Europe and North America in order to examine the cultural conditions of Asia and the Caribbean in particular. In the next section, I will attempt to examine the way in which debates on hybridization have been undertaken by Latin American scholars.



### 3.3 The Hybridization Debate in Latin America.<sup>120</sup>

The hybridization debate in Latin America has recently reached boiling point. As Rita de Grandis and Zila Bernd affirm in their introduction to the book *Unforeseeable Americas*, the question of literary and cultural hybridity "has displaced almost every other idea from the cultural conceptual arena for a while, becoming at one point *the* cultural manifestation of critical theory,"<sup>121</sup> at least in Latin America. However, the postcolonial discourse with which the notion of hybridization is generally associated has not been particularly popular among Latin American scholars especially those who are based in Latin America. There seems to be a generalized rejection of postcolonial discourse based upon the fact that it originated in the metropolitan centers using cosmopolitan theoretical models that, according to some Latin American theorists, do not respond to the particularities of the Latin American contexts. It has taken the work of diasporic figures like Rita De Grandis, Román de la Campa and Abril Trigo among others, to establish the connection between postcolonial discourse and theories of hybridization —as well as other methods of critique associated with post-structuralist theory— in order to produce new critical and theoretical models to explore the contemporary situation of the Latin American cultures.

The ambiguous use of the notion of hybridization, not only in Latin America but everywhere within contemporary cultural theory, has had a counterproductive effect so that the term has lost most of its initial explanatory value. Therefore, the increasing complexity of this notion requires that a number of specifications be made. Otherwise, the term itself would lose its epistemological and critical capacity turning

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<sup>120</sup> Part of this section was published in the *Journal of Architecture*, Volume 7, Number 1 pp 77 - 86, under the title of "On the Notion of Architectural Hybridization in Latin America."

<sup>121</sup> DE GRANDIS, Rita, and BERND, Zila, editors, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, 2000 pp x

out to be vague, or as de la Campa affirms, it would become a buzzword "loosely associated with an exotic and undifferentiated multiculturalist flavor."<sup>122</sup> Having set up such a slippery ground for my own exploration of the notion of hybridization in Latin America, I consider it necessary to start this section with three theoretical warnings:

- a) The first warning is precisely that warnings have to be made. This is because the notion of hybridization has been used in so many contexts and with such diverse meanings that its definition has become unclear. One must proceed with extreme caution so as to specify the way in which the notion of hybridization is to be used.
- b) The second warning is that the notion of hybridization, as has become clear throughout this chapter, connotes a certain *trans*-disciplinarity, *trans*-temporality, and *trans*-culturalism.<sup>123</sup> Therefore, it cannot be reduced to a univocal or unidimensional notion.
- c) The third warning is that the notion of hybridization is a theoretical tool that carries a subversive cultural value. It is not a merely descriptive aesthetic device that can be used to explicate finalized cultural manifestations, or other products such as artistic architectural works.

These three warnings will become particularly important when the notion of hybridization is applied to an architectural discourse as in the following chapter. Nonetheless, they will also become relevant to the present chapter especially due to the diversity of approaches to the notion of hybridization that exist in Latin America.

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<sup>122</sup> DE LA CAMPA, Román, *Latin Americanism*, Minneapolis - London, University of Minnesota Press, 1999 p 10

<sup>123</sup> I use the prefix *trans* instead of *multi* because the latter may not imply the interaction of the different components, whereas the former suggests not only a multiplicity of elements but also their movement and interaction.



This section will explore the three most characteristic ways in which Latin American scholars theorize cultural hybridization. This is part of a politically charged and culturally subversive quest for a differential identity mostly against the dominant idea that Latin American cultural identity stemmed homogeneously from Spanish culture after colonization as suggested by the notion of *Hispanidad*. In so doing, I will shed light on the notion of cultural heterogeneity used by Antonio Cornejo Polar since the seventies, which manifests some of the epistemological characteristics that the notion of hybridization will hold later. Second, there is the anthropological approach of Néstor García Canclini which is worth citing despite the criticism that he has received in the past few years. Canclini's notion of hybridization can be understood as a complexification of previous notions of cultural heterogeneity, or as the result of the accelerated interaction between the heterogeneous components of our cultures—traditions and modernities—effected by the global market. For Canclini, Latin American tradition survives through the hybridization with markets. Therefore, he focuses on the socioeconomic aspects of transcultural hybridization by analyzing in detail the strategies used by popular artisans to have access to international circles of global capitalism, yet attempting to maintain their traditions. This would generate an ambiguous situation described in the subtitle of his book *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, which suggests that hybridity becomes a liminal space similar to Bhabha's notion of the third space. Finally, I will engage with more contemporary readings of Latin American cultures that are based upon post-structuralism and Derridean notions of deconstruction<sup>124</sup>. This position, which is often resisted in Latin America, is mainly led by contemporary theorists based in the United States and Europe. This later approach is a very sophisticated theoretical model that conveys a highly political content. Nonetheless, due to the rapid development of this approach among contemporary theorists there is the risk

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<sup>124</sup> For some Latin Americanists, the strategy of deconstruction arrives through the postcolonial discourse of diasporic figures such as Bhabha and Spivak, and not necessarily

that it becomes *the* official discourse of Latin American cultural theory therefore losing its subversive potential, or that it becomes totally ambiguous, lost in the very labyrinth of its own complexity.

### **3.3.1 The Quest for a Differential Identity: Against Monolithic Views of Latin American Culture.**

For many years, after the majority of Latin American countries achieved their independence, institutionalized Latin American studies in Europe and North America tended to homogenize the culture of the continent so as to conform to the criteria of a dominant Spanish culture. This emergent homogeneous construct was called "*Hispanidad*." The concept of *Hispanidad* is intended to depict the offspring of the communion between Spanish culture and Native American culture(s), and is associated with the mestizo population that results from the same mixture. This view makes the notion of *Hispanidad* a highly genealogical and racial approach to the question of culture thus being reductive in its understanding of the cultural reality of Latin America. Not only does it ignore the fact that there were several different native groups inhabiting the continent prior to the arrival of the European, but also the fact that the colonizers brought other races along with them, the black-Africans slaves being the most representative of them.

Yet, it was only until after the 1960s that it was possible for Latin American scholars to counter these views and to assume a more radical and critical position. With the help of new discourses and methods of critique such as post-structuralism, deconstruction or postmodern discourse (paradoxically appropriated from Europe), Latin American theorists started to develop more complex theoretical models in order

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directly from Derrida.



to analyze our cultures. In a move that resembles the *translational* model examined in chapter two, the discourses of the centers were re-written in the form of counter-discourses. But this time not in an attempt to re-construct an essential identity, "but as an appropriation of the discourses of the center which are introduced in a recodified form through inclusion in a new context and historical paradigm."<sup>125</sup>

One of these cases is the notion of cultural heterogeneity that Cornejo Polar has used since the early seventies. His notion of heterogeneity can be seen as a transitional epistemological tool towards a critical understanding of Latin American cultures. Cornejo Polar criticizes notions such as *mestizaje* and its official terminology —Hispanidad, syncretism, synthesis, and the like— because they imply rigidity. He also suggests that other terms such as Rama's transculturation may be theoretically more sophisticated, but are incapable of surpassing the ideology of *mestizaje*. Cultural heterogeneity, then, becomes a theoretical device to overcome dialectical synthesis. As Abril Trigo puts it: "Cornejo's purpose is not to represent a hegemonizing totality; instead, he wishes to formulate a concept expressing an antagonic plurality, the tense coexistence of diverse cultures, whose heterogeneity is fulfilled in their segmented participation in dissimilar systems of production."<sup>126</sup> Clearly, heterogeneity in Cornejo Polar is inseparably attached to irreducibility and, thereby, to notions such as heteroglossia, rhizome and hybridization (especially in Bhabha), that help to understand culture-as-difference. What is important in Cornejo Polar's long-standing theory of heterogeneity is that he makes use of metropolitan discourses to assume a more critical position in the process of identity formation, abandoning the uncritical posture that Latin America can only be understood, and its

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<sup>125</sup> Del TORO, Alfonso, "The Epistemological Foundation of the contemporary Condition: Latin America in Dialogue with Postmodernity and Postcoloniality," in YOUNG A., Richard, *Latin American Postmodernisms*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, 1997 p 36

<sup>126</sup> TRIGO, Abril, "Shifting Paradigms: From Transculturation to Hybridity," in De GRANDIS, Rita and BERND, Zila, editors, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam-Atlanta, Rodopi, 2000 p 92

identities can only be produced, from within. Also important in Cornejo Polar is his radical rejection of the idea of cultural synthesis. If Hispanidad suggests that Latin American cultures are derived from Spanish culture it, therefore, locates those results at an inferior/secondary level in relation to the original. By rejecting the idea of cultural synthesis, Cornejo Polar also attempts to reject the idea that Latin American cultures result from a prior original culture, while maintaining that there is an inherent agonistic coexistence of different cultural elements which never manage to fuse completely.

Whereas Cornejo Polar works at a cultural level focusing on the multiplicity of historico-cultural entities that exist in Latin America, José Joaquín Brunner is interested in the successive economic modernizations that have occurred in the continent's recent history. For Brunner, heterogeneity would be the result of the successive and distinct processes with which modernization has linked Latin American cultural production to the global market. Brunner's emphasis on the transnational aspects associated with the notions of modernity and postmodernity lay at the core of the Latin American debate over hybridization. Although Brunner himself tries to avoid using the term hybridization (indeed, he is one of the most incisive critics of Néstor García Canclini's theory of cultural hybridity), he works along the same lines. In other words, he explores the uneven access to modernity that different social groups have across the continent and its struggle with postmodern thought and textualities. However, it is neither Brunner nor Canclini but Enrique Dussel who best describes the tension between modernity and postmodernity in Latin America.

As Dussel explains:

The 'realization' of modernity no longer lies on the passage from its abstract potential to its 'real,' European, embodiment. It lies today, rather, in a process that will transcend modernity as such, a trans-



modernity, in which both modernity and its negated alterity co-realize themselves in a process of mutual creative fertilization.<sup>127</sup>

Clearly, Dussel's aim is to produce a theoretical framework to examine both the modern and the postmodern in the context of Latin America. However, his notion of trans-modernity could move forward, towards postmodernity, and perhaps also backwards towards a pre-modern instance, since both can be understood as modernity's negated alterity. Dussel's model becomes more flexible and more applicable to the dynamics of Latin American cultures. It is precisely this coexistence and mobility between the pre-modern, the modern and the postmodern which lies at the center of Canclini's theory of cultural hybridity that focuses on the strategies for entering and leaving modernity in either direction.

### **3.3.2 From Cultural Heterogeneity to Cultural Hybridization.**

Although the notion of hybridization had been previously used to explain the specific conditions of the Latin American cultures, it was only with the book *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad* published in 1989 that the debate reached boiling point. The book has certainly become a pivotal work in terms of the hybridization debate in Latin America. Although Canclini's approach differs from those examined in the previous sections of this chapter, it is important because his subject matter is specifically Latin America. Canclini does not overlook questions of colonialism, but he suggests that contemporary Latin American hybrid cultures are the result of the impact of the global economy and communication technologies. Both the global economy and the advent of advanced technology in mass communications are characteristics of the postmodern era which enter abruptly within contexts where,

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<sup>127</sup> DE LA CAMPA, Román, *Latin Americanism*, Minneapolis - London, University of Minnesota Press, 1999 p 27

according to Canclini, modernization has not yet arrived, or its arrival has been uneven. Consequently, the multiple spheres of our complex societies find themselves in an ambiguous situation having to negotiate at different levels between the local and the global. The main point of Canclini's book is that a liminal zone is created in which traditional cultural manifestations interact with modernizing forces in order to survive. Or, in other words, that tradition survives through hybridization in market circumstances.

Not only in his book *Hybrid Cultures*, but also in other<sup>128</sup>, Canclini uses several case studies to illustrate his argument. The case made by Canclini is that, given the multiplicity of social spheres that coexist within the space of the Latin American nations, artisans have to alter their work in order to have access to the global market. In this way, Canclini turns a negative situation, one that would be understood as a loss of culture, into a positive situation of cultural reconversion. Canclini illustrates this process by citing one of his own experiences:

That was until about eight years ago when I entered a shop in Teotitlán Valley —an Oaxacan town dedicated to textiles— where a man of fifty years watched television with his father, while exchanging words in Zapoteco. When asked about the rugs with images from Picasso, Klee and Miró that he showcased, he responded that he started to make them in 1968, after a visit by some tourists employed by the Museum of Modern Art in New York, who proposed to renew the designs. He showed me an album with photos and newspaper clippings in English, where they analyzed the expositions of his work held in California. In half an hour, I saw him fluidly move from Zapoteco to Spanish to English, from high art to artisan art forms, from his ethos to the information and the entertainment industries, with various commentaries along the way on metropolitan art criticism. I understood that my worry for the loss of his tradition was not shared by this man who moved so effortlessly across three cultural systems.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> See also: *Las Culturas Populares del Capitalismo*, México, Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1982 Or. *Consumidores y Ciudadanos: Conflictos Multiculturales de la Globalización*, México, Editorial Grijalbo, 1995 both by Néstor García Canclini.

<sup>129</sup> GARCIA CANCLINI, Nestor, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, trans. Christofer L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López, Minneapolis - London, University of Minnesota Press, 1995 pp 172 - 173



This passage eloquently explains Canclini's notion of hybridity, as the swift transit across different and disconnected cultural systems. What occurs in this case is that a transitional cultural zone is composed so as to allow the artisan to enter and leave the dominant structures of the global market imposed by modernization. This permanent movement across cultural boundaries materializes in the work of artisans who sell their products in local fairs and also in other countries.

Not only does the artisan, as a member of minority ethnic and social groups, make manifest this sort of hybridization, but also members of the dominant social groups in Latin America hybridize to the same extent. Canclini asks whether it would be wrong to affirm that most Latin Americans, of all social classes and groups, have among their musical collections "records and cassettes that combine classical music and Jazz, folklore, tango and salsa, including composers like Piazzola, Caetano Veloso and Ruben Blades who [also] fuse those genres, crossing cultivated and popular traditions in their work."<sup>130</sup>

Although Canclini insists that these processes are permanent, have always occurred and are accelerated in our time, the way in which they manifest themselves in his own discourse proves to be somewhat static. Paradoxically, the first footnote of his book *Hybrid Cultures* is an attempt at explaining all at once the meaning of the notion of hybridity, but which at the beginning of his book, presents hybridity as a notion that serves only to replace other terms that have been used before:

Occasional mention will be made of the terms syncretism, mestizaje, and others used to designate processes of hybridization. I prefer this last term because it includes diverse intercultural mixtures —not only the racial ones to which mestizaje tends to be limited— and because it permits an inclusion of the modern factors of hybridization better than does syncretism, a term that almost always refers to religious movements or traditional symbolic movements.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p 2

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. p 11

It seems that Canclini simply tries to replace a word with another by enhancing its semantic capabilities. The new term, however, seems not to offer innovative theoretical alternatives besides the fact that it is intended to combine the meaning of various other terms into one. The question arises as to why Canclini located a conclusive but ineffective clarification at such an early stage of his book. The result is a bifurcation between the theoretical/anthropological dimension and the empirical manifestation of hybridization. In other words, the theoretical/anthropological facet of Canclini's notion of hybridization addresses a series of sociocultural problems in relation to the economy and market structures that exist in Latin America, and enables him to propose that new structures be created in the continent to compete in the global market. The point would be that such structures already exist, albeit at an undeveloped stage. On the other hand, the empirical facet of Canclini's notion of hybridization explores the actual hybridization seen in the work of artisans in which elements of "high" and "low" are merged to satisfy the demands of the global market. One wonders whether this merger differs from any previous notion of syncretism, synthesis or mestizaje. For if artisan objects are in fact synthetic products that physically combine different and antagonistic motifs in clay, wood, wool or any other material they are made of, those motifs remain culturally separated and maintain an intangible struggle for differentiation and survival that is never reconciled in the object. In other words, the artisan objects that Canclini uses as case studies may have the opposite effect in the sense that they serve to highlight the incommensurable differences that exist between the cultures of the centers and the peripheries, differences which are complicit with Western narratives of cultural superiority. There is no doubt that Canclini's theoretical work is an accurate and compelling analysis of the complex attributes of the Latin American cultures with particular attention to the work of contemporary artisans in different contexts across the continent. It opens doors for a continued study of conditions of transculturation that affect artistic and architectural manifestations as "objects" produced within the



complexity of the Latin American cultures. However, the way in which the case studies are analyzed does not satisfy the complexity of his theoretical work because they suppose an end to a process that hitherto has been understood as endless.<sup>132</sup>

Canclini's model(s) of hybridization has/have been heavily criticized by other Latin American theorists like Brunner who insists that there is a methodological failure in the way Canclini theorizes hybridization uniting uncritically so many disconnected aspects without ever creating a coherent analytical structure. As Abril Trigo comments, "Brunner [...] critiques García Canclini's theoretical inconsistency in introducing an erroneous Gramscian adjustment to a primarily Bourdieuan concept of culture, thus completely erasing the struggle for hegemony."<sup>133</sup> Abril Trigo, for his part, affirms that "the phenomenological density of hybridity [...] clearly reduces its analytical precision, to such an extent that in its attempt to embrace all, it qualifies nothing."<sup>134</sup> De la Campa, seems to be more comfortable with Canclini's work to the point of affirming that his is an innovative approach to hybridization informed (eclectically) by contemporary theory, moving beyond deconstruction and "turning instead to a different array of cultural texts that are not ready made."<sup>135</sup> However, he criticizes the fact that Canclini does not account for women's roles and women's issues in his strategies of cultural reconversion.

Rita De Grandis, for her part, explores the theoretical linkages between Canclini and Bakhtin focusing on the implications of the terms dialogism and hybridity/hybridization:

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<sup>132</sup> HERNANDEZ, Felipe, "On the Notion of Architectural Hybridization in Latin America," in *The Journal Of Architecture*, Volume 7, Number 1 pp 77 - 86

<sup>133</sup> TRIGO, Abril, "Shifting Paradigms: From Transculturation to Hybridity," in De GRANDIS, Rita and BERND, Zila, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam - London, Rodopi, 2000 p 106

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. p 96

Bakhtin's study of the novel in relation to the popular genres and their interpenetrations in the novelistic form is comparable to García Canclini's extended analysis of popular culture interpenetrations in other spheres of cultural production and consumption. Bakhtin's hybridity, identified at the level of the utterance and extended to dialogism at the level of language socially defined is recuperated by García Canclini in a cultural macrotext whereby every symbolic system of cultural exchange entails hybridity.<sup>136</sup>

Clearly, De Grandis detects a theoretical connection between Bakhtin and Canclini. The Bakhtinian notion of hybridity is later compared to Canclini's notion of "multitemporal heterogeneity" since both serve to explain the coexistence and interaction of different historical temporalities, systems of belief, languages, and so on. The link between Bakhtin and Canclini has also been explored by other Latin Americanists like Robert C. J. Young, Sabine Mabardi, and François Pérus among others. Their work serves to corroborate the theoretical complexity and eclectic nature of Canclini's discourse. Although De Grandis does not find the Bourdieu-Gramsci-Canclini linkage problematic, she affirms that Canclini would still have to "systematize the description of the artesanal production within a formulation that combines the economic and political contexts and is comprehensible and oriented toward the specific material [...] of each typology of objects."<sup>137</sup>

Although Canclini's discourse presents various inconsistencies, it is perhaps the most significant work on issues of hybridization that has been published in Latin America. Canclini does touch on a series of aspects that had not been previously theorized. He shares with Bhabha the idea that hybridity acquires a subversive value with which it is possible to reverse situations of inequality. However, Canclini takes the idea further and suggests that the notion of cultural hybridity has not only a

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<sup>135</sup> de la CAMPA, Román, "On Border Artists and Transculturation," in DE GRANDIS, Rita and BERND, Zila, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Cultural Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, 2000 p 69

<sup>136</sup> DE GRANDIS, Rita, *Pursuing Hybridity: From the Linguistic to the Symbolic*, in DE GRANDIS, Rita, editor, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam - London, Rodopi, 2000 pp 219 - 220



theoretical subversive value, but also a practical potential. It becomes a tool for artistic and even technological creation. Despite the fierce criticism that he has received, Canclini managed to unveil the difficulties that Latin American indigenous artisans have had to endure in order to survive, caught as they are between their traditions and the global market. In other words, in spite of all its possible shortcomings, Canclini's model of hybridization responds as no other to the particularities of the Latin American cultures, and serves as a base for future elaboration. For this reason, the notion of hybridization is one that might well be applied to architecture. Although it is not my purpose here, it would be interesting to test the applicability of Canclini's model of hybridization to architectural cases so as to explore the strategies followed by architects like Ricardo Legorreta to export the architectural tradition of México to the United States and Europe. I would suggest that Canclini's notion of hybridization, as a practice of cultural reconversion, could become an outstanding theoretical tool to explore architectural cases. With careful elaboration it could also become a tool for architectural creation that helps understand practice in a more comprehensive manner. In other words, it would help architects to understand that questions about architecture in the Latin American context require engagement with broader issues if they are to respond accurately to the conditions of their particular cultures.

### **3.3.3 The Current Debate on Hybridity in Contemporary Latin American Culture**

It becomes clear from the multiple theoretical standpoints that have been explored throughout this chapter that the current debate on contemporary Latin American culture has become extremely complicated. Numerous discourses have been utilized

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p 220

and many theoretical positions have been assumed in order to interpret and to analyze the characteristics and dynamics of the Latin American cultures. That is why we see the confluence of postcolonial discourse, deconstructive practice and postmodern thought as the ruling theoretical triad among contemporary Latin American scholars.

In keeping with Cornejo Polar's radical rejection to the notion of cultural synthesis, syncretism, fusion or *mestizaje*, which not only put an end to permanent processes of cultural becoming, but also imply a certain inferiority and secondariness with regard to the assumed original cultural locus of enunciation —Spanish culture—, contemporary theorists make use of deconstructivist methods in order to prove the inappropriateness of such assumptions. As explained above, deconstruction arrives through the discourses of other postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha and Spivak and not directly from Derrida, the figure who coined the term itself in the late sixties and who has led the debate during the past three decades. Only during the past few years have theorists such as Walter Mignolo, Román de la Campa and Fernando Coronil produced extensive work on postcolonial discourse making use of deconstructive practice and its applicability within Latin American cultural theory.

Román de la Campa, for instance, has produced an acute critical inspection of the work of Bhabha and Spivak from a Latin American perspective. The reason why de la Campa has undertaken such a task is because he believes that the naivety with which some discourses of the centers are appropriated within Latin America allow for the reconstitution of cultural metropolitan power and authority. In other words, the uncritical and facile use of discourses appropriated from the centers in order to theorize the conditions of the peripheries undermines their political capacity and efficacy. De la Campa does not suggest that theoretical appropriation or collaboration of/among discourses has negative connotations, but that such practice requires a



clear political agenda if it is to have a subversive effect both in the centers as well as in the peripheries, and this is the deconstructive predicament of postcolonial discourse. De la Campa affirms that "deconstructive practice is the most rigorous method behind postmodern thought,"<sup>138</sup> and that it reaches a highly sophisticated level in Bhabha's postcolonial theory. Clearly, postcolonialism, both in Bhabha and Spivak, "is understood as a deconstructive look at the culture of the Third World in relation to the First, or the culture of the Third World diasporas within the First."<sup>139</sup> As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, Bhabha aims at reversing the unequal cultural relationships between the centers and the peripheries that result from processes of colonial domination. Similarly, de la Campa analyzes the case of Spivak who has engaged more directly with Latin America. However, de la Campa strongly criticizes Spivak's position because her view of Latin America is reductive. In the same way that Bhabha's notion of hybridity/hybridization becomes ambivalent due to its universalistic aspirations, Spivak overlooks the heterogeneity of Latin American culture:

Spivak somehow fails to acknowledge the existence of a Latin America that speaks through different voices, most particularly from within, but also through first world diasporic and immigrant articulations like her own. She makes no effort to document, or imagine, a vast region with a rich, though far from successful, history of attempts to decolonize that inform more than a century and a half of culture and literature.<sup>140</sup>

This kind of generalization, similar to the notion of *Hispanidad*, has become recurrent among those who theorize Latin America and the Third World. The case of Fredric Jameson's Third World construct is another well-known case. In his idea of the "national allegory," Jameson seems to generalize the whole of the Third World in one single, totalizing stroke without regard of the historical and cultural complexity of the

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<sup>138</sup> DE LA CAMPA, Román, "On Border Artists and Transculturation," in DE GRANDIS, Rita, and BERND, Zila, editors, *Unforeseeable Americas: Questioning Hybridity in the Americas*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, 2000 pp 59

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* p 58

contexts that the term seems to embrace. However, despite Spivak's erroneous approach to the question of Latin America, de la Campa finds her use of a deconstructivist practice appropriate and productive. "In contrast to Jameson," de la Campa says, "Spivak proposes a postcolonial mode of critique and textuality in which 'you take positions in terms not of the discovery of historical or philosophical grounds, but in terms of reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding.'"<sup>141</sup> Spivak defines this practice as a "founding cathacresis," or, in other words, a search whose referent no longer exists, hence dismissing claims for grounded identities that would therefore be false.

Deconstructive practice, then, appears as a creative theoretical tool associated with postcolonial discourse, in the sense that it allows for the reevaluation of the traditional structures that link the centers and the peripheries, and postmodern culture becomes the epistemological site within which it operates. This entanglement seems unavoidable yet unclear in the discourse of many Latin Americanists. It is Alfonso De Toro who produces one of the clearest explanations of the relationship deconstruction-postcoloniality-postmodernism in his essay "The Epistemological Foundations of the Contemporary Condition," but finishes his explanation with a contradictory affirmation that seems to jeopardize his own position:

Postcoloniality as a postmodern perspective is characterized by an attitude and an intertextual, inter-cultural, and deconstructionist (in the sense of a critical-creative perspective) thought, by ways of thinking which re-codify (decenter) history, and by heterogeneous or hybrid thought, which is radically particular yet radically diverse and, in consequence, universal.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> DE LA CAMPA, Román, *Latin Americanism*, Minneapolis - London, University of Minnesota Press, 1999 p 9

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p 10

<sup>142</sup> DE TORO, Alfonso, "The Epistemological Foundations of the Contemporary Condition: Latin America in Dialogue with Postmodernity and Postcoloniality," in YOUNG, Richard, editor, *Latin American Postmodernisms*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, 1997 p 37



It is clear from the above that De Toro understands postmodernity as a phenomenon against, or as an alternative to, the homogenizing and universalizing aspirations of the ideology of modernity. This stance, then, provides the epistemological ground for postcolonial discourse to rethink the world in terms other than the European or the North American. What is not clear is the assumption that "in consequence" this way of thinking becomes universal, in which case there is a major contradiction since a commitment to intertextual, intercultural, and heterogeneous thought is in opposition to universality. Once this perspective becomes universal, differences are eliminated and there is no space for heterogeneity and intercultural or intertextual thought. It would be necessary to establish whether De Toro demonstrates that this condition appears in every culture so that his theoretical model would have universal application although he focuses on Latin America for the purposes of this particular essay. This may be a reasonable explanation, even though he runs the risk of suffering from the same lack of specificity that makes Bhabha's notion of hybridity paradoxical.

For de la Campa, the interaction between postmodern culture, postcolonial discourse and deconstructive practice becomes stronger and all acquire more specificity in the Latin American context than in the centers. Nevertheless, they can never be dissociated from it. Consequently, it becomes imperative for de la Campa to create contextual cultural grounds rather than universalizing theoretical methods, yet always in contact with central theoretical debates. De la Campa also warns us that deconstruction alone may not be sufficient to resolve the totality of the debates about Latin American cultures. In order to bring greater depth to the current debate, it would be necessary to engage also with questions of feminism, politics, postcolonialism and cultural studies in the broadest sense.

In other words, the new critical agenda among Latin American scholars includes the creation of a cultural politics of difference which makes use of the discourses and debates mentioned above so as to produce more creative responses to the particular circumstances of our historical moment with contextual specificity. This new cultural politics is oppositional in the sense that it contests traditional metropolitan structures and attitudes towards Latin American cultures. However, it is not an uncritical claim for intellectual acceptance or inclusion within mainstream Euro-American theory.

The notion of hybridization becomes central to the cultural politics of difference. As has been maintained throughout this chapter, the notion of hybridization implies the existence of a number of different elements that share the same cultural space and together give rise to an alternative form of cultural logic for which difference, multiplicity and heterogeneity become central. Nonetheless, if the Latin American version of hybridization is to take further the implications of the notion itself, then it is necessary to specify the context in which it is to be applied. Contemporary Latin American theorists are aware that Latin America cannot be assumed to be one single homogeneous and monolithic cultural body. Therefore, it would be misleading to theorize the whole continent in one stroke, as Spivak does. Nor is it possible directly to appropriate external theoretical models without careful recodification. After all, the experiences of transculturation that lay beneath processes of hybridization are markedly different as one moves from one context into another. In the case of Latin America, for example, whose history of decolonization antedates that of India by more than a century, it is necessary to establish whether Bhabha's and/or Spivak's theoretical models are entirely applicable. It thus becomes clear that, to reach the full political potential of the notion of hybridization, it requires of contextual specificity.

Another critical issue is the fact that the notion of hybridization goes beyond the simple fact of a multiple coexistence of cultural elements. As a creative theoretical



tool, it requires a certain trans-disciplinarity. Both Canclini and de la Campa, as well as the majority of Latin American scholars, affirm that in order to study the situation of our contemporary culture it is necessary to have the contribution of various disciplines and to hear the voices of racial minorities, women, gays and lesbians, and the elderly. Trans-disciplinary cooperation is not only important to overcome the self-referentiality that characterized theoretical debates produced in Latin American at the beginning of the past century, but also to get closer to the complex reality of the Latin American life-world, to use de la Campa's words. In this way, hybridity ceases to be a merely descriptive term, or an aesthetic device only used to illustrate the heterogeneous nature of Latin American cultures. It also carries a subversive value that contests the traditional dialectical binarism of the cultural relations between an assumed homogenous center and its peripheries.

The term hybridization alone has interesting implications. However, there seems to be a fine line dividing its critical capacity and its potential theoretical futility. That is the reason why I started this section by announcing some theoretical warnings. It is my contention that, in order to maintain the theoretical and political efficacy of the notion of hybridization, the context in which it is to be used has to be clearly demarcated. It also has to be approached through its *trans*-disciplinary, *trans*-temporal and *trans*-cultural dimensions, and must not be reduced to a univocal or unidimensional notion. And finally, it ought to be used as a deconstructive practice in the sense of being a critical and creative reflection to challenge the traditional structures that have determined transcultural relations between the centers and the peripheries. Otherwise, hybridity/hybridization might lose its theoretical value becoming a catchword associated with the notion of multiplicity be it cultural, racial or aesthetic.

This is precisely the reason why the notion of hybridization has so quickly disappeared from contemporary architectural debates in Latin America when it was so keenly used towards the beginning of the 1990's. Architectural theorists, not only in Latin America but also in other contexts<sup>143</sup> use the term hybrid only to describe architectural works that combine different materials, colors, forms, logics and the like. It could easily be affirmed that the term hybrid became a fancy word that replaced the term *eclectic*, or *eclecticism*, so common in architectural history and art theory to describe a similar phenomenon. The self-referentiality of architectural discourse has rendered it incapable of grasping the complexity of the term. Used as a descriptive tool only, hybridity/hybridization loses its critical potential. Architectural theorists in Latin America, and elsewhere, may have noticed the superficiality of the way in which the term had been used and may have decided to render it unfashionable. However, it has re-emerged more recently within architectural debates but this time with electrical, technological and computational connotations, which does not mean that the previous approach has completely disappeared from the panorama of architectural theory. Murray Fraser and Joe Kerr in their essay "Beyond the Empire of the Signs" explore new and more appropriate alternatives for the notion of hybridization within contemporary architectural theory.

The fragility of architecture as an intellectual subject has been a distinguishing characteristic of the last few decades. What was missing was a wider conceptual framework for architecture; an approach that could embrace activities from patronage through to construction and use, and could locate these within the entire spectrum of economics, politics and social practices. This is precisely where cultural theory fits in. Cultural theory proposes, without reservation, that existing conceptions of architecture need to be replaced by broader and more inclusive types of readings which address issues such as race, gender,

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<sup>143</sup> Wladimir Kryszinski, in his essay "Rethinking Postmodernism: With Some Latin American Excursus," uses the term hybridization to describe the architectural work of postmodern architects like Robert Venturi, Michael Graves, and Aldo Rossi among others, based on the fact that they utilize various architectural languages and systems of coding in their buildings. See: KRYSINSKI, Wladimir, "Rethinking Postmodernism: With Some Latin American Excursus," in YOUNG, Robert, *Latin American Postmodernisms*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, 1999



space, image and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.<sup>144</sup>

It becomes clear that Fraser and Murray propose a more comprehensive approach to architecture and find postcolonial theory appropriate for such expansion. In fact, they suggest that it is the notion of hybridization in particular, as developed in postcolonial theory, which proves fruitful for a successful understanding of contemporary architectural theory and practice. Although Fraser and Murray do not write about the Latin American context—they work exclusively on the United States-Europe architectural and cultural exchange in the era of globalization—their use of the notion of hybridization is more thorough than that of most other architectural theorists who also engage with the term.

I will ignore Fraser's and Murray's theoretical engagement with postcolonial theory due to its apparent superficiality. They briefly quote Said, and then move on to apply his thought to the study of the cultural relationship between United States and Europe in a way that seems slightly inappropriate, moving hastily from Said's postcolonial theory to post-structuralist theory and then to a somehow traditional architectural theory. It is very difficult to determine from their short essay whether this is a methodological mistake, or whether it was simply due to the fact that they were working within the reduced margins of an article. All in all, they seem to be well aware of the implications and complexities of postcolonial discourse, and find the true potential of the notion of hybridization in connection with architecture.

Following Said's argument according to which all cultures are interlinked as a consequence of the colonial expansion of Europe and the later emergence of capitalistic imperialism, Fraser and Murray paraphrase Said as follows:

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<sup>144</sup> FRASER, Murray, and KERR, Joe, "Beyond the Empire of the Signs," in BORDEN, Iain, and RENDELL, Jane, *Intersections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories*, London,

Partly because of empire, all architectural projects are involved with one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily different, and unmonolithic.<sup>145</sup>

This straightforward, and obvious, appropriation of Said's arguments serves to make clear the fact that the notion of cultural hybridization within architecture goes far beyond the physical and/or aesthetic description of buildings. It involves the totality of processes around the design and construction of a building. That includes the political, financial, urban, architectural and social agendas that lie beneath the actual existence of a building. Fraser's and Murray's case studies, the Getty Center in Los Angeles, California, and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, are considered hybrid not only because they combine different geometries, materials, forms and scales. Hybridization here is much more complex. These buildings demonstrate not only the rhizomatic connectability of our current cultures, as explained in chapter one, but also the logics of corporate capitalism, and the nomadic nature of architectural thought and practice. Both buildings reverse situations of cultural inequality, and even ignore them. In the case of the Guggenheim, the building was designed by a Canadian-American architect based in Santa Monica, California, for an institution based in New York but with an undeniable interest in European art, to be built in a Spanish city characterized by its ferocious separatist ideals. Eventually, the building becomes representative of three different collective identities, that of Bilbao and the Basque Country, that of the Spanish in general, and that of the United States' corporate expansion, not to mention the architect Frank Gehry whose individual and professional identity cannot be detached from this building. Again, as Fraser and Murray would put it: "architectural hybridization can hence be seen as a response to

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Routledge, 2000 pp 125

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p 130



new forms of cultural and power displacement which are being produced by, and in reaction to, widespread forces of globalization."<sup>146</sup>

The point to be made is that both postcolonial theory and the notion of hybridization become very useful tools to explore and to understand contemporary architectural practices. The use of postcolonial theory and the notion of hybridization will help to overcome the traditional formalism characteristic of architectural analysis. It will also help to embrace the whole spectrum of cultural practices that architecture implies, especially in postcolonial contexts with complex attributes like the Latin American. Unfortunately, there is not enough scholarship on this area at the moment, but there is an emergent interest in exploring these issues. This is why, in the next two chapters, I will expand on the way in which the notions of hybridity and of hybridization, as well as the notions of translation and transculturation, can be used within contemporary architectural theory with particular emphasis on Latin American architectural practices.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid. p 146

## **Chapter Four: Theorizing Latin American Architectures.**

At the time when most Latin American countries became independent, the modernist discourse had already firmly established itself in Europe and North America. The ideas of modernism and modernization that were brought into Latin America by the European colonizer prior to independence became central within the political agenda for the formation of the Latin American nations after independence. Therefore, the principles of cultural and political order and homogeneity, which are part of the universalizing Euro-American modernist agenda, became a primary target for the governments of the emergent Latin American nations<sup>147</sup>. It was thus believed that the new nations should be socially and culturally homogeneous, and that such homogeneity was achievable through industrialization, the modernization of urban infrastructure, and through European forms of education. However, as discussed in previous chapters, colonialism and other forms of transcultural interaction —some of which started prior to colonization— had already produced fragmented heterogeneous societies whose dynamic multiplicity was no longer reducible to any system of homogeneity. In other words, in the haste for building modern nations, the dramatic sociocultural fragmentation resulting from conditions of transculturation was entirely overlooked.

After years of colonial repression, the experience of freedom manifested itself through a radical rejection of anything associated with the repressive colonial power. Therefore, cultural elements related to Spanish culture were deliberately dismissed, and the models to build the newly formed nations were appropriated from other contexts. It is thus that sociocultural and political links between Latin America and other central nations like England, France and the United States became stronger,

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<sup>147</sup> See chapter 1, section 1.1.2.1 The Lettered City, and the discussion on the translation of rationalist ideas about a new social order into Latin America via a highly hierarchical sociopolitical class division and the rationalization of urban space.



and served as a catalyst for the incessant multiplying of cultures that began with colonization. However, instead of having a liberating effect, such links eventually generated new forms of dependency that marked the beginning of post-colonial modes of transcultural interaction. As stated in the previous chapter, this complex intermingling of sociopolitical conditions makes the homogenization of the nation an impossible task. Yet it was also pointed out that there will always be forces striving towards homogenization. These forces, which are part of the political and pedagogical apparatuses for building the nation, will nonetheless be unable to achieve their goal. Sociocultural homogenization will therefore always remain an unfinished project.

In this chapter, I will pay particular attention to the way in which the struggle between the centers and Latin America, as a periphery, has been recently theorized within architectural circles. In so doing, I will first take a historical excursus in order to explore the most important cultural and architectural post-independence reactions to the tension between the centers and Latin America, focusing on the arrival of the neo-classical style and the emergence of the modernist debate. In the second section of this chapter, I will analyze the theoretical work of three Latin American architects who have worked extensively on the relation between Latin American and central architectural practices. I do not attempt to produce a literary review of these theories but to analyze them in the light of the notions of transculturation, translation, and hybridization presented in previous chapters. Finally, I will revise the notions of syncretism and hybridization strictly within architectural debates. These two notions have recurrently been used to examine architecture in Latin America, yet their use has shown little success. It is the aim of this chapter to demonstrate that theorists and historians have failed to respond accurately to the complex reality of Latin American architectural practices. This is perhaps because they have relied heavily on architectural theory and have isolated themselves from larger cultural debates. In

order to respond accurately to the complex reality of contemporary architectural practices in Latin America, it would be necessary to engage with the whole spectrum of political and social realities to which architecture, as collective cultural practice, is inherently connected. Only in this way would it be possible for architectural theorists to address processes of identity formation, sociopolitical inequality, and architectural production in a globalizing culture with political specificity.

#### **4.1 Post-Independence Reactions: A Historical Excursus.**

In the countries liberated by Simón Bolívar, there was a period of sociopolitical instability and incertitude that took place during the first few years after independence. Colombian historians have called the phenomenon "*la patria boba*" [the silly *patrie*]. During this time, decisions had to be made as to whether the newly independent countries should become democratic republics, or whether the implementation of a monarchy was the best alternative, in which case Bolívar would have been crowned king. Although the latter alternative was rapidly ruled out, more and equally problematic questions were to be answered at this time regarding the politics of the nation, its society, and its culture. After, the period known as "*la patria boba*," most Latin American governments created political agendas that focused on the construction of modern homogeneous nations. Consequently, the multiple and incommensurable cultural differences coexisting in the space of the new nations were utterly ignored. In fact, a detailed historical analysis of the conditions of the minorities and the non-dominant social classes in the years after independence would prove that although the colonial system was dismantled, and Spain no longer had direct control over its ex-colonies, sociopolitical structures remained almost unchanged. Whites and a vast mestizo population were dominant, and the various black and indigenous groups remained at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Even



slavery remained socially, politically, and even morally accepted for several years after independence. In order to achieve a modern homogeneous nation, minorities were expected to comply with the conditions of the dominant white and mestizo social classes which remained attached to sociocultural European patterns. Ania Loomba, for example, demonstrates that in the nineteenth century in Colombia "Pedro Fermín de Vargas advocated a policy of interbreeding between whites and Indians in order to "Hispanize" and finally "extinguish" Indians."<sup>148</sup> It is thus clear that the sociopolitical structures imposed by the colonizer did not disappear after independence. Not only was there a continuity of the same structures, but also a desperate appropriation of alternative social, cultural, and political models from central nations. In this way, direct military and political domination may have come to an end, but new forms of dependency commenced after the declaration of independence.

#### **4.1.1 Neo-Classicism and the Arrival of the European Styles.**

As argued above, during the first years after independence the social elites of the emergent nations tried to reject all traces of Spanish culture because they were immediately associated with a shameful past of colonial domination and backwardness. Within architecture, this phenomenon manifested itself through rejection of the baroque style, which was predominant in the absolutist European monarchies at the time of the colonization of the Americas. The baroque was to be replaced initially by neo-classical architecture and later by other European styles. The neoclassical, as opposed to the backwardness of the baroque style, was associated with the French Revolution and the new academies. It becomes clear that the neoclassical style was considered a symbol of freedom, democracy, and

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<sup>148</sup> LOOMBA, Ania, *Colonialis/Postcolonialism*, London, Routledge, 1998 p 173

modernization. The principles of neoclassicism were mainly disseminated through the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* founded in the aftermath of the French Revolution in Paris. It became the most important school of architecture in the world admitting students from all over the world. Not only did these students take the *Beaux-Arts* ideas back to their own countries, but the *Ecole des Beaux-Arts* also became a model for architectural education at the moment when many new schools of architecture were opened around the world. For this reason, various architectural historians such as Kenneth Frampton, affirm that neo-classicism was the first architectural style to aspire to universality. The willingness of the Latin American elites to appropriate neoclassical architecture can therefore be understood as part of their project to build new homogeneous modern nations.

Apart from the symbolic value attached to it, the neoclassical style brought new building typologies that were so far non-existent in Latin American cities. In this way, symbols of the modern European and North American ways of life such as theaters, clubs, parks, banks and capitol buildings, were built in Latin America, and the activities that came with them changed the way Latin American middle and upper classes conceived and inhabited the city while, at the same time, increasing the gap between socioeconomic classes and racial groups. Thus, it is evident that neoclassicism was not only an architectural style, but also an instrument to disseminate the principles of European civilization.

However, the neoclassical came accompanied by other European styles such as Tudor, Georgian, French or Republican, and even Californian (paradoxically, this latter style was none other than a Spanish-Mediterranean style that now arrived from North America so as to disguise its Spanish origin). These styles were found to respond to the modernizing and homogenizing impetus of the peoples of the time, and they became very popular especially in the case of private housing



developments. In Argentina, for instance, the Californian style became the official national style during the 1940s whereas in Colombia the Tudor and Georgian styles were used to build entire neighborhoods in Bogotá and other major cities.

The appropriation of foreign styles generated the reaction of nationalist movements for which the only way to find a really Latin American expression was to search for the roots of our pre-Hispanic past. Nationalist movements were particularly acute in countries with a large indigenous and mestizo population such as México, Brazil and the Andean countries. This does not imply that there were not nationalist movements in countries like Argentina, Chile or Uruguay where the percentage of European immigrants was significantly higher than in other countries. However, there are enormous doubts about the legitimacy of these movements and their real political concern. They seem to have had more emotional than critical aspirations. Although the fact that many nationalist movements were emotionally motivated may not represent a problem in itself. It appears that such reactions tend to overlook certain realities that are critical for the construction of every nation, for example, the diversity of cultures, races, genders with their different historical experiences that share the space of the nation and whose history of transculturation cannot be deleted.

Within architectural circles, the question of nationalism was mainly reduced to a problem of decoration. In other words, instead of using the Greek and Roman architectural motifs of neoclassical architecture, these were replaced by indigenous architectural elements and imagery. However, the traditional layout of colonial and contemporary houses, for example, did not change. Neither was the way people inhabited houses challenged by architects of the various nationalist movements. It is curious that there were no proposals to recuperate pre-Columbian urban structures. This may have been due to the lack of sufficient archaeological knowledge of the way pre-Columbian cities were laid out before the arrival of the colonizer, or perhaps

because the concept of the modern city brought by Europeans had a different rationale, which did not allow for the application of Pre-Hispanic associations. The fact is that in most cases architectural nationalisms during the early twentieth century were never more than superficial aesthetic responses to architectures of foreign origin with very little political transcendence. The struggle between nationalist movements and those who promulgated the use of foreign styles was nonetheless positive as it marked the beginning of the discussion about architectural identity in Latin America and the need to develop a Latin American history and a theory of architecture.

This transitional period came to an end with the full arrival of architectural modernism after the Second World War. Due to the war in Europe, Latin America had the opportunity to reaffirm its role as a provider of goods and went through a period of growth and wealth. During the period between the two World Wars and the two decades after the second there was some industrialization, especially in the area of agriculture. Incipient industrialization generated an enormous migration of farmers into the main cities. Since cities were no longer suitable to host such large populations, architectural modernism offered solutions to these problems under the utopian belief in progress and egalitarianism. Another factor that contributed toward the full arrival of architectural modernism was the recognition of the first schools of architecture and the foundation of the first professional associations of architects throughout the continent. In Colombia, for example, nine new schools of architecture were created between 1942 and 1952. The heads of these schools were young architects most of whom had studied abroad and who were influenced by the modernist ideas of European architects like Le Corbusier. The modernizing agenda rapidly became central to all Latin American nations and affected dramatically the totality of our cultures and cities. This can be seen in the numerous projects that were commissioned by the governments of almost every Latin American nation



during this period. As mentioned above, modern architecture was appropriated to symbolize progress and modernization.

This attitude has changed only very little in the past few decades. The architects of this first generation of modern architecture, most of whom are still alive and continue to work, have become representative of the Latin American architectures. Amongst them there is Oscar Niemeyer (Brazil), Rogelio Salmona (Colombia), Eladio Dieste (Uruguay), Carlos Raul Villanueva (Venezuela) and Luis Barragán (México). The last three have unfortunately passed away during the last twenty years. But, if these are the most representative "practitioners," the most important theorists also belong to their generation: Germán Téllez (Colombia), Cristián Fernández Cox (Chile), Enrique Browne (Chile), and Marina Waisman (Argentina). It is therefore not surprising that the recent history and theory of Latin American architecture has been written according to the ideology and the models of modern architecture.

The above-mentioned theorists and historians praise the work of the above-mentioned practitioners for the quality of their buildings, which, according to modernist standards, are in all respects excellent. However, as in most cases of paradigmatic modern architecture, there seems to be a detachment between architectural materiality and the reality of the social context where buildings are inscribed. As I will demonstrate in the next section, Latin American theorists and historians are not unaware of the complex reality of our heterogeneous cultures, but remain unable to connect architectural productivity with social spheres. Through their theoretical approach, architects transform paradigmatic buildings into hegemonic architectural models. Thus, younger architects are expected to design buildings following the same parameters, and, what is more, people are expected to adjust themselves to this hegemonic architecture. In so doing, theorists eliminate cultural differences by means of architecture.

At this stage, the notions of transculturation, translation, and hybridization appear to be relevant within architectural discourses. For these three notions bring to the fore the fragmented, heterogeneous, and often antagonistic realities of the Latin American societies challenging traditional architectural attitudes towards cities and buildings.

#### **4.2 Recent Architectural Discourses in Latin American.**

Latin American architectural theory has developed rapidly since the early 1980's. This has been largely due to the fact that there is an increasing interest in issues related to the formation of Latin American cultural identities. Architects and architectural theorists in the continent have paid particular attention to the differences between the architectures produced in Latin America and those that are produced in the so-called centers and other peripheries. For many years, there were only individual and isolated efforts to study and to analyze Latin American architectural practices, but a coherent and solid body of work had never been produced. Only with the creation of the SAL (Seminarios de Arquitectura Latinoamericana) was it possible for most Latin American architects to attend continental meetings and work together towards the creation of more comprehensive architectural theories.

The first SAL was organized by the magazine *Summa* in 1985 in Argentina. It was a traditional reunion of Latin American Architects to discuss their built work by looking at large numbers of slides in a dark lecture theater rather than a space for theoretical debate. However, the organizers of the second SAL in 1986 had the creative idea of combining the long shallow slide sessions with the presentation of theoretical work. This was the beginning of an unprecedented effort to study the situation of the architectural discipline by Latin American architects from within the continent itself.



Yet, in the beginning, theoretical debates lacked a critical dimension and were heavily determined by hegemonic discourses originated in Europe and North America. The first few SAL did nonetheless provide the space for the development of the three most sophisticated theories that have so far been produced in relation to Latin American architectures. They are: "Modernidad Apropiada" by The Chilean architect Cristián Fernández Cox; *La Otra Arquitectura Latinoamericana* by the Chilean architect Enrique Browne; and an interesting theoretical proposal entitled "Arquitectura Divergente" devised by the Argentine architectural theorist Marina Waisman. In this chapter, I will analyze in detail each one of these theories. Instead of offering a literary review of the work carried out by the above-mentioned architects, I will analyze them critically in the light of the ideas presented in previous chapters. In so doing, I will demonstrate that the work of Fernández, Browne, and Waisman brings to the forefront the problems of applying traditional architectural theories and practices in Latin America, although it remains reductive in the sense it relies almost exclusively on architectural theory. Their engagement with issues outside architecture is superficial, and, in some cases, even naive. Additionally, these theories appear to be teleologically devised in order to construct hegemonic architectural narratives with which to validate certain practices and dismiss others. It needs to be made clear that I do not pretend to diminish the value of their work since it creates a solid ground for the continued study of Latin American architectures. What I attempt to prove is that a larger and more critical engagement with other sociocultural debates would add a stronger political dimension to their theses, an aspect that is currently missing.

#### **4.2.1 Appropriating Architecture.**

Amongst the most notable theses that have emerged from the SAL, is the one entitled "Modernidad Apropiada" by Cristián Fernández Cox. His theory is basically a critique of modernity similar to other Latin American critics like Brunner and Dussel. However, Fernández also follows carefully the ideas of the Chilean theorist Norbert Lechner, and the influence of Kenneth Frampton is undeniable. It would be possible to affirm that Fernández's analysis is a simplification of Brunner's work. In Fernández's view, modernist discourse is unable to respond to the complex realities of Latin American cultures because it originated in a different context where the social, cultural and political conditions were radically different. On these grounds, Fernández suggests that Latin American architectures may never have been modern because there has never been a completed process of appropriation of the notions of modernity, modernism and modernization.

##### **4.2.1.1 Fernández's Critique to the Notions of Modernity, Modernism and Modernization.**

Fernández affirms that the various architectural modernizations that took place in twentieth-century Latin America have been superficial. In his essay "Modernidad Apropiada," Fernández suggests that modern Latin American architects imported the solutions for a series of problems that did not yet exist in our contexts. He goes on to claim in a way that reminds us of Kenneth Frampton's criticism of the International Style exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1932, that modern



architecture, which was anti-stylistic by definition, became, in Latin America, just another style.<sup>149</sup>

My interpretation of Fernández's complicated rhetoric is that he wants to affirm that the rational abstractionism characteristic of modern architecture did not only overthrow the complex heterogeneous reality of our cultures, but also that the political content of modern architecture changed radically during this process of misappropriation. Yet this message does not appear clear in his writing. As I have pointed out in various occasions throughout this thesis, early modernist architects ignored the complex reality of our cultures in order to reproduce Euro-American architectural styles associated with the idea of progress and modernization. In other words, the main value that early modernist Latin American architects found in modern architecture was its capacity symbolically to represent the promises offered by the great modernist narratives. However, it is clear today that most of the architectural attempts at modernizing Latin American cities proved the inability of modern architectural discourse to respond to the realities of Latin America. This is seen in the way the majority of architectural solutions designed by modernist architects, following faithfully the principles of modern architecture, were radically altered during the first few years after their completion. However, seen from the centers, the inability of the modernist discourse to respond to Latin American cultures is understood as the failure of the Latin American nations to modernize themselves and to access the new modern world order. Such an assumption lies at the center of Fernández's critique. For this reason, he launches a suggestive and highly subversive response in the form of a question:

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<sup>149</sup> See: FERNANDEZ COX, Cristián, "Modernidad Apropriada," in ARANGO, Silvia, *Modernidad y Postmodernidad en America Latina: Estado del Debate*, Bogotá, Escala, 1991 pp 11 - 22

¿No será que a la inversa, estos fracasos se podrían deber a la inaptitud de las instituciones de la modernidad ilustrada ante nuestro sujeto histórico real; que culturalmente no proviene del cosmos ilustrado, sino del cosmos barroco-indiano?

...¿Fracasaron nuestros pueblos? Más exacto será decir que las ideas filosóficas y políticas que han constituido la civilización occidental, han fracasado entre nosotros...<sup>150</sup>

[Would not it be the other way round? So this failure might be due to the incapacity for the institutions of the illustrated modernity in relation to the reality of our historical subjects, which does not emerge from the cosmos of the enlightenment, but from the baroque-Indian cosmos.

...Was it a failure of our nations? It would be more appropriate to affirm that the philosophies and politics that constitute the western civilization have failed amongst us [My translation].

There are two highly provocative issues in the previous quotation to which I will refer. First, there is an attempt at reversing those hegemonic structures which suggest that Latin American nations are incapable of modernizing themselves in order to access the modern world order; second, there is the notion of the "barroco-indiano" cosmos as the root from which Latin American cultures have allegedly derived. The former is a highly provocative and, to some extent deconstructive act, in the sense that it reverses the assumption according to which the Latin American nations failed to modernize themselves. Instead, Fernández proposes that it is the modernist Euro-American project that fails to respond to the complexity of our cultures. This argument challenges the adequacy and authority of the modernist Euro-American project while, at the same time, challenges architectural practices based upon the principles of modern architecture.

Consequently, Fernández's argument can be seen as a deconstructive act. Yet, it is interesting that he does not seem very comfortable with the agendas proposed by both deconstruction and postmodernism, which is clear in his criticism to the notion of deconstruction.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. p 15



Si uno pudiera reducir a un punto principal, la propuesta de la postmodernidad que es la deconstrucción es una especie de apropiación. Deconstruir el lenguaje, deconstruir los símbolos, deconstruir las formas y las estructuras, desarmar una cosa para rearmar lo mismo solo que ubicando los elementos convencionales en situaciones no convencionales, para provocar la sorpresa y la ironía.<sup>151</sup>

[If one could reduce to one main point the proposal of postmodern discourse, which is deconstruction, it could be seen as a kind of anti-proposal. To deconstruct language, and symbols, to deconstruct forms and structures. To undo one thing in order to reassemble the same thing but locating conventional elements in non-conventional situations so as to provoke surprise and irony [My translation].

Fernández's criticism of deconstruction is ambiguous, and his dogmatic interpretation of postmodern discourse is also paradoxical. He cautiously starts by inquiring whether "it would be possible to reduce the proposal of postmodernity to a main point," perhaps suggesting the impossibility of such a task, but he continues to affirm that the "main" proposal of postmodern theory is deconstruction. It would be feasible to claim that he sees the whole notion of deconstruction through the eyes of other architects of the late seventies and eighties who fashionably reduced the entire question of deconstruction to a problem of architectural form instead of taking it directly from Derrida. It can therefore be argued that Fernández attempted to reject such reductive view of deconstruction theory and tries to avoid its use, which appears as a theoretically sound strategy. Yet, it could also be argued that the reversal proposed in the previous quotation —where he raises his non-conformity with the assumption that Latin American nations failed to modernize themselves by inquiring whether it is the modernist discourse which fails to respond to the conditions of Latin America— is a deconstructive act in the sense that it demands a re-writing of history from the perspective of previously colonized peoples [see chapter two].

The second issue is the notion of the "barroco-indiano" with which Fernández associates our cultures. Fernández follows the Uruguayan theorist Alberto Methol

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<sup>151</sup> FERNANDEZ COX, Cristián, "Modernidad Apropiada," in ARANGO, Silvia, *Modernidad y*

Ferre in associating the origin and nature of Latin America cultures with the Baroque.<sup>152</sup> Fernández maintains, following Methol, that our cultures continue to reflect the ethos of baroque European society from which they derive. This theoretical stand appears to be common amongst Latin American architectural theorists. Sandra Vivanco, for example, uses the notion of the Baroque as a critical lens in order to explore Latin American processes of transculturation. As Vivanco says, "the Baroque in all its conflictive reception and re-interpretation, is pertinent today more as an attitude than as a style. In fact, in its interdisciplinary and multi-cultural condition, the Baroque offers a post-modern avenue of inquiry into Latin American modern architectural production."<sup>153</sup> However, if Fernández sees the Baroque more as an avenue to study the labyrinthine development of Latin American histories in a way similar to Deleuze, then further theorization is necessary. As analyzed in chapter one, Angel Rama's *The Lettered City* departs from the same assumption, but his understanding of the notion of the baroque as the basis upon which Latin American cultures developed is more rigorous. It is therefore not the use of the notion of the Baroque that is problematic in Fernández, but the lack of theoretical elaboration. In sum, Fernández's loose understanding of basic theoretical issues, and the insufficient development of others, especially those outside architecture, removes theoretical validity and political impact from his notion of an appropriated modernity. Consequently, his theoretical work provides little support for his architectural analysis.

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*Postmodernidad en América Latina: Estado del Debate*, Bogotá, Escala, 1991 P 18

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. pp 15 - 16

<sup>153</sup> VIVANCO, Sandra, "Trope of the Tropics — the Baroque in Latin American Modern Architecture," in HERNANDEZ, Felipe, MILLINGTON, Mark, BORDEN, Iain, editors, *Transcultural Architecture in Latin America*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, expected date of publication: March 2003



#### 4.2.1.2 The Process of Appropriation in Fernández's Discourse.

It is clear that Fernández attempts to develop a methodology in order to *appropriate modernity* in Latin America, yet he does this merely within an architectural field. It is therefore clear that the notion of appropriation would deserve particular attention. As already analyzed, Fernández's premise is that a critical process of *appropriation* is necessary if the Euro-American modernist project is to respond to the complex reality of Latin American cultures. However, the meaning of the term "appropriation" appears to be ambiguous in his discourse. Appropriation is given a triple meaning:

- a. "Apropiada en cuanto adecuada."
- b. "Apropiada en cuanto hecha propia."
- c. "Apropiada en cuanto propia."

The first meaning implies the process of adaptation. In other words, it is the process of converting or transforming something that is inadequate into something adequate. The second implies the process of turning what belongs to the other into one's own. This would imply the adoption of a critical position so as to carry out a critical selection of what one appropriates. As Fernández puts it:

a condición precisamente de que hagamos una discriminación previa a partir de un *digestor* crítico de nuestra identidad, y lo que con-venga a nuestra realidad, sepamos adaptarlo e incorporarlo armónicamente a ella, esto es, apropiarlo en el sentido de hacerlo propio.<sup>154</sup>

[Precisely, under the condition that we perform a selection based upon a critical *digestor* of our own identity, would we be able to adapt and incorporate harmoniously those elements that are convenient. To appropriate in the sense of make them ours [My translation].

If the second meaning implies the process of turning something into one's own, then, the third meaning focuses on the sense of ownership over the product that results

after the previous two processes. Although Fernández never mentions the work of the Brazilian *Antropofagia* movement, there are various clear similarities. On the one hand, Fernández uses the digestive analogy, digestion as a critical process. It was explained in chapter two how the idea of devouring implicit in the notion "antropofagia" implies the selection of what one eats and the subsequent process of digestion that would then allow for the production of new cultural elements. This process was understood as political in the sense that it unsettles the primacy and authority of taxonomically produced identities and allows for the creation of more dynamic identities that are both different and differential.

So far, Fernández's theoretical model appears to be applicable to Latin American architectures. So, why does Fernández want to call it *appropriated modernity* instead of *appropriated architecture*? He himself elaborates on this question and is keen to maintain that the former option is theoretically more adequate than the latter. However, his explanation is not entirely satisfactory. Fernández claims that the reasons for calling his thesis an "Appropriated Modernity" obey what he calls "historical realism." He says:

Es posible que en un poblado cualquiera de cualquier lugar de sudamérica, hace treinta, veinte, o diez años atrás, una determinada arquitectura tradicional sea perfectamente apropiada. Pero ¿qué sucede cuando llega repentinamente, por ejemplo, una agroindustrialización intensiva, y en pocos años, llega nueva gente, surgen necesidades habitacionales de escalas mucho mayores; es decir, cuando llega la modernidad? ¿Será capaz esa tipología tradicional de satisfacer los nuevos requerimientos? ¿esa tipología de casa que se construía en dos o tres años con los artesanos del lugar, será apropiada cuando hay que construir cien casas en pocos meses? Es evidente que estos cambios cuantitativos y de velocidad ya de por sí requieren cambios arquitectónicos cualitativos. Y este es el advenimiento ineluctable de la modernidad —el desafío arquitectónico principal que afrontamos de hecho. Por eso nos parece más ajustado el término de modernidad apropiada en arquitectura, que no nos permite evadirnos en la nostalgia, sino que nos enfrenta cruda y

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<sup>154</sup> Op. Cit. p 20



verázmente, con nuestra vocación de servicio objetivo y simbólico, de nuestro aquí y ahora.<sup>155</sup>

[It is possible that in a random town somewhere in South America, thirty, twenty, or ten years ago, there was a traditional architecture perfectly appropriate. But what happens when all of the sudden an intensive agricultural industrialization arrives, and, in a few years, new people arrive and there is a need for housing at a larger scale? In other words, what happens when modernity arrives? Could a traditional house type satisfy the new requirements? Could this type of house built over the years by local artisans be used when it is necessary to build one hundred houses in a few months? It is evident that this quantitative changes, as well as changes in the speed of production, require qualitative architectural changes. And this is the ineluctable advent of modernism —the main architectural challenge that we in fact face. That is why we prefer the term appropriated modernity in architecture, which does not allow us to feel nostalgic, but faces us, crudely and veritably, with our vocation of objective and symbolic service, here and now [My translation].

It is clear that Fernández is concerned with the changes generated by the arrival of new conditions of industrial production resulting from processes of socioeconomic modernization. That is, the migration of rural peoples into centers of industrial production and the consequent need to locate them in comfortable accommodation. He sees traditional architectures as ill-equipped to deal with such pressures and demands. For this reason, he decides that architectural modernity is a description more closely tied to sociopolitical conditions than appropriated architecture. However, Fernández's judgement is only concerned with the inability of traditional modes of architectural productivity to respond to changing circumstances, but he does not address the question of whether modern mass-produced architecture, which he seems to welcome enthusiastically, satisfies equally the needs of every sector of the Latin American societies.

It has always been clear to everyone —architect and non-architect— that new methods of architectural production have to be developed, as well as new construction technologies, in order to respond to the demands of industrialization.

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p 21

What needs to be addressed is why such modes of production and technologies implicitly suggest the elimination of cultural difference. Is such an homogenizing approach not contradictory especially after Fernández has appealed to our vocation of objective and symbolic service? I therefore agree with Fernández that the arrival of a certain degree of industrialization in Latin America generates changes in the modes of architectural production, but I disagree that those changes suggest sociocultural homogenization.

I also disagree with Fernández in that the term "appropriated modernity" fits the aim of his thesis. I believe that the title "appropriated architecture" matches better the scope of his inquiry and its theoretical scope. Following Fernández's own line of argumentation, an appropriated architecture implies that architectural forms, technologies, and methods of production which originated in other sociocultural contexts have to be adapted in order to respond to the realities of diverse Latin American sociocultural groups. In this way, architecture would respond to the exigencies posed by industrialization and modernization, but the debate would be focused on the question of how new architectures respond to the diversity of peoples who will inhabit them. For this reason, the notion of appropriation deserves the greatest attention. Whether specified as the appropriation of modernity or of architecture, the question remains as to what exactly Fernández means by appropriation.

Fernández maintains that some Latin American architects have been able to *transform* different aspects of modern Euro-American architectures in order to respond to the conditions of our cities and our people. Through this process, Fernández continues, they have created a "new architectural order," which suggests that their work is different from the architectures that inform them. However, the questions of what exactly is appropriated and how the process of *appropriation*



works, which are the most suggestive aspects of Fernández's notion of an appropriated modernity/architecture because they highlight the importance of the process and place it above the finished architectural object itself, is never critically explained. I suggest, at this stage, that a theory of translation would support Fernández's notion of appropriation, and would also help introduce both a major critical capacity and political agency. As became clear in chapter two, cultural translation is a process that stresses the need for the creation of a cultural politics of difference in order to undertake the negotiations not only between the various groups that exist in Latin America itself but also between Latin American cultures and the centers. It would also help eliminate systems of dependency that validate our architectures only by association with central architectural models. And finally, it would become essential in the construction of more dynamic identities that challenge the linear taxonomy with which Latin American architectures have always been approached. It is therefore my contention, that Fernández's theory fails because:

- A. It is reductive. His engagement with issues outside architecture is timid and lacking in critical incisiveness.
- B. The process of appropriation that defines his thesis is never satisfactorily theorized. He does not take into consideration the unequal distribution of power between the centers and the peripheries, nor does he ever specify how cultural and architectural elements can be appropriated.

In sum, Fernández detects an important problematic and proposes an interesting theoretical strategy of cultural reversal with extensive applicability within architecture. However, he does not develop his thesis in order to cover the whole range of architectural practices that exist in Latin America. Fernández needs clearly to establish whether architects ought to appropriate industrialized methods and

techniques of production in order to respond to the arrival of modernization, or whether it is a certain spatiality, form, language, image or discourse what needs to be appropriated. Fernández chooses the work of some paradigmatic architects as an example of successfully appropriated architecture. However, their body of work is very limited compared to the totality of architectural production in the whole continent. Their projects have mainly been aimed at and commissioned by the dominant classes. Consequently, these examples cannot be taken to represent the full range of Latin American architectural practices. If a new, specifically Latin American, architectural order is to be considered, then it would have to include the totality of architectural production, even if it does not comply with the parameters of modern Euro-American architecture or with hegemonic narratives created by Latin American architects like Fernández himself.

I believe that the use of translation theory, as well as a more serious engagement with issues outside the purely architectural field, would help take further Fernández's notion of appropriation. This might also imply interdisciplinary collaboration between Fernández, as an architect, and professionals in other areas. Otherwise, his thesis would not only remain theoretically reductive and architecturally ineffective, but ultimately it would help reconstitute the authority of Western hegemonic discourses. In other words, faulty or uncritical discourses about Latin American architectures might also be seen as part of our inability properly to theorize ourselves, thereby returning authority to central discourses.

#### **4.2.2 An-Other Latin American Architecture.**

During the last twenty years, the Chilean architect Enrique Browne has elaborated extensively on questions regarding the identity of Latin American architectures and



their differential character. He has also been a regular participant in the SAL, and has produced one of the most comprehensive theses about the characteristics of what he calls *An-Other Latin American Architecture*, which is also the title of one of his books. Browne's analytical method is very effective and clear. Unlike other theorists, he does not engage primarily with questions of modernism and modernization, notions that are important for him although he sensibly prefers to focus specifically on questions of architecture. Browne tends to avoid using the term modernity as such, and replaces it with the neutral notion "contemporary." His critique of the modernization of Latin America is very modest. He argues with other theorists that modernism and modernization have failed to satisfy the realities of Latin American societies, and, therefore, that different sociocultural and political alternatives need to be found. He does not participate in the search for such alternatives at a broader cultural level, nor does he himself adhere to any particular dogmatic position. Nonetheless, in terms of architecture, Browne does rely heavily on the regionalist agenda. He follows faithfully the thesis of critical regionalism devised by Kenneth Frampton, and also the ideas of various phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger and Christian Norberg-Schulz.

The premise underlying Browne's thesis is that contemporary Latin American architectures have developed within a permanent tension between the *Zeit-Geist* and the *Genius Loci*.<sup>156</sup> This is an acceptable and valid theoretical position that served Browne as a basis for an interesting and coherent thesis. However, the rapid development of cultural and architectural theory —and also the growth of interdisciplinary collaboration— during the eighties and nineties provides us with the tools to question Browne's theoretical point of departure and perhaps to supplement the course of his ideas in order to prevent their obsolescence. At the end of this

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<sup>156</sup> See: BROWNE, Enrique, *Otra Arquitectura en America Latina*, Naucalpan - México, Gustavo Gili, 1988 p 11

section, I aim to have shown that the notion of hybridization, as presented in chapter three, would open doors for the continued development of Browne's ideas.

Browne also argues along with other cultural and architectural theorists that the history of Latin America has been written following European models. His argument is that such models could not explain or adjust themselves to the complex, non-linear and multiple historicity of Latin America. Through this lens, Latin American architectures have been seen only as marginal variants of central architectures.<sup>157</sup> As Browne puts it:

La excentricidad de las categorías de análisis para estudiar la arquitectura latinoamericana es inadecuada. No explica el entrelazo de influencias propias y ajenas con que dicha arquitectura está tensionada. Tampoco los desarrollos sincrónicos que se producen, tan distintos a la aparente linealidad europea. Tampoco la frecuente superposición de la arquitectura epocal sobre las coyunturas sociopolíticas.<sup>158</sup>

[The eccentricity of the analytical categories used to study Latin American architecture is inadequate. It does not explain the intertwining of influences, internal and external, that tensely inform such architecture. Neither does it explain the synchronic developments that are produced within it, and which are very dissimilar to the apparent European historical linearity. It does not explain the frequent superimposition of the architectures of different epochs over successive sociopolitical junctures. My translation.]

It becomes clear that, for Browne, European historical models do not satisfy the reality of Latin American historicity. For him, it is imperative that new historical categories be created accurately to study the conditions of contemporary Latin American architectures. His very notion of an Other architecture would be part of such an alternative history as it defies the authority of any univocal central historicity. However, since Browne is not a historian nor a full-time academic —Browne's main activity is his architectural practice— he does not attempt to create new historical

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p 11

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. p 11



categories. Perhaps, he implicitly calls for other specialists to carry out this task. Browne is only interested in examining how the complex dialogue that heterogeneous Latin American cultures maintain with central cultures, as well as with other peripheries, manifests itself within architecture.

At the beginning of his book, Enrique Browne claims that Latin America is not an essence but a history. This is important because, right from the outset, he reveals his understanding of Latin America as a heterogeneous and fragmented entity. He maintains that:

En todo caso, las fuentes culturales que han hecho el mundo latinoamericano nunca han llegado a fundirse en una unidad completa y estable. Se han mezclado en todas las formas imaginables en grado y forma variables según el tiempo y la situación. Las culturas se han combinado desde el lenguaje hasta la alimentación, del folclore a la creación artística. No escapa ni siquiera la religión, ya que el catolicismo del Nuevo Mundo nunca ha sido un mero trasplante del español. En las ceremonias y en la superstición popular se tiñó de la herencia precolombina y africana. De todo esto nace el principal rasgo vital de la región, su mestizaje cultural.<sup>159</sup>

[In any case, the elements that gave rise to the Latin American world never did fuse in a complete and stable unit. There have been all kinds of mixtures whose form varies according to time and other situations. Cultures have combined from languages to food, from folklore to artistic creation. Not even religion has escaped this situation since the New World's Catholicism was never a mere transplant from the Spanish. Different ceremonies and superstitions are the heritage pre-Columbian and African practices. The main vital characteristic of the whole region, the cultural "mestizaje", is a result of all this. My translation]

Thus, Browne recognizes the heterogeneity of Latin American cultures, and the coexistence of multiple cultures within the same geographical space. This approach to Latin American cultures coincides with our understanding of the notion of hybridization [see chapter three]. Unfortunately, Browne does not follow this argument further so as to link his view with architectural practices in order to propose an architecture, or urbanism, that responds to such heterogeneity. It seems that

these kinds of suggestive arguments are never taken into the realm of architectural design, or as a tool of urban analysis. In his book, Browne swiftly moves on to produce a historical and linear account of the different architectural movements that have occurred in Latin America. The structure of his analysis leads teleologically to a few architects whose work is presented as the epitome of his notion of other architecture. The work of these architects —once more Luis Barragán, Eladio Dieste, and Rogelio Salmona— is therefore sublimated and transformed into an architectural hegemony. It would be interesting to know if there are other kinds of architectures that fit Browne's notion of *other architecture*, especially after his highlighting of the heterogeneous character of Latin American cultures. Such heterogeneity manifests itself through the often spontaneous urbanism of our fragmented cities, or in the anonymous architecture of the working and middle classes, as well as in the architecture of the "invasiones" and favelas. Browne recognizes the heterogeneity of Latin American cultures, that is, the coexistence of multiple cultures that share the same geographical space, yet the ultimate aim of his theoretical project appears to be the exaltation of a specific kind of architecture, which is informed by Euro-American modernist discourses. Thus, the bifurcation between theoretical work and architectural analysis is made clear. It would therefore be necessary to find avenues to reconcile these two areas in order to find architectural responses to the outcome of theoretical research.

#### **4.2.2.1 Spirit of Place and Spirit of Time.**

In theorizing the relation between Latin America and the centers, Browne assumes a traditional theoretical posture, one that is familiar to most Latin American architects: he subscribes to the thesis of critical regionalism. Critical regionalism, in this case, is

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. p 9



approached mainly through the work of Kenneth Frampton, although Browne also engages with the theories of the sociologist Alfred Weber and the philosopher Hegel, as well as with the work of phenomenologists such as Hiedegger and Norberg-Schulz. As mentioned above, Browne maintains that the convoluted nature of Latin American architectures derives from the fact that they evolve in the tension between the spirit of the time and the spirit of place. The former, *Zeit-Geist*, is freely interpreted, to use Browne's own words<sup>160</sup>, from the work of both Hegel and Weber. According to Browne's free interpretation, the spirit of the time corresponds to the rational and objective knowledge characteristic of modern thought and its universalizing agenda. It would be, something above the individual person, nation or culture, a kind of force that determines everybody's understanding of the world.

Es por las razones anteriores que en este ensayo asimilaré el concepto de "espíritu de la época" a sus aspectos civilizatorios, reconociendo su importancia como proceso unitario que penetra el destino de la humanidad y, con su ritmo propio de desarrollo, empapa los cuerpos históricos de todas partes y de todos los tiempos.<sup>161</sup>

[It is for this reason, that in this essay I will associate the "spirit of time" to its civilizing aspects, acknowledging its importance as a unitary process that penetrates the destiny of humanity, and, with its own rhythm of development, drench the historical bodies of all parts and times. My translation.]

It would then be my free interpretation of Browne's own (free) definition of the spirit of the time that the whole problematic of modernity, modernism and modernization is here replaced by the concept of the *Zeit-Geist*. That is, the spirit of our time is that of modernity and modernization. Perhaps this interpretation allows Browne to categorize, in Aristotelian terms, the question of modernism and modernization as something that comes from outside, or above, and is therefore unavoidable. Such

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<sup>160</sup> As Browne himself puts it: "De cualquier modo, no tengo la ambición de discutir los diversos vaivenes y acepciones filosóficas de la noción de 'espíritu de la época,' ni tampoco aquellos de 'espíritu del lugar.' Mi propósito aquí es mucho más modesto: aclarar que entenderé en este ensayo por ambos conceptos. Para lo cual me apoyo en diferentes fuentes que interpreto libremente." Ibid. p 12

interpretation does simplify the problem, but leaves us with the question of whether it is a genuine theoretical assumption. It appears as if by means of reducing the problem to a given category, Browne avoids theoretical debate in order to carry out only a traditional formal analysis of Latin American buildings and their visual/linguistic relation to those in the centers.

On the other hand, there is the Genius Loci. Browne's definition of the Genius Loci follows teleologically the same path followed by Kenneth Frampton, from Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefebvre, with citations from Heidegger, Ricoeur, and Goethe. According to Browne, locality determines the way everybody sees and understands the world. Therefore, cultures and societies are rooted in the soil, and so are we. He emphatically denies that advanced transportation and communications systems can change our sense of regional dependency, "it is an illusion,"<sup>162</sup> he says. Heavily influenced by Heidegger's essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, Browne affirms that:

La identidad de los hombres presupone la identificación con el lugar y el sentimiento de pertenencia y orientación en él. Ya que el hombre habita, su mundo deviene un "interior," un lugar que adquiere un carácter particular o espíritu. Este solo puede ser descrito empíricamente y no por conceptos analíticos o científicos.<sup>163</sup>

[The identity of men presupposes identification with place, and the feeling of belonging and orientation in it. Because man inhabits a place that acquires a particular character or spirit, his/her world develops an interior dimension. Such world can only be described empirically and not by means of analytical or scientific concepts. My translation.]

The values of the locality that Browne mentions in his definition are particularly suspect today. Advanced mass communications technologies, tourism, migration, and diaspora among other things, are phenomena that imply a fundamental shift in the way we relate to the world. The work of contemporary philosophers and thinkers

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. p 12

<sup>162</sup> Ibid. p 13

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. p 13



such as Fredric Jameson, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jean Braudrillard, to mention only a few, place under scrutiny the primacy of concepts such as Genius Loci. In fact, one wonders whether in today's world such a concept retains any authority. In my opinion, the whole question about the spirit of place is, in Browne, only a theoretical detour to validate the importance of looking at the geographic and climatic conditions of the different regions of Latin America. In other words, it is an unnecessary distraction designed to introduce an issue as basic and old as the need for analyzing and understanding the site, either urban or rural, before carrying out an architectural intervention. I believe that Browne's thesis in the *An-Other Latin American Architecture* is sufficiently strong without his engagement with regionalism and phenomenology. Although not clearly and directly specified in his book, it appears to the reader that the main purpose of Browne's thesis is to demonstrate that "some" contemporary Latin American architectures have completely different values from European and North American ones. That is because these architectures respond better to the complex cultural conditions of Latin American peoples.

I would like to add here that, using the theoretical tools provided throughout this thesis, Browne's argument could be taken further so as to find other values inherent in these other architectures. The most important one could perhaps be the fact that, by being different, these new Latin American architectures defy the authority of central architectures bringing to the fore the need to develop appropriate theoretical models to study and understand them properly. However, as pointed out above, Browne refers only to a few architectures and not all. In order to endow his thesis with a political value, it is necessary to specify exactly the context within which his case studies work so well: the middle and higher social classes of Latin American societies. Other Latin American theorists may feel afraid of making this kind of specification because it is believed that in so doing Browne's work loses validity, or universality. It is my contention that the effect of specifying social, cultural and

economic contexts with precision is the opposite: theory gains political value and its practical possibilities increase. Political specificity opens doors for further theoretical work on those architectural practices that have been left out in existing theses.

Nonetheless, Browne's argument presents a few shortcomings. One of the most notable is that in order to establish the main characteristics of the other Latin American architecture, Browne brings into the discussion the work of three architects: the Mexican Luis Barragán, the Uruguayan Eladio Dieste, and the Colombian Rogelio Salmona. But Browne has been particularly selective in choosing his case studies. Chronologically, the work of these three architects covers most of the twentieth century as well as the majority of the geographical territory of Latin America. They all talk about the importance of analyzing and understanding the conditions of place, and all make use of low technologies and local materials. This exclusive selection reveals an obvious intentionality that casts doubts on the validity of his general thesis. Quite clearly, Browne is attempting to write a Latin American version of Kenneth Frampton's *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*. Hence, Browne makes the same mistake: the careful selection of paradigmatic buildings and architects leaves us with only a partial view of the Latin American architectural practices that renders his theory inadequate to account for the architecture of the whole continent. Here, Browne suffers from the same problems as many other architectural theorists not only in Latin America, but also in other contexts. That is, the construction of an architectural history and its critical analysis only through the selection of paradigmatic buildings and architects which implies an enormous generalization and also the homogenization of the cultural field. Such a generalization does not account for the multiplicity and heterogeneity that lie at the base of his argument. The fact that most of the case studies presented in his book are private houses and/or institutional buildings, for example, implies that these architectures might not respond to the conditions of poverty, unemployment, and lack



of education particular to the minorities<sup>164</sup> and the less dominant members of Latin American societies who are the numerical majorities.

#### **4.2.2.2 "Other" Architecture.**

The questions of otherness, of being Other, or of existing as the Other are part of a complex debate that is opened under the title of *An-Other Latin American Architecture*. Browne deliberately talks about "another" architecture instead of "the other" architecture, and uses English language to explain his intention as the difference between "other" and "another" does not exist in Spanish language. This is important because it serves to highlight the existence of a number of Latin American architectures, as opposed to just "the other," within a system that includes many more. As Browne himself suggests "the name remains open," or, it could be argued, might not even be necessary. However, what appears to be a clever move in Browne's thesis remains unresolved because he assumes "otherness" as a monological notion. The work carried out in other disciplines such as cultural theory, gender studies and postcolonial discourse demonstrates that "otherness" is a complex concept that requires careful elaboration, and which has manifold political implicit connotations.

Browne's point of departure is the affirmation that there exist Other Latin American architectures, which derive from the complex interaction of multiple historical experiences and cultural elements that never really synthesize. He maintains that these architectures "emerge at the cultural interstices left vacant by the hegemonic

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<sup>164</sup> Minorities, as explained in chapter one, imply sections of the society that do not have easy access to the institutions of power, so that in number the minorities exceed the so called majorities.

centers,"<sup>165</sup> and are therefore different and new. Consequently, the word "other" rightly serves to highlight difference; yet difference in a positive sense, as a quality. However, Browne seems unable to specify why exactly the architectures he refers to are different, or where exactly their differential characteristics can be found. In fact, he seems to highlight sameness rather than difference in the sense that what he celebrates is the compliance of certain buildings produced in Latin America with Euro-American architectural models. The concept of otherness is never thoroughly theorized, nor is it given a critical value within the context of the relationship between Latin America and the centers. Otherness is therefore taken in its literal sense: as an indefinite adjective that suggests difference and/or distinction. The theoretical tools provided in this thesis help dig out the main aspect of Browne's argument, which appears to be implicit in his own writing: it is the subversive capacity inherent in the notion of otherness. In other words, due to their differential nature, these *other* Latin American architectures challenge the authority of architectures that have traditionally been considered superior. Consequently, Latin American architectures can no longer be considered marginal "variants" of the architectures of the centers.

Further on in Browne's argument, otherness appears to be accidental. He says:

Si bien las mezclas étnicas y la dependencia de América Latina son reales, su permeabilidad cultural no la convierte en un mero receptáculo de influencias aluvionales. Si se abandona una visión autocompasiva, habría que reconocer la existencia de muchos componentes activos. Las innovaciones no parten de cero: son recombinaciones inéditas de elementos preexistentes. Por lo mismo, en muchos casos, las mezclas y la receptibilidad latinoamericanas han sido favorables para el logro de productos culturales inéditos, *cuando los elementos de reelaboración han sido compatibles entre sí.*<sup>166</sup> [my italics]

[If it is true that ethnic mixtures and dependency are real in Latin America, its permeability does not make it a mere receptacle of influences. If we abandon a sympathetic view to ourselves, it would be

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid. p 108

<sup>166</sup> See: BROWNE, Enrique, *Otra Arquitectura en America Latina*, Naucalpan - México, Gustavo Gili, 1988 p 9



necessary to acknowledge the existence of many active components. Innovation does not depart from zero: on the contrary, they are unedited re-combinations of preexisting elements. For this reason, in many cases, Latin American mixtures and its receptibility have been favorable in order to achieve our own cultural products, when the re-combined elements have been compatible between themselves. My translation]

It is clear from the above that not every building belongs to this, now elitist, category of architectural otherness. It is only when the "mixed" elements have been compatible that cultural products achieve the status of being Latin American. The question remains unanswered so as to whether, in those successful cases, architects have followed a specific process, or used a particular method, that allows them to achieve otherness. Or, whether compatibility depends on a set of rules imposed by dominant architectural narratives.

Enrique Browne's thesis about *An-Other Latin American Architecture* is an extensive analysis of the situation of contemporary Latin American architectural practices. However, the theoretical tools that he uses in his analysis do not fully satisfy the complexity of his endeavor. Browne criticizes the use of hegemonic historical and theoretical models as being inadequate to deal with the cultural characteristics of Latin America yet he calls on models from outside Latin America without adapting or translating them so as to respond to the specificities of our cultures. For example, he appeals to critical regionalism in order to explore a phenomenon that goes beyond the theoretical limits of that particular thesis, and then he criticizes it for being inadequate although he finds himself at a loss to provide an alternative theoretical model. Additionally, there is the problem of insufficient theorization of the notion of otherness. From the title of his book, it is clear that his thesis is based upon such a concept. Yet, Browne does not engage with any of the political implications of this notion, which would add depth to his argument. For this reason, I want to suggest that the subversive and deconstructive standpoint of postcolonial theory would be

helpful to develop further Browne's view of another Latin American architecture(s). The notion of hybridization as used within postcolonial theory would provide Browne's work with the necessary dynamism and theoretical elasticity to deal with the new forms of culture, power displacement and systems of dependency that affect our continent. It would also connect architectural debates with larger and deeper cultural debates and would introduce political agency, which is lacking within Latin American architectural circles.

#### **4.2.3 A Divergent Architecture.**

The Argentine architect and theorist Marina Waisman (1946 - 1997) dedicated all her professional career to the study of the Latin American architectures. From the early 1960's, when she was a member of the editorial staff of the magazine *Summa*, Waisman started to look for alternative ways to theorize Latin American architectures. As in the previous cases, Waisman maintains that Latin American architectures have always been analyzed through hegemonic theoretical and historical models that are inadequate to respond to the complexity of Latin America. For this reason, she attempts to engage with broader cultural issues as well as with the work of various European contemporary thinkers like Gianni Vattimo, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari and Jacques Derrida, as well as various Latin American theorists, in order to carry out an intertextual reading of their work. Thus, Waisman tries to introduce fresh ideas into emergent Latin American architectural debates and to depart from traditional theoretical positions. It is unfortunate that Waisman did not have the opportunity to develop her ideas further. Yet it would be possible to affirm that, although unfinished, her ideas on a *Divergent Architecture* have become the basis for the most suggestive architectural theory so far produced in Latin America.



#### 4.2.3.1 Critical Background.

Waisman constantly criticized the work of other Latin American architects like Cristián Fernández Cox and Enrique Browne. She maintained that, while they perceive the current inadequacies of architectural theory and criticism in Latin America, they do not manage to produce effective theoretical alternatives. In reference to Browne's theory of the fusion between the spirit of time and the spirit of place, for example, Waisman says that both categories are extremely ambiguous so that Browne's work never reaches a satisfactory level of theoretical accuracy. She says:

Me parece pues que el concepto de tiempo se presenta como una categoría demasiado ambigua, casi inasible, como para que, sin un análisis mas profundo, podamos aceptarlo como parámetro para la caracterización que estamos buscando.<sup>167</sup>

[I therefore believe that the concept of time is presented as a very ambiguous category, almost intangible. For this reason, we cannot accept it as the parameter we are looking for without a more in-depth analysis. My translation]

Additionally, Waisman maintains that Browne's concept of place remains vague and therefore requires major precision. As concluded in the previous section, Waisman also believes that Browne needs to carry out a more comprehensive analysis and, perhaps, engage with issues outside architecture before his theoretical project can be thoroughly accepted. Thus, his notion of fusion between the spirits of time and place proves not to be sufficient to satisfy the politics of otherness that he proposes in the title of his thesis. Not only does Browne need to carry out further elaboration, as Waisman thoughtfully suggests, but he also needs to make use of more effective theoretical tools.

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<sup>167</sup> WAISMAN, Marina, "Un Proyecto de Modernidad," in ARANGO, Silvia, *Modernidad y Postmodernidad en America Latina: Estado del Debate*, Bogotá, Escala, 1991 p 90

Likewise, Waisman criticizes Cristián Fernández's theory of an appropriated modernity. She finds Fernández's notion of appropriation, and the implicit process of a critical selection of cultural and architectural elements that would help produce an architecture that responds better to Latin American cultures, an interesting notion. Considering that both propose to carry out a complete reevaluation of the notion of modernity, it is not surprising that Waisman celebrates Fernández's theoretical posture. I believe this is a rather fruitless debate not only because it appears to be an enormous project, but also because it is unnecessary. If the point is to demonstrate the existence of an alternative architecture that comes about after a critical process of appropriation so that it challenges the authority of central hegemonic architectures and architectural discourses then a new subversive theoretical strategy is necessary to analyze such architecture. The process of appropriation is more important than the appropriated result because it will allow the continued production of renewed architectures with political specificity. Unfortunately, the process of appropriation is never sufficiently theorized, only the results. Waisman sees the theoretical work of both Fernández and Browne as being too static because their subject matter is the building as a finished product. It would be necessary to go beyond the materiality of the building and carefully study the whole series of circumstances that, prior to the realization of the building, determine its sociocultural validity. Otherwise, it would only be an attempt to validate buildings through theory, a practice that has already proven to be inadequate within architectural theory.

Unlike Fernández and Browne, Waisman openly welcomes the arrival of post-structuralist ideas and postmodern discourse.

Si hay algo netamente positivo que ha derivado de la crítica al Modernismo producida por el pensamiento posmoderno es el derrumbe de los modelos hegemónicos, el reconocimiento de las diferencias: la diferencia como ya no como distinción respecto a algo



canónico, sino como una cualidad en si (Derrida), como un modo de reconocerse a si mismo.<sup>168</sup>

[If there is anything totally positive that emerges from the critique to modernism that has been produced by postmodern thought is the demolition of hegemonic models and the recognition of differences. difference not as a distinction against the canon, but as a quality in itself (Derrida). As a way to recognize oneself. My Translation]

It becomes clear that Waisman finds postmodern theories helpful to develop new theoretical models with which to explore and understand contemporary architecture in Latin America. Nonetheless, she maintains that the confinement of postmodern thought to the fields of theory and criticism makes it difficult for Latin American architects to understand the practical opportunities that it brings about. Waisman believes that the means by which architectural ideas travel across cultural sites today dislocate their content and affect the way they are perceived by architects.

Living in a world that relies mainly on visual communication, it is not easy to penetrate beyond the images offered by the ingenuity of architectural photographers and high-quality architectural publications. It is only by discerning the real meaning of the messages coming from the First World and submitting them to profound analysis that they can be useful to local architects.<sup>169</sup>

Waisman criticizes the facile and uncritical appropriation of images so common in architectural practices in Latin America and also in other contexts. However, she suggests that the misappropriation of empty images taken from international architectural magazines has a much more damaging effect in contexts whose cultures are in a process of formation, as in the case of Latin America. The building for Banco de Crédito del Perú, recently designed by the American architectural practice Arquitectonica, is in her view a clear example. Although this building has been presented in international architectural magazines as an example of cutting-edge architectural aesthetics, within its real context it serves only to highlight the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p 92

poverty and precarious standards of life of people in certain areas of Lima, not so far from where the building is located. In this case a dominant architectural aesthetics has been uncritically introduced into a Latin American context, but the effect has been contradictory. As in the case of Brasilia, the naïve utopianism with which central architectures are appropriated reinforces the difference between the centers and the peripheries and is complicit with Euro-American strategies of cultural domination. In the case of the Banco de Crédito del Perú, the building had a twofold effect: on the one hand, it succeeded in introducing the institution into international architectural circles —which is beneficial for the bank—; on the other hand, it revealed the fragmented and tense coexistence of different groups in Perú's society. As Waisman maintains in the previous quotation, the only way in which the messages that arrive from the centers can respond to our sociocultural realities is if they are critically translated.

Once again, the notion of translation becomes central to our discussion. This time, Waisman makes direct reference to the process of translation itself:

At the present time, the weight of international tendencies is exerted not only upon design but also on architectural thinking, by means of the transmission of theories. In this field, like in those directly concerned with design matters, *translating* ideas from one world to another is not a simple operation. [My Italics] <sup>170</sup>

It becomes clear that the process of translation of theories across cultural sites is, for Waisman, an important issue and not a simple operation. The importance and complexity of architectural translation lies here on the fact that Waisman highlights the importance of architectural thinking as a mode of practicing architecture. In other words, architectural translation is not only about the transmission and appropriation of forms, images, materials, techniques and the like, but also about ideas and

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<sup>169</sup> QUANTRILL, Malcolm, *Latin American Architecture: Six Voices*, Austin, Texas A&M University press, 2000 p 15



theories which need to be carefully examined, scrutinized, and reproduced. For translation implies a critical process of transmission and relocation with transcendental political connotations.

The influence of post-structuralist ideas and postmodern thought is clear in her introduction for the book *Latin American Architectures: Six Voices*, edited by Malcolm Quantrill in collaboration with Kenneth Frampton and others. Waisman maintains that despite the apparent unity of Latin America's cultures, it is in fact a complex ensemble of multiple differences. There are differences across the nations and the peoples of the nations, and differences between the cultures of Latin America and the cultures of the centers, and even between Latin America as part of the so-called Third World and other nations branded as part of the same category. Therefore she suggests, following Derrida, that difference is abstractly a quality in itself and objectively a characteristic of the Latin American cultures. However, the influence of post-structuralist theory in Waisman is nowhere clearer than in her use of the notion of symbiosis.

#### **4.2.3.2 The Notion of Symbiosis.**

Another interesting facet of Waisman's approach is the use of the term "symbiosis." She prefers this term to others such as mixture, fusion, synthesis, or syncretism. Symbiosis is an appropriate term because it semantically means "mutual dependence" and does not imply an end to the implicit interactive process. On the contrary, symbiosis suggests that interdependence is a continuous process. Thus, Waisman maintains that from the symbiosis of diametrically dissimilar elements there results an *original* architecture that responds more appropriately to the

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p 14

heterogeneous sociocultural conditions of Latin America.<sup>171</sup> Note the use of the term *original* in this context. Waisman calls original an architecture that results from the symbiosis of dissimilar elements, hence she suggests that despite the existence of predecessors or previous originals, what appears is a new original. This new original will therefore challenge the authority of Euro-American hegemonic architectures traditionally considered as *the* originals. Her definition of a divergent architecture is more eloquent in this respect:

I prefer to talk instead about an architecture of divergence, as I think the architects referred to are exploring ways of making architectures that differ from those usually followed in developed countries. To resist would mean to defend one's own old territory against the assaults of the outer world (that is, the postmodern system). To *diverge* is to *depart* from one's own familiar *territory* in search of new courses of action, leaving aside the pressures and the enchanted siren's songs of the postmodern architectural system.<sup>172</sup> [My Italics]

Waisman criticizes postmodern theoretical positions, such as critical regionalism for example, that suggest an attitude of radical resistance. Instead, she proposes the notion of divergence, as the opposite of resistance, which is based on a dynamic system of deterritorialization-reterritorialization that shares more with Deleuze than with Frampton [see chapter one]. She also maintains that to diverge is to depart from one's own familiar territory in search of alternative paths of becoming. This takes us back to chapter two where the notion of translation was explored in the light on Walter Benjamin's ideas. In Benjamin it was clear that the original would simply become a point of departure for the translation after which the translation would gain its own life. Then, following Derrida, it was argued that the translation would become the original thereby deleting the notion of original as a pure, unified and superior category. Although Waisman does not extensively elaborate on theories of translation, nor does she discuss Benjamin, she seems to work within a similar

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<sup>171</sup> HERNANDEZ, Felipe, "The Transcultural Phenomenon, and the Transculturation of Architecture," in the *Journal of Romance Studies*, Volume 2; Number 3, 2002 pp 1 - 14



framework. Translation, in Waisman, serves as a deconstructive strategy to level the ground on which transcultural —or transarchitectural, to be precise— relations take place, hence eliminating hierarchical structures of Euro-American domination. In this way, Waisman's notion of a divergent architecture is anti-essentialist and anti-hegemonic, and, therefore, heavily political. The notion of an architecture of divergence can be inscribed within the cultural politics of difference, which is central to the postcolonial agenda and which allows for negotiation between the different sociocultural and political positions that exist within our own cultural spaces and between Latin America and the metropolitan centers —a symbiosis. However, the term symbiosis is similar to the notion of hybridization. Both dismiss the finalizability implied in other terms like fusion, synthesis or syncretism, and suggest that elements interact but never really disappear in a mixture. Through permanent processes such as symbiosis or hybridization, elements may change, mutate, or alter themselves. As a permanent process, both notions imply constant renewal, and, therefore, a permanent state of newness and originality opposed to essentialist versions of cultural purity and originality in a univocal sense. In the context of this thesis, the notion of hybridization has been given preference over the term symbiosis. The reason lies mainly in the fact that hybridization has been largely theorized from various disciplines and is now taken as an adequate term to describe and to analyze conditions of transculturation in situations of inequality. What is more, as a notion used and developed in various contexts and disciplinary areas, the notion of hybridization has gained a subversive value that has never been thoroughly explored within the context of Latin American architecture.

It is extremely unfortunate that life did not give Marina Waisman the opportunity to develop further her ideas on a divergent architecture. After extensive research, I have come to the conclusion that, although her work is unfinished, Waisman has

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<sup>172</sup> Op. Cit. p 19

been the only theorist capable of producing a coherent architectural theory with sufficient political ingredients to satisfy the real needs of current Latin American architectural scholarship. She is the only theorist who really comes to grips with the notion of cultural reversal. Waisman does radically suggest that there is a series of Latin American architectures that emerge as originals and dismiss any claim for univocal and hegemonic cultural and architectural originality. A divergent architecture appears to be the tool to theorize such complex architecture. Taken in the right direction, the notion of a divergent architecture could also be seen as a tool for architectural design. Yet, this is a facet of her work that remains to be explored.

#### **4.3 Architectural Theory in Colombia.**

In this section, I will analyze the work of Ricardo Castro and Carlos Rueda, two Colombian architects who work on the notions of syncretism and hybridization respectively. Ricardo Castro, for his part, has developed an interesting theory based upon the notion of syncretism and has used it in order to analyze the *oeuvre* of the Colombian architect Rogelio Salmona<sup>173</sup>. Nonetheless, it appears that Castro relies heavily on the thesis of critical regionalism devised by Kenneth Frampton. Finally, I will analyze Carlos Rueda's ambitious work on the notion of hybridization. Rueda empirically appropriates the notion of hybridization in order to "describe" some Latin American buildings, but fails to engage with other aspects of architectural practices thereby diminishing the critical potential of his own discourse. Despite their interest in engaging with questions outside architecture, the work of Castro, and Rueda remains immersed within traditional architectural debates. I will therefore attempt to add a more political dimension that is currently absent from their work.

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<sup>173</sup> Rogelio Salmona was born in Paris, his mother was French and his father Spanish, yet Salmona has lived in Colombia since the early 1930's and has adopted Colombian nationality.



#### **4.3.1 The Notion of Syncretism.**

The Colombian architect, photographer and theorist Ricardo Castro has been interested in the notion of syncretism for several years. During the eighties and early nineties, Castro wrote extensively on the notion of critical regionalism paying particular attention to the case of Colombian architecture. Although Castro's recent work has shifted drastically from his early work on critical regionalism, the influence of Kenneth Frampton still remains strong. In his recent work, Castro explores the relationship between bodies and [architectural] objects, and elaborates on questions regarding the synthesis of architectural form through a kind of phenomenology. Yet in this section I am much more interested in his work on the notion of syncretism.

The notion of syncretism has gained in importance within Castro's later published work. Castro approaches the notion of syncretism through the work of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, and reflects mainly upon the work of the architect Rogelio Salmona. Castro maintains that one of the most important aspects of Salmona's work lies on its syncretic nature, which results from the combination of materials, geometries, forms and architectural referents. Castro associates the notion of syncretism with Carpentier's notion of "lo real maravilloso" [the marvelous-real]. This notion, apparently coined by Carpentier, helped him describe the syncretic nature of Spanish American cultures, or, to use his own words, the Americanness of America. Carpentier's 1920s notion of the marvelous-real was a reaction against the monolithic notion of Hispanidad, which he considered an utterly reductive understanding of Latin American cultures as the result of a straight mixture between Spanish culture and indigenous cultures. It was concluded in chapter three as well as at the beginning of this chapter, that such an approach to Latin American cultures overlooks not only the fractures and impurities of Spanish culture itself, but also the multiplicity of indigenous cultures that inhabited America before the arrival of the Spanish

colonizer. Neither does this particular approach account for the different black African groups that arrived in America as slaves accompanying the Spanish. Such a diversity of cultural elements produced a rich reality, or what Carpentier calls "the marvelous-real." Our religion, our language, our music, and also our architectures derive from the complex interaction of such different components that give rise to the "marvelous" reality of Latin America. As various theorists affirm, "the marvelous-real is essentially a strategy, a technique which is designed to sharpen our awareness of the astonishing richness of observable reality."<sup>174</sup> Castro believes that the ideas of Alejo Carpentier are useful to all those working on questions regarding Latin American cultures, and are also pertinent to those working on Latin American architectures.

It follows that the concept of the marvelous-real, first conceived as a strategy to describe existing reality, would also seem appropriate in its construction. Salmona, unknowingly, mines the same vein as Carpentier, constructing a reality as vivid and engaging as that of the writer but this time made of tangible elements and materials. It is nonetheless a marvelous reality.<sup>175</sup>

It appears that Carpentier's notion of the marvelous-real and Salmona's work are linked through the notion of syncretism. The marvelous-real, in Carpentier's work, serves to enhance the theoretical capabilities of the process of cultural syncretism from where our cultures emerge. Instead of a straight fusion between the Spanish and the indigenous, the marvelous-real stands for the undecidable hybridization of cultural referents that avoid stratification within the parameters of rational Western thought. Castro, then, argues that "this syncretic reality, seizable in terms of Carpentier's strategy of the marvelous-real, implicitly permeates the work of Rogelio Salmona."<sup>176</sup> However, when Castro moves into the architectural realm, the enormous theoretical potential of the notion of syncretism in Carpentier is unavoidably reduced to a question of architectural form.

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<sup>174</sup> CASTRO, Ricardo, *Rogelio Saloma*, Bogotá, Villegas Editores, 1998 p 16

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. p 17

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. p 17



Syncretism is a powerful idea, particularly suited to the characterization of an architectural pursuit, that, informed by various sources, is able to extract ideas from them to be used critically in the form-making process and its ultimate product, architecture.<sup>177</sup>

It therefore becomes clear that there is drastic and intentional shift from an abstract concept in the work of Carpentier to a question of architectural form. Castro also seems to be aware of the religious connotations inherent in the notion of syncretism, yet he maintains that the term could be used to describe practices in other realms. Although this claim appears to be genuine, more theorization would be necessary so as to support not only the claim itself, but also the use of such a notion within architectural theory.

For Castro, syncretism is present in the work of Salmona in two ways. On the one hand, there is the mixture of materials and forms, and, on the other, there is the mixture of historical architectural referents.

Syncretism is evident in Salmona's architecture, through the manipulation and combination of various components of the projects, particularly those designed after the Torres del Parque, 1967 - 1972 [Towers of the Park] in Bogotá. Such aspects range from the use of plant materials and traditional construction materials, unconventional elements such as water and air, organizational typologies derived from various cultures, as well as the active use of what I call an architectural memory, coupled with a deep understanding of the landscape.<sup>178</sup>

It follows that the combination of such different elements and materials render the work of Salmona essentially syncretic. This, and the subtle mixture of historical and architectural referents, generates what Castro refers to as a "sense of wonder" produced by the work of Salmona.

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p 15

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p 17

With regard to the combination of architectural referents, Castro highlights the fact that Salmona worked for Le Corbusier for many years.<sup>179</sup> During this time Salmona traveled extensively throughout Europe and the North of Africa where he learnt about the kind of architecture that was brought to America by the Spanish. Castro also points out that Salmona visited the ruins of the Mayas and the Aztecs in Central America and México where he studied the architecture that was practiced by our pre-Columbian ancestors. All this experience would then "syncretize" in Salmona's later work. As Castro puts it:

In the recent work of the architect, that built since the House for Illustrious Visitors in Cartagena of 1980 - 1981, the influence of pre-Columbian architecture, particularly of the Maya and Inca has also been of fundamental importance [as important as that of Le Corbusier, South Spain, Italy and the North of Africa]. Salmona discovered on one of his trips to México during the 1960's that it was possible to find on our own continent an organizational syntax for the making of a true American architecture.<sup>180</sup>

Syncretism, then, manifests itself in the work of Salmona through both the combination of materials, forms and geometries, and the combination of architectural referents rooted to our pre-Hispanic past. This, in Castro's words, allows Salmona to produce a "truly" American architecture. At this stage Castro introduces a series of theoretical devices that reveal his intimate relation with critical regionalism.

In his book about the work of Rogelio Salmona, Castro dedicates a chapter to *Mnemosyne*, the classical Greek Goddess of memory. In this chapter, Castro elaborates on Greek architecture and how it responds to the topography and the landscape conveying a strong sense of belonging to its own locus. This serves as a point of departure for Castro's elaboration on the topological qualities that

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<sup>179</sup> Experience that Salmona shares with other architects like B.V. Doshi, Julián de la Fuente, and José Oubrierie, all mentioned and classified as critical regionalist architects by Kenneth Frampton.

<sup>180</sup> CASTRO, Ricardo, *Rogelio Salmona*, Bogotá, Villegas Editores, 1998 p 21



characterize the work of Salmona. There is also a chapter entitled "Telluric Forces" that complements the latter, in a way that resembles Frampton's work on tectonics. Here Castro elaborates on the use of particular materials in the work of Salmona and the way they serve as a vehicle to establish a dialogue with the landscape. Finally, chapter four is entitled "Embodiment." In this chapter, Castro brings in Heidegger's poetic work on the notion of dwelling, belonging and rootedness to the land. It becomes clear that Castro still dwells, albeit not directly, on the idea of critical regionalism. However, Castro has re-interpreted and re-coded Frampton's work through his idea of syncretism and the work of Alejo Carpentier.

Although Castro's use of the notion of syncretism is undoubtedly useful in order to examine the formal characteristics of the work of Salmona, it also presents a series of theoretical inconveniences. Syncretism is a term that has been largely confined to the synthesis of religious practices. This does not mean, as Castro himself maintains, that the notion of syncretism has no theoretical value outside this disciplinary area. However, there is little literature about the notion of syncretism outside the margins of religion so that the debate is rather limited. As Nikos Papastergiadis puts it:

Syncretism has an ambivalent status in anthropological debates on cultural exchange. It is often used pejoratively to suggest the dilution or corruption of indigenous religious systems through the proselytizing order of Christianity. According to *the Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the accepted meanings of syncretism is as a derogatory term for the inconsistency of accepting incompatible principles or beliefs.<sup>181</sup>

As Papastergiadis points out, the notion of syncretism has traditionally been used as a derogative term that implies a loss of purity, or a contamination, rather than a subversive process. In this way, the notion of syncretism is complicit with the colonizer's claim for cultural superiority, and does little to disrupt the paradigm of Western cultural purity. Additionally, there is the problem of finalizability. Syncretism

has also been used to describe and to examine finished mixtures. Very little work has been carried out on syncretism as a process. Yet, this aspect does not seem to be a problem for Castro who is interested in analyzing finished buildings. The inherent ambiguity of the notion of syncretism, along with the lack of theorization outside the religious area, renders it slightly inadequate to deal with the dynamic complexity of contemporary transcultural interaction, and also with the whole spectrum of politics and social practices inherent in architecture. It is nonetheless quite appropriate in the case of Castro's architectural inquiry because he explicitly declines to engage with questions outside architecture in order to focus on the question of the synthesis of architectural forms. Thus, it would be possible to accept that there exists a certain syncretic nature in the work of Rogelio Salmona in terms of the mixing of materials and architectural references. Castro's analysis of the work of Salmona leaves no doubts about the extraordinary qualities of his architectural work, its capacity to impress the viewer and the user, to respond to the site and the landscape, and also its capacity to produce wonder. However, today this is a limited way of viewing architectural practices especially in situations where there is a long history of transculturation and cultural inequality.

The celebration of architects and the sublimation of their work runs the risk of becoming an officializing discourse. This is an effect that can already be seen in Colombia. One has only to look at the architecture of the middle-class and high-class neighborhoods in Bogotá, Cali and Medellín (Colombia's three largest cities) to realize not only the influence of Salmona, but also in particular the use of bare brick as a canonic cladding material. This is by no means an attempt to question the quality of Salmona's work, but to alert theorists to the possible effects that the way they present his work to the public may have. Otherwise, it might be understood as a

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<sup>181</sup> PAPASTERGIADIS, Nikos, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000 p 126



hegemonic kind of architecture. Another aspect that has to be questioned is whether the architecture of Salmona —whose body of built work is relatively small in comparison to other Colombian architects, and who has mainly designed official buildings or houses for members of the highest economic classes— can be considered representative of the architecture of the whole country.

If an architectural theory is to respond accurately to these conditions it should depart from the traditional formalism characteristic of architectural theory. For this reason, I insist that the notion of architectural hybridization opens doors for engagement with other issues that would bring about new possibilities for architectural theory and practice. This is not a capricious defense of the notion of hybridization to the detriment of other terms. It has been demonstrated so far that due to the enormous amount of theorization carried out in various fields during the past fifty years, the notion of hybridization appears to be the more appropriate to describe and to analyze the nature and dynamics of contemporary processes of transcultural interaction. However, although the notion is gaining ground within architectural circles, there is still very little work done on it. In the next section, I will elaborate on the notion of architectural hybridization in the work of another Colombian architect and theorist.

#### **4.3.2 The Notion of Architectural Hybridization: A Mistaken Concept.<sup>182</sup>**

The notion of hybridization has commonly been used to describe Latin America architectures. Yet it remains a little theorized concept within Latin America and other contexts. The notion of hybridization caught the interest of architectural theorists in

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<sup>182</sup> Part of this section was published under the title of: "On the Notion of Architectural Hybridization in Latin America," in *The Journal Of Architecture*, volume 7 Number 1, London - New York, Routledge, April 1, 2002 pp 77 - 86. Some extracts will also be published in the

the early 1980s, but, in most cases, it was reductively used to describe architectural works that combine different materials, forms and/or architectural referents, as was the case of syncretism. Wladimir Krysin, for example, in his essay "Rethinking Postmodernism: With Some Latin American Excursus" uses the notion of architectural hybridization to describe the work of postmodern architects like Michael Graves, Aldo Rossi and Robert Venturi. The hybrid dimension of their work depends only on the fact that these architects mix various architectural languages, historical referents and systems of coding in their buildings.<sup>183</sup> Chris Abel, in his book *Architecture and Identity* dedicates a section to the notion of hybridization. The section, entitled "Living in a Hybrid World," mainly discusses the *fusion* of different architectural referents in South East Asia with particular attention to the mixing of Islamic and classical architectural features in some colonial buildings in Malaysia. Although Abel suggests that the notion of hybridization has larger political implications than those he explores in his book, and that it has plenty of possibilities for future theoretical elaboration within architectural theory and practice, his idea of hybridization remains attached to questions of form. It is clear that for Abel, hybridization is the offspring of the direct fusion or mixture, between two predecessors. As he himself puts it:

The hybrid architecture shown here is therefore offered, not only as an example of what individual architects have achieved in the past, but also as a more general metaphor for other possible future hybrid culture-forms. It is possible, therefore, to look upon such architecture as representing the product of a creative process of cultural interaction, which, while being associated in these cases to colonialism, might also be produced out of other sorts of global interactions, and other, less destructive cultural balances of power; in short, wherever two or more vital cultures meet and produce their hybrid offspring.<sup>184</sup>

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Catalogue of "The Americas" exhibition organized by the *Centre International pour la Ville, L'Architecture et le Paysage* in Brussels.

<sup>183</sup> See: KRYSINSKI, "Wladimir, Rethinking Postmodernism: With Some Latin American Excursus," in YOUNG, Robert, *Latin American Postmodernisms*, Amsterdam - Atlanta, Rodopi, 1999



Abel's approach is different from that of Krynski in that he is aware of the enormous potential of the notion of hybridization despite the fact that he decides not to engage with such other areas of inquiry. The problem remains that there has been little work on the larger cultural and political capacity of the notion of hybridization linking the idea of combination to the whole spectrum of politics and social practices inherent in architecture. As argued at the end of chapter three, it could easily be claimed that in the early 1990's the terms hybrid and hybridization became merely fancy words that replaced the terms eclectic, or eclecticism, so common in art history and architectural theory to describe the phenomenon of mixing styles.

In Latin America, architects and theorists fashionably used the notion of hybridization at the beginning of the 1990s after Néstor García Canclini published his book *Hybrid Cultures*, but it was soon rendered unfashionable. This could be precisely due to the lack of theorization outside architecture. However, the Colombian architect Carlos Rueda has continued to elaborate on the notion of hybridization since it first appeared on the Latin American arena. Rueda's work on architectural hybridization has not been published outside Colombia, yet the papers he presented at the SAL provide sufficient material for theoretical debate.

In June 1995, Rueda presented the paper entitled: "About the Concept of Hybridity in Latin American Architecture" at the VII SAL. In a way that resembles both Krynski's and Abel's misinterpretation, Rueda's paper clearly shows the reasons why the notion of hybridization has been mistaken within architectural debates. Hybridization is chosen to replace the notion of "mestizaje." According to Rueda, "mestizaje" carries highly moral connotations, whereas the notion of hybridization is related to a

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<sup>184</sup> ABEL, Chris, *Architecture and Identity*, Oxford, Architectural Press, 1997 p 166

"free game" [his own words] with referents that come from diverse contexts.<sup>185</sup> It seems that Rueda finds more creative freedom in the notion of hybridization. He also implies that freedom consists of the possibility of mixing diverse architectural referents exempt from moral attachments. Nonetheless, the notion of "free game," which initially suggests a certain dynamism rapidly turns into fusion. For Rueda affirms that the main characteristic of Latin American architectures is the *fusion* between elements brought from diverse contexts with the local cultural heritage<sup>186</sup>. It thus becomes clear that Rueda reduces the capacity of the very concept of architectural hybridization to the mixture of architectural references. The notion of fusion obliterates the suggestive idea of "free game," and returns a certain teleology to processes of identity formation by conceiving culture genealogically and taxonomically.

In exemplifying the existence of what he sees as a hybrid Latin American architecture, one finds yet another inconsistency. Rueda ingenuously ignores the cultural differences that exist across and within Latin America; he considers the whole continent as a homogeneous field. It is clear from his case studies, that he thinks that hybridization is a notion equally applicable to any one of the Latin American cultural contexts.

As Rueda argues, there are two main types of hybridization that he calls "hibridación de lo universal erudito dentro de un contexto particular" and "hibridación entre lo culto y lo vernáculo." I will quote at length from Rueda's paper in order to explain

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<sup>185</sup> The original quote reads as follows: "A pesar de que en el concepto de mestizaje este implícita la mezcla cultural este connota una carga moralista. Es excluyente con respecto a todo aquello que no está justificado mientras que la hibridación, asociada a los procesos de creación esta relacionada con el juego. Un *juego libre* de referentes venidos de contextos diferentes. [my italics] See: RUEDA, Carlos, "Acerca del Concepto de Hibridación en la Arquitectura Latinoamericana," in *Revista PROA*, 425, Junio, 1995 pp 34 - 37



these two ideas. Rueda chooses the "Calvo-Caracola" house located in Santiago de Chile, designed by the Chilean architect Enrique Browne, to exemplify the former idea. About this house, Rueda says:

La casa Calvo-Caracola... se plantea la necesidad de resolver el tema de la vivienda bajo los parámetros de un diseño que retoma una tipología tradicional como la del patio, dentro de la interpretación de las expectativas y necesidades de una sociedad contemporánea. La multiplicidad de referentes formales y tectónicos se hace evidente a través de elementos como las caídas de agua de Barragán, o de esencias como la alusión a la casa Jacobs de Frank Lloyd Wright, o la imagen de sus fachadas que también recuerdan al citado maestro.<sup>187</sup>

[The Calvo-Caracola house... undertakes the question of dwelling under some design parameters that reuse a traditional typology such as the central courtyard yet as an interpretation and a response to the contemporary society. The multiplicity of formal and tectonic referents makes itself evident through elements such as the waterfalls of Luis Barragán, or essential motifs like the allusion to the Jacob House by Frank Lloyd Wright, or even the image of its facades which also remind us of the mentioned master. My translation]

Only two aspects seem to be fundamental for Rueda's idea of the hybridization between the "universal erúdito" and the "contexto particular," they are the re-interpretation of the central courtyard typology in order to respond to the conditions of the contemporary society, and the combination of architectural referents taken from various architects.

The second case is the Ghezzi House located in Lima, Perú, by the Peruvian architect Juvenal Baracco. With this example, Rueda illustrates the notion of "hibridación entre lo culto y lo vernáculo:"

Retomando enseñanzas ancestrales precolombinas de las casas del desierto. La casa planteada como una "U" alrededor de un espacio

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<sup>186</sup> The original text by Rueda reads: "la fusión de elementos traídos de contextos diversos con el sustrato que conforman nuestras propias herencias se ha convertido en la característica común de una arquitectura identificada como 'latinoamericana'." Ibid. p 35

<sup>187</sup> RUEDA, Carlos, Acerca del Concepto de Hibridación en la Arquitectura Latinoamericana, in Revista PROA, 425, Junio, 1995 pp 34 - 37 Translation by the Author of this article.

central cubierto y simultaneamente abierto al clima y el paisaje una solución ambiental apropiada al lugar en que se implanta.<sup>188</sup>

[Retaking the taught of the desert houses of the pre-Columbian ancestors, the house stands like an U around a central space that is both covered and open to the weather and the landscape at the same time becoming an appropriate environmental solution in response to the site where the house is located. My translation]

Here, Rueda refers to the use of an open social space common in the local indigenous architecture, as well as to the use of vernacular materials like untreated wood. These are *hybridized* with the Hispanic central courtyard typology and with a functionalist arrangement of spaces. Although there is a clear mixture of materials, forms and referents that could be considered as hybridization, these two cases demonstrate that Rueda reduced the whole notion of hybridization to a descriptive tool. In his article, Rueda elaborates only on the mixture of materials, forms and referents, but does not engage with questions regarding the place that such architectures have within Latin American sociocultural structures, nor does he engage with debates about cultural/architectural identity. Hybridization appears as a process that generates synthesis, and hybridity becomes an aesthetic concept with a reductive critical content. This transforms the whole notion of hybridization into a question of syncretism that puts an end to the permanent process of cultural becoming.

In fact, Rueda uses the notion of hybridization in a way that resembles Néstor García Canclini. This could be the reason why hybridization has been mistaken as a finalizable process in opposition to the unfinalizability of the process of cultural becoming that it tries to represent. It seems that Rueda repeats one of Canclini's major ambiguities: the equation of the notion of hybridization with other terms such as syncretism, synthesis, and mestizaje. It was argued in the previous chapter that

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid. pp 34 - 37 Here Rueda refers to the U shaped patio that comes from the southern Spanish and Moor traditions which is allegedly hybridized with the use of local materials and



Canclini's failure to define the difference between the notion of hybridization and other notions generates an ambiguous use of interchangeable terminology that results in a bifurcation between the theoretical/anthropological dimension and the empirical manifestation of hybridization. The former focuses on the various sociocultural problems that affect the market and economic structures at work in Latin America, which allows him to claim for the creation new structures so as to compete in the global market. The latter looks at the actual hybridization manifested in the work of artisans in which elements of "high" and "low" art merge to satisfy the demands of the global market. These newly formed artisanal objects do in fact generate a hybridized form of culture that demonstrates the adaptability of minoritarian groups to the changing sociocultural structures of late capitalism while maintaining their separate identities. However, as pointed out in chapter three, this would be a negative way of looking at this phenomenon. For if artisanal objects are, in fact, synthetic products that physically combine different and antagonistic motifs in different materials, they also highlight the intangible struggle for differentiation and survival that is not reconciled in the object. For this reason, I suggested that the artisanal objects that Canclini uses as case studies may enhance the incommensurable differences that exist between the cultures of the centers and the peripheries so that it becomes complicit with Euro-American narratives of cultural superiority. The problem appears when architectural theorists, like Rueda, appropriate uncritically Canclini's discourse and apply it to architecture apparently unaware of the shortcomings of his argument.

The reason why the notion of hybridization overcomes notions such as syncretism, synthesis or "mestizaje," is because the former has gained a certain subversive political value. Yet it is not an intrinsic part of the term hybridization. The term appears to be versatile enough to describe and analyze various aspects of our

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its covered-uncovered characteristic directly associated with Peruvian indigenous ancestors.

contemporary cultures, and it has gained its subversive political value through the work of philosophers, cultural and postcolonial theorists, as well as through work in other disciplines. For this reason, it is my contention that it serves to theorize and reevaluate situations of inequality with more dynamism. In other words, terms such as syncretism, synthesis or mestizaje imply a certain inferiority and secondariness with regard to any assumed original cultural locus of enunciation, whereas the term hybridization is used to deconstruct the structures that place central cultures above the peripheral.

Rueda, like many other Latin American architects and theorists, ignores the political potential intrinsic to the notion of hybridization that has been discussed throughout this thesis. He does not engage with the entire spectrum of social practices, politics, and economics that are implicit in both the notion of hybridization and in architecture as a collective cultural practice. Rueda seems not be interested in the subversive capacity of the notion of architectural hybridization as a way to elaborate on the position in which Latin American hybrid architectures stand in relation to central or metropolitan architectures and reverse the structures that value the former as secondary. Consequently, the notion of hybridization in Rueda is not only reductive, but also of little political efficacy.

At this point, I would like to return to the conclusion of chapter three where it was proposed that there are two different but correlated temporalities implicit in the notion of hybridization. Within the first temporality, hybridization is seen as a permanent process, while in the second temporality it produces results that may manifest synthetic characteristics, like a fusion of different elements into one as in the case of Canclini's artisanal work or as in Rueda's houses. However, these latter results happen to be part of the permanent and unfinalizable process of hybridization that occurs on a broader cultural level. In other words, hybrid or synthetic manifestations



require the existence of a different temporality where synthesis never occurs and different elements remain apart in a permanent struggle for survival. I want to aim my attention at the first temporality where differences remain unresolved, coexisting in an agonistic relation, and where claims for cultural superiority can be, at least theoretically, eliminated. To undertake such a task, architectural theorists must depart from the self-centered and closed architectural field and engage with broader cultural issues. Otherwise our views will continue to be reductive and politically ineffective. Indeed, what is missing from contemporary architectural theory in Latin America is a wider theoretical framework with which to cover the whole spectrum of cultural practices to which architecture is socially and culturally related.

It is thus clear that the notion of hybridization is not only a descriptive tool in the way it has been used in recent architectural debates in Latin America. It has a much larger political value. It is also clear that despite the efforts made by various architectural theorists in Latin America, the notion of architectural hybridization has been thoroughly mistaken. Due precisely to a naïve lack of theorization, architectural hybridization has been reduced to a problem of syncretism —to an architectural aesthetic. For this reason, Rueda fails to engage with questions regarding the architectural practices of minority groups and their performative nature. For, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the concept of hybridization not only refers to the interaction between cultures, but also reveals that all cultures are inhabited by numerous differences. Consequently Rueda's use of the notion of hybridization obliterates its political potential. This could have a negative effect for architectural theory and architecture in general because the uncritical and facile appropriation from other disciplines of terms and discourses, which may have originated in different sociocultural contexts, with the intention of theorizing the conditions of the Latin American architectures could undermine their political capacity and efficacy. From the arguments and examples presented in this chapter, it is possible to conclude that

buildings are not hybrid because they combine numerous architectural motifs, but because they emerge within and take part in the hybrid cultures where they happen to exist, and, as a consequence, they overturn the hierarchical structures that qualify them as inferior. This does not imply a kind of utopianism, which would overlook other realities that affect Latin American architectural practices. On the contrary, the notion of hybridization is anti-utopian. It is a theoretical tool that serves to prove wrong notions of cultural purity, linear taxonomic development, and superiority. Yet, debates about cultural hybridization acknowledge the existence of other systems of dependency that affect peripheral cultures and, thereby, architectural practices.

It is clear that contemporary Latin American architectures have been generated from the whole range of differential identities and the particular, sometimes conflicting, historical experiences of the people. Therefore, transculturation, translation and hybridization ought not to be seen as banners created only to distinguish Latin American architectures from others. The theorization of processes of architectural transculturation, translation and hybridization is a necessary and urgent task amongst Latin American architects in order to produce more accurate and dynamic theories with which to describe and analyze our cities, our urban spaces and our architectures. The terms studied throughout this thesis could also be considered as tools to carry out creative exploration and to produce new alternative architectures. By new alternative architectures I refer to the creation of new design methods, both urban and architectural, which are informed by the dynamism and heterogeneity of Latin American cultures. Such new methods should challenge the validity of traditional architectural practices such as master planning still in use in many countries, and which have already proven their total inadequacy. It is my contention that the theoretical models created in this thesis have enormous potential to carry out a continued study of Latin American architectural practices in response to the demands of our changing societies and unstable economies. In other words, the



notions of architectural transculturation, translation and hybridization provide theoretical as well as practical means to rethink architectural practices within the multiple contesting sociocultural sites that exist in Latin America. In the next section, I will return to the notions of transculturation, translation and hybridization in order to reveal a number of issues that have not been considered in previous theories.

## **Chapter Five: Dynamic Identities and the Construction of Transcultural Architectures.**

The theories and arguments studied in chapters one to three served as a base to carry out an in-depth analysis of the most prominent architectural theories produced in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century [see previous chapter]. That analysis led to the conclusion that those theses brought to the fore the convoluted nature of contemporary architectural practices in the continent yet they remained attached to traditional methods of critique that prevented a more comprehensive critical engagement. For this reason, there are several facets of contemporary Latin American architectures that remain untheorized. For example, there is the issue of the architecture of the minorities. It was demonstrated above that Latin American architecture has always been examined via an exclusive selection of paradigmatic buildings. However, popular architectures have never been given the attention they deserve, or have been completely neglected, despite being proportionally greater than the architecture produced by architects. The reason could be the fact that Latin American architecture has been studied and analyzed through Euro-American methods and models of critique that did not account for the dynamism and heterogeneity of popular architectures. Only with the help of theoretical devices such as those examined throughout this thesis can appropriate theoretical models and methods of critique be created to deal with the complexity of Latin American architectural practices. (Another aspect that has been largely understudied is the performative dimension of architecture.) Architecture has generally been seen as the means to provide comprehensive and definitive solutions for large parts of our societies and cities. However, it has become apparent that architecture is not immutable. On the contrary, it is subject to constant transformation. I have called this phenomenon: the performative temporality of architecture, which is seen in the processes of appropriation carried out by



heterogeneous peoples. / Architects and architectural theorists have normally assumed an elitist and heavily dismissive attitude towards architectural users and the appropriations they carry out in buildings and cities. / Since popular appropriations imply a re-codification of architecture after which new values and significance are introduced, I will use the theories studied in this thesis to challenge traditionally elitist assumptions about the interaction between people and architecture. /

Given the vastness of the critical territory covered in this thesis, Latin America, and considering that I have advocated achieving major political specificity in the analysis of architectural practices, I will now focus on a few architectural cases in the context of Colombia. This deliberate decision not only responds to my nationality, but also to the fact that Colombian architectures are amongst the least theorized internationally. As in other aspects of Latin American culture, Argentine, Brazilian, Cuban and Mexican architectures have received greater attention from theorists both inside and outside the continent. However, Andean architectures have not been sufficiently theorized. Therefore, I want to aim my attention to this region of Latin America and focus on Colombian architectural practices. I have detected a certain disdain amongst Colombian architects and architectural theorists that, in my opinion, causes more harm than benefit. This is because Colombian architectural scholars seem to remain oblivious to the complexity of the sociocultural and political conflicts that surround architectural practices in the country. Consequently, I am certain that the application of the architectural methods of critique created in this thesis will bring to light numerous aspects of Colombian architectural practices that have not yet been studied and which require urgent attention.

In the first part of this section I will put to work the theoretical models created in this thesis in order to carry out an alternative analysis of a significant building in the context of Colombia. Formal as well as technological aspects of the building will be

set aside. Instead, I will use the concepts studied in chapters one to three so as to reveal other aspects of the building that have not been theorized because existing theoretical methods have not allowed architects to see them. By engaging with social, cultural and political issues, I will show the reasons why this paradigmatic building has failed to respond to the specific sociocultural circumstances of the contexts where it exists and the culture for which it was designed. This analysis will serve to shed light on a paradox of architectural practice in Latin America —although the same could be said of many other contexts—, that is the fact that, despite their interest in responding to problems beyond architecture, architects continue to confirm their inability to overcome their obsession with formal abstraction. This section shows how the theories examined throughout this thesis can be used in the analysis and interpretation of buildings yet always connecting them with areas that go beyond architectural materiality. In the second section, I will scrutinize the response of Colombian theorists to the existence of cultural differences and their effect on cities and buildings. Colombian theorists continue to ignore the sociocultural realities of their country and work on the creation of hegemonic architectural narratives to dismiss the agency of the minorities. This section sheds light on the narrowness of the structures of architectural analysis in Colombia, and demonstrates the potential of the arguments developed in previous chapters to introduce issues that have so far been left unattended by other theorists. In the final section of this chapter, I will focus on the architecture produced by the minorities. In a way that is similar to the point raised in the previous section, theorists have traditionally rejected minority architectures mainly due to the fact that architects have not produced them. However, it will be shown that the arguments that are used by theorists in order to dismiss minority architectures carry the risk of reconstructing hierarchical structures that consequently dismiss the entirety of architectural production in the country. Terms such as hybridization and cultural difference give political validity to the architecture of the minorities and challenge architects to undertake a thorough



reevaluation of their methods of analysis. The purpose of this section is not so much to provide alternative solutions, a task to which I will nonetheless endeavor to respond, but to bring to light a large number of aspects within architectural debates that have not been thoroughly studied in the past, but which require urgent, serious and extensive theorization.

### **5.1 The Unseen Side of the Museum: Reading between Architecture, History, and Cultural Theory.**

Since their introduction in the nineteenth century, museums have played an important role in the processes of formation of Latin American nations. First, museums were points of contact between the cultures of the centers and newly formed Latin American cultures. Museums were part of the pedagogical temporality of the nation as narration. However, in the early twentieth century with the emergence in Europe of the artistic avant-garde and the so-called politicization of art, museums in Latin America became outlets of nationalism. On the one hand, museums provided the space to present to the public new artistic expressions that followed the models of the European avant-garde, while on the other local artists saw the opportunity to announce the emergence of a truly Latin American art. Thus the function of the museum changed, as well as its political significance.

In spite of its new sociopolitical role, the museum, as a building type, did not change. It continued to be a traditional building formed by a succession of rooms where assorted objects could be displayed. Consequently, a contradiction can be seen in the fact that displayed objects carried an enormous subversive content that highlighted the performative temporality of the nation (as in the case of nationalist art by the Latin American avant-garde), while the building itself remained attached to the

pedagogical temporality of the nation and its official homogenizing agenda. In other words, there was a tension between the museum as a building and the objects displayed in it.

This phenomenon became more acute when in the 1940's museums proliferated throughout the continent. Such proliferation can be associated with the popularization of modern art. Museums became part of a global symbolic network associated with the notions of modernity and modernization, and dependent upon dominant capitalist structures. For this reason, it became virtually mandatory that every major Latin American city had to have a museum of modern art, and for small towns it became an aspiration. Museums were seen as the means of access to the global symbolic network of modern art as well as to modernity in general. Paradoxically, a vast number of museums of modern art in Latin America have never had an exhibition of modern art because it is financially impossible for them to afford to mount a show. Consequently, the museum happens to have the opposite effect: instead of being a bridge giving access to a global art network, it makes visible the impossibility of having access to it. Instead of uniting, the museum separates.

Several cases illustrate this situation. There is for example the Museo del Sitio in Chichén-itzá, México, by Teodoro González de León and Abraham Zabludovsky, or the Museum of Art of Sao Paulo by the Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi. Both museums have been celebrated for their response to the context and the creation of public spaces in addition to their amazing structures. However, both museums also reveal various contradictions that jeopardize their sociopolitical significance. In the case of the MASP, for example, it is contradictory that the museum, as an institution that provides the means of access to the modern world and the symbolic network of modern art, is achieved through unorthodox methods of sociopolitical coercion. In other words, the museum, that was conceived as a democratic space to make art



available to the masses, was in fact accomplished via anti-democratic processes that revealed the strong hierarchies, the class division, and the antagonism between the different parts of Brazil's society. In both cases, the very materiality of the museums generates contradictions between the building, its interior space, and the exhibited pieces. In the MASP, Brazilian art and popular objects appear to be decontextualized when accommodated in the modernist space of the building. This creates an abrupt sense of rupture between architecture and its content. My criticism of these two museums by no means diminishes their architectural significance. The fact that they fail to respond to the complex and contesting coexistence of different cultures could even be positively seen in the sense that they brought to light (negatively) the realities of Brazilian and Mexican cultures. Besides, these two museums can be seen as ingenuous, yet significant, attempts at providing spaces for the minorities to enter into close interaction with each other and with the elites.

The following case study differs widely from the previous one. However, both share the fact that they reveal areas of conflict that have not been addressed in previous architectural analyses. The case that I will analyze below has a greater degree of political specificity. Its very name, *Museo Cultural Quimbaya*, creates a direct link with a specific indigenous culture, its brutal history of colonization acculturation and eradication, as well as with its present of unfair discrimination as a minority. This case puts under scrutiny architects, and architectural theorists' commitment to, and understanding of, the realities of Colombian cultures and societies.

The *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* was designed between 1983 and 1984, and was awarded the "Premio Nacional de Arquitectura" [Colombian National Prize for Architecture] in 1988. Armenia, the place where it is located, is an intermediate city between the Western and central branches of the Andes. Before the arrival of the Spanish colonizer, this area was inhabited by members of the *Quimbaya* culture. The

*Quimbayas* were excellent artists and developed extraordinarily refined skills in the production of gold as well as clay objects, and textiles. Some of these objects were for many years kept in the *Museo del Oro* [Gold Museum], in Bogotá<sup>189</sup>. However, as part of the preparations for the celebration of the 500 hundred years of the discovery of America, it was decided that the pieces should return to their original location. For this reason, the central government commissioned the design and construction of the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya*.

There is not enough information available to establish definitely what the various agendas behind the initiative to build the museum were. It is therefore difficult to determine whether or not indigenous groups participated at any stage during the development of the museum. It is also difficult to establish whether the architect had the intention of going beyond the materiality of the building so as to engage with other cultural and political issues in order to make visible the tragic past of the Quimbaya family or the uncomfortable present of indigenous groups in Colombia. For this reason, I will not carry out a speculative analysis of possible hidden agendas, nor will I produce a judgment regarding the characteristics of the finished building. My aim is to use contemporary cultural theory so as to reveal aspects of the museum that have not been thoroughly theorized, or which in fact have never been theorized at all. In so doing, I will demonstrate that despite the architectural characteristics of the museum, it was a missed architectural opportunity to engage with broader cultural issues regarding the contemporary situation of Colombian cultures and social groups.

The indisputable ability of Rogelio Salmona to produce architecture of excellent quality once more became apparent in his design for the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya*.

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<sup>189</sup> The objects displayed in the *Museo del Oro* were only a small number of archaeologically found pre-Columbian indigenous works. The vast majority is held in private collections or has



In this building, he continues to explore the idea of a succession of courtyards arranged on a diagonal that he had already used in previous buildings. Water streams, or "atarjeas," run across the building producing a constant natural whisper both outside as well as inside some interior spaces. Brick is chosen as the main cladding material, which is a characteristic of Salmona's work. Despite having been awarded the most important architectural award given to an architect in Colombia, the building has been widely criticized. Germán Téllez who in other occasions has celebrated Salmona's work has in this occasion been an acute critic. Perhaps Téllez's criticism could be considered as yet another accolade given to the museum: the first of Salmona's buildings to receive Téllez's criticism. However, as in most cases, architectural analysis and criticism do not transgress the formal dimension of architecture. Téllez affirms that:

La obra de Salmona en Armenia es menos convincente en la disposición y el uso de los espacios interiores y cerrados y en su envoltura arquitectónica, que en los jardines circundantes y espacios abiertos. Los muros horadados, tan vigorosos y expresivos en Cartagena, en la piedra coralina, rubia y alegre bajo el sol, resultan bastante menos expresivos en el ladrillo oscuro y manchado, visto bajo el desapacible clima andino de Armenia. El espacio claustral "descuadrado" en declive, en Armenia, es menos convincente que su congénere estrictamente horizontal en Cartagena. [...] en el museo Quimbaya de Armenia el éxito es mucho más limitado: gargolas y atarjeas en ladrillo bogotano resultan posmodernistas implantadas sobre las salas de exhibición como para recordar al observador de la adhesión de Salmona al culto del ángulo de 45 (en planta) y de 60 (en alzada) parecen traídas subrepticamente de alguna otra obra de vanguardia, sensación corroborada por los ventanales puntiagudos que las rematan. Todo ello implica concesiones de Salmona a las tendencias de la moda arquitectónica reciente, tan inquietantes como discutibles.<sup>190</sup>

Salmona's work in Armenia is less convincing in the layout of interior spaces than in the solution of the surrounding gardens and open spaces. The punctured walls that are so powerful in Cartagena where they are made of yellow coral stone, which shine in the Caribbean sunlight, are less expressive when made of dark brick and stained, and in the whether of the Andes. The "unsquared" sloping quad space in

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been traded on the international market.

<sup>190</sup> TELLEZ, Germán, *Rogelio Salmona: Arquitectura y Poética del Lugar*, Bogotá, Escala Ltda., 1991 p 318

Armenia is also less convincing that its horizontal predecessor in Cartagena. [...] In the Quimbaya Museum success is far more limited. The "atarejas" in brick from Bogotá appear to be postmodern in the exhibition spaces. As if they were to remind the viewer of Salmona's adhesion to the cult of 45 degrees in plan and 60 degrees in elevation. They look as if they had been surreptitiously stolen from some other avant-garde, which is corroborated by the pointing windows that top them up. All this shows that Salmona has also given way to recent architectural fashion tendencies that are so intriguing as well as debatable. My translation.]

As has been demonstrated in previous occasions throughout this thesis, architectural criticism in most Latin American contexts as well as in Colombia is restricted to questions of form. Only rarely do critics engage with issues beyond architectural materiality. However, whether the building is functional, or looks good under the local sun light while responding to climatic conditions, or whether it becomes a landmark within its physical context is only a small part of architectural analysis. Since this aspect has so far received all the attention, I will address mine to other areas that remain unattended namely the cultural problematic implicit in the construction of a museum for the *Quimbaya* culture. In other words, the political implications of creating a museum for an indigenous cultural group that was almost completely eradicated by the Spanish colonizer exactly in the place where their subjugation took place.

According to the official agenda, the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* was to be built in Armenia, the capital of the department of Quindío, to symbolize the return of the art works produced by the pre-Columbian indigenous group to where they belong. And all in preparation for the celebration of the 500 years of the discovery of America. It is curious that the initiative to build the museum and relocate the collection took place at the same time as indigenous groups all across Latin America were campaigning for the recuperation of what was allegedly theirs, especially the land. However, indigenous groups also demanded acceptance and inclusion within the hegemonic



governmental institutions of the nation. The *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* was therefore an outstanding opportunity to make a radical architectural statement by engaging with these problems and thereby introducing political agency into the practice of architecture.

Nonetheless, Salmona opted to design a traditional museum. The building has a succession of galleries where art objects are displayed. They are organized according to functionalist principles and united by circulations that run along the perimeter of the courtyards and through some of the main rooms. The use of central courtyards is reminiscent of European domestic architecture as well as of the architecture of Colombian haciendas, while water streams, or "atarjeas," are directly linked with Moorish traditions. Salmona even experimented, albeit unsuccessfully, with postmodernist motifs such as the heavily criticized skylights. Yet, the building for the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* is by no means associated with the Quimbaya culture and its traditions. I do not suggest that the building should have had indigenous features, or should have been made of wood and straw. On the contrary, I believe that the theme of this building had enough social, cultural, and political components to enable the exploration of numerous architectural alternatives and to transgress the limits of traditional architecture, both indigenous and so-called modern. Salmona's unproblematic selection of a rational and serene architectural language occludes the violence of colonization and the history of destruction and subjugation suffered by indigenous groups in Colombia, as well as in the rest of the continent. The Museum does not commemorate, nor does it bring to light, the genocide of thousands of indigenous people and almost the totality of a culture. In addition, the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* does not reveal the current situation of minority indigenous groups, and does not offer the opportunity for them to make visible and audible their claims. It could also have provided spaces for contemporary indigenous artists to work and to display their work. In other words, *The Museum Cultural Quimbaya* could have

become the means to make visible a part of Colombian society that has been, and continues to be neglected.

Another aspect of this particular museum that clearly did not receive the necessary attention was the way in which indigenous objects are displayed. In keeping with the functionalist and modernist arrangement of circulations and galleries, the exhibits are placed within glazed cases and plinths as in any museum of modern art. The lighting of the galleries is simplistically copied from Salmons's own *Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá*. This estranges the perception of the pieces, which are pre-Columbian objects symbolically returned to the region where they belong. The result is a contradiction between the exhibited object and its immediate surroundings. The museum therefore banalizes and exoticizes *Quimbaya* objects. It banalizes them because their real significance is taken away from them, and exoticizes them because they are presented as what they are not: pieces of modern art. This tension is more dramatic because *Quimbaya* objects appear to be out of context although they are exactly in the place where they were created more than five hundred years ago. It is also the place where their creators were variously acculturated, abused, and massacred. The conflict between the artworks and architecture is therefore not only a curatorial inconsistency, but also an architectural problem that arises from the inadequacy of the spaces provided for their display. In this case there seems to have been a lack of interest—or even a lack of knowledge—in searching for alternative ways to display indigenous art while, at the same time, responding to the sociopolitical reality of the *Quimbaya* culture.

The *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* can be seen as a conciliatory initiative offered by the government of Colombia in order to moderate the animosity of indigenous groups at the time. Architecturally it is a simple and unproblematic solution whose program is only concerned with functionalist and aesthetic issues yet not with the realities of the



sociocultural group to which it was addressed. For this reason the museum could also be understood as a patronizing response to indigenous claims. The government decided to move the collection of *Quimbaya* art from one official institution to another, which, albeit in the place where the *Quimbayans* lived, does not provide spaces for the re-articulation of differences, nor call discrimination to a halt. The *Quimbaya* culture will be "exhibited," but this will happen according to vertically imposed structures created by the elites. As a result, the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya*, reinforces sociopolitical hierarchical structures and obstructs sociocultural integration. In a project like this, with an enormous degree of political specificity, it is necessary that architects transgress the limits of architecture as simply the art of building and engage with much broader issues. Sociopolitical specificity implies that architects (and architectural students) have to respond to the particularities of specific cultural contexts and groups within the space of specific Latin American nations. It is also necessary to rethink the concept of the museum as a global institution when facing the problem of design. As maintained throughout this section, the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* was a missed opportunity to engage with the past and present realities of the *Quimbaya* people, and to reveal and problematize their history. A task that Salmona clearly did not take on board. This case study shows how the theories studied in this thesis open new areas of inquiry for architecture because previous theoretical models were incapable of tackling them. This is nonetheless not an arid and fruitless theoretical effort disconnected from the design of buildings. On the contrary, it leads to the reassessment of the way buildings are designed and respond to social, cultural and political circumstances to which they are inherently connected. It is also implicit that in order to challenge traditional practices and the hierarchical structures that support them, it is necessary to undertake a continued and more radical formal exploration so as to provide architectural solutions to the problems underlined above.

## **5.2 Can the User of Architecture Speak?**

In the previous section, the theoretical model created in this thesis was used to demonstrate that architects and architectural theorists in Colombia have failed to engage with issues beyond architectural materiality. Consequently, buildings respond to the necessary functional requirements and comply with the conditions imposed by hegemonic architectural narratives, but fail to respond to the complex sociocultural realities of the peoples to which they are addressed. In other words, although buildings can sometimes be considered successful according to pedagogically devised judgmental structures, they occlude present and historical circumstances pertinent to the peoples of the nation that obliterate their political validity. In this section, I will shed light on the reluctance with which architects explore the dynamic interaction between people and buildings, or what I have called the performative temporality of architecture. In so doing, attention will be drawn at the effect of people's appropriations in mass housing projects built for the working-class and the middle-class that have been generally commissioned by governmental institutions and designed by famous architects. This analysis unveils a paradoxical situation whereby users appear to be inadequate to inhabit certain buildings. As the responses of architectural theorists to popular appropriation of buildings demonstrate —as well as the opinion of the designers themselves—, people appear not to be prepared to inhabit buildings when these have been designed by famous architects.

It has been pointed out at various stages throughout this thesis that in the years between the two World Wars and the first twenty years after the second there was a massive migration of rural peoples into Latin America's main cities. This situation also affected Colombia where cities doubled and, in some cases, tripled in size. As a consequence, mass housing projects had to be built in great quantities and with extreme urgency across the country. Rural immigrants who moved into cities came



from different parts of the country, and were members of different sociocultural groups with diverse races, traditions, educational backgrounds, and even languages. It could be said that given the urgency with which these projects had to be built, architects did not have the opportunity to take into consideration the multiplicity of sociocultural groups that suddenly appeared in growing cities. Architects were allegedly left with no other option than to consider Colombia as a homogeneous whole. The fact that different sociocultural groups entered into close contact with a mestizo majority that had so far been dominant in the main cities of Colombia caused an imbalance in the sociopolitical structures of the nation that was left unattended. Yet, the assumption that architects had no other alternative than to ignore cultural differences due to urgency can only be partially true. It is clear that apart from the urgent need to provide housing solutions for the masses, the homogenization of the nation was also a priority within the architectural, as well as the political, agenda of the time, and, as demonstrated in previous sections, still is.

According to Silvia Arango —perhaps the most prominent architectural historian in Colombia and the author of the first history of Colombian architecture—, the majority of mass housing projects built between 1945 and the early 1970's were thoroughly homogenizing. Most of these projects were promoted by the *Instituto de Crédito Territorial* and the *Banco Central Hipotecario*<sup>191</sup>, and their design was influenced by the notion of “tipo ideal de vivienda” [ideal housing type], which attempts to resolve only the basic needs required for human living, following the principles of the CIAM. Arango demonstrates with photos and plans that the layout of the ICT-type house was identically used across all social classes and in different parts of the country with only variations in size and in the quality of materials.<sup>192</sup> This does therefore prove that

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<sup>191</sup> Both the ICT and BCH were large financial institutions created by the initiative of the government of Colombia to promote housing projects for the working and middle classes.

<sup>192</sup> See: ARANGO, Silvia, *Historia de la arquitectura en Colombia*, Bogotá, Centro Editorial y Facultad de Artes Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Third Edition 1993, p221

architects were oblivious to the existence of social and cultural differences and subscribed to a homogenizing and universalizing project. They deliberately attempted eliminate differences by means of architecture possibly in order to achieve Euro-American standards of urban life.

Examining the evolution of working-class and middle-class neighborhoods during the past three decades, one finds that there is a vast majority of houses that have been the object of at least one minor alteration. In some cases only decoration is added to the facades, in other cases a second or third floor is added to houses that previously had one or two floors. The reason can be found in the fact that for those who have the good fortune to own a house, it is their most precious belonging. In Colombia, as well as in many other Latin American countries, the economic situation does not allow for houses to be traded as easily as in countries with much stronger and stable economies. Most working-class householders have acquired their houses from speculative builders who produce mass housing projects sponsored by the government, or at the time when they moved from the countryside into an urban shanty-town. Others have been much luckier to have the opportunity to purchase a plot on which to build their own house. For the middle classes the situation may be slightly more comfortable. On some occasions houses have been designed by architects. However, this is no longer a common practice because today most middle-class people buy mass-produced housing units built by developers, or live in apartment buildings. In all cases, houses may belong to their owners for various generations. Consequently, the vast majority of working-class and middle-class houses in Colombia has been altered in response to changing circumstances. These could be family related, economic, and even in response to new fashions.

The effect of popular architectural transformation is undoubtedly more dramatic in cases of mass production when the alteration of one house affects the rhythm and



synchronicity of the totality. This phenomenon can be seen to take place in many cases across the continent, for example in the famous "Previ" project in Perú, the "El Paraiso" blocks in Caracas, some of the houses in "El Pedregal" in México City, and even in most paradigmatic cases such as Brasilia. However, this can also be seen in the evolution of certain neighborhoods in Colombian cities. There is, for example, Bachue, Los Alcázares, Niza, and Multicentro in Bogotá; Nueva Floresta, Nuevo Tequendama, Vipasa, in Cali; or Los Libertadores and La Floresta in Medellín. All of which are working-class and middle-class mass-produced neighborhoods built between the 1940's and 1970s whose current physiognomy is radically different from that at the moment of their completion. As mentioned above, most of these projects were sponsored either by the ICT or the BCH and designed by famous local architects.

Almost without exception, users have altered all these projects in order to adapt standardized solutions to individual needs. Although this is an area that has been largely theorized in other contexts, in Colombia there is a frustrating lack of literature on an issue where architects and architectural theorists simply dismiss popular appropriation altogether. Altering or appropriating architecture is simply seen as an unfortunate occurrence, which, in normal cases, threatens architects' creations. However, popular appropriation is considered more than unfortunate if the affected building(s) has been designed by a paradigmatic architect such as Rogelio Salmona. In this case, alterations are scandalous and architects and theorists assert that architecture escapes the sensibility of users, especially if they belong to minority groups.

I will now examine the way Germán Téllez has interpreted the issue of popular appropriation in one project designed by Rogelio Salmona in 1963. In the same year Salmona was commissioned to design various large-scale mass housing projects

such as *La Fundación Cristiana* [The Christian Foundation] and *Las Torres del Parque* [The Park Towers]. In addition to large-scale projects, Salmona was also commissioned to design eight little working-class houses in a neighborhood known as *La Palestina*, in Bogotá. This was a low-cost domestic project, much less ambitious than the previous two, and one in which Salmona was unable to utilize the same construction systems used in larger projects. The eight houses for *La Palestina* can therefore be seen as a common and unambitious housing project designed for the working classes. Apart from the use of a triangular section, with walls that follow down the gradient of the roof reaching the level of the street at the end of the lawn, there are no audacious explorations or impressive results. It could be said, that these houses correspond to what Silvia Arango describes as the typical plan of the ICT/BCH ideal house, which follows the principles of modern architecture. In other words, these houses are rationally designed so as to resolve all the basic, technical, and programmatic requirements, with minimum standards for human occupancy.

As in the majority of mass housing projects in Latin America, users rapidly altered the houses of *La Palestina* after they moved in. This phenomenon reveals the conflict between the architects' homogenizing agenda, and the social realities of users. In other words, the rapid process of adaptation of architectural projects carried out by different users, makes visible the conflict, and incompatibility, between the pedagogical and the performative temporalities of architecture. The former is seen in the architects' project, while the latter is found in the dynamic and creative interaction between peoples and buildings.

In spite of the unambitious character of the project, and the evident lack of engagement with transcendental sociopolitical issues, theorists admire it simply because it was designed by Colombia's most prominent architect. What their analyses demonstrate is that theorists seem to suffer from a kind of myopia that



prevents them from seeing beyond the question of architectural form. Germán Téllez, a Colombian architectural critic and editor of the first book written about the work of Salmona, dedicates only one page to an analysis of the houses of *La Palestina*. However, his analysis does not transgress the limits of a mere description of the project, and takes the form of an unfounded and naïve attack against its inhabitants. As Téllez put it:

Actualmente, las casas de "La Palestina," como era de esperar, son prácticamente irreconocibles por cuanto sus habitantes procedieron prontamente a recuperar mediante intervenciones "impromptu" los volúmenes que Salmona había cortado inesperadamente, regresando gradualmente a las fachadas "tradicionales" de dos pisos, directamente sobre los frentes a la calle. La sofisticación ambiental de una apertura espacial en pirámide inversa para captar más y mejor el cielo, el sol y la lluvia bogotanos escapó a la sensibilidad del grupo social de baja burguesía de "La palestina." En teoría, la aplicación de los aportes formales y ambientales propuestos para la "Fundacion" [this was another mass housing project designed by Salmona almost at the sametime] era ciertamente posible, pero en la práctica, las distancias entre arquitectura y usuarios segúan siendo insalvables. Entonces, la cuestión derivaba a que, además de otorgarle a los usuarios los beneficios de la arquitectura de Salmona, habría también, que educarlos prolijamente en el uso de la misma y coaccionarlos mediante un reglamento cuasi-policivo en el respeto a las formas construidas. Salmona enfrentaba aquí la dicotomía entre la ciudad del arquitecto y la ciudad del ciudadano. [my italics]<sup>193</sup>

[As one could have expected, the houses of "La Palestina" are currently almost unrecognizable. This is because their inhabitants did soon proceed to recuperate through "impromptu" interventions, the volumes that Salmona had unexpectedly cut in order to generate traditional two-storey facades looking directly upon the street. The environmental sophistication of the spatial aperture, given by the inverted pyramid form, which allows to better receive sunlight and rain, but also to observe Bogotá's sky, escaped the sensitivity of the lower bourgeoisie. In theory, the application of the formal and environmental explorations of "The Christian Foundation" was possible. Yet, in practice, the distance between architecture and the user continued to be unbridgeable. Consequently, the point became that *in addition to the benefits given to the users by the architecture of Salmona, it would be necessary to prolifically educate them so as to teach them how to use it.* It would also be necessary to *coerce them through a quasi-police set of rules to respect built forms.* Here Salmona faced the dichotomy between the city of the architect and the city of the citizen. My translation - My Italics.]

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<sup>193</sup> TELLEZ, Germán, *Rogelio Salmona: Arquitectura y poetica del lugar*, Bogotá, Escala Ltda., 1991 p 127

It is clear from the above that architects and architectural theorists fail to deal with the complex reality of Colombian's heterogeneous societies. Instead, Téllez avoids them via the creation of homogenizing narratives detached from the tensions, conflicts, and dynamism generated by the existence of cultural differences, what Bhabha refers to as the performative temporality of the nation. Cultural difference appears to be a menacing concept for most architects because it challenges them to abandon their fascination with mere forms and to radically reassess architectural practices.

Téllez appears to be interested only in the physical qualities of the work of Salmona, but not in the different, contrasting, and perhaps antagonistic historical and psychological experiences of the peoples who inhabit the houses of *La Palestina*. The problem in Téllez could simply be methodological because he does not mark the limits of his theoretical inquiry. If his aim is to carry out an exclusively formal and geometrical analysis then he should clearly establish the limits of his analysis so as to avoid engagement with questions outside architecture. However, he attacks the people —architectural users— and renders them inadequate to live in Salmona's buildings. Such a judgment adds a sociological dimension to the discussion that goes beyond a merely architectural field. But, Téllez does not analyze the crucial social, cultural, political and economic circumstances that determine patterns of individual, or collective, processes of appropriation of space.

His engagement with aspects outside architecture reveals a certain naivete that runs in opposition to recent advances in cultural and Latin American theory as discussed in this thesis. Téllez does not attempt to dismantle hierarchical social or theoretical structures. On the contrary, he opts for reconstructing hierarchical and hegemonic architectural narratives. The call for a forceful elimination of cultural differences is not only alarming but also dangerous. There is no foundation for Téllez's [possibly never more than facetious] demand that a public body like the police be created, along with

a strict set of rules, so as to deter people from carrying out alterations to projects designed by famous architects. One wonders whether Téllez is aware of the danger in his argument. Maybe he does not realize that, as mentioned above, the elimination of differences is equivalent to the elimination of democracy, and that the connotations of such action in a society where the struggle between different sociocultural groups has acquired violent dimensions could be catastrophic.

It could therefore be established that Colombian architectural practices are still imbued with a radical homogenizing agenda. It is also clear that the gap between architecture and recent advances in cultural theory has never been greater. In fact, not only is the gap between the two disciplinary areas greater than ever, but also they appear to be going in opposite directions. While cultural theorists address their efforts to revealing the existence of cultural difference and the complex dynamics of transculturation, architects continue to reject such realities and aim at the homogenization of the build environment. Thus, it is necessary to bridge the existing gap between architecture and other areas of cultural theory so as to develop strategies to deal with complex sociocultural circumstances.

In order to reassess radical theoretical positions such as those found in the work of theorists like Germán Téllez and Benjamín Barney [see chapter one], I will draw attention to the notion of consumption examined in the final section of chapter one. I pointed out that the question of architectural consumption is important precisely because it addresses the performative temporality of architecture. Traditionally, architecture is seen as only concerned with the design and construction of the building, which appear to be the only two instances of architectural production that deserve attention. However, the houses of *La Palestina*, as well as the examples used in chapters one and two, demonstrate that buildings go through other instances



of production when they enter into close contact with users. In this second instance, the user becomes the producer of architecture.

The performative corresponds to the dynamic interaction that occurs between cities, buildings, and heterogeneous peoples. The performative temporality of architecture does therefore confront traditional architectural practices with the creative and dynamic interaction between architecture and its heterogeneous users in a way that contests the authority of pedagogical and homogenizing architectural narratives. As in the case of Bhabha, "the transformational power [of the users of architecture, especially when they are minorities] depends upon their being historically [and geographically] displaced."<sup>194</sup> The agency of architectural users does therefore render inadequate the judgment of architects such as Téllez for it reveals a temporality of architecture that escapes their control, but not the realm of architecture. It is for this reason that a complete reevaluation of architectural practices in Colombia is necessary so as to account for the existence of cultural differences and their creative participation in the construction of the built environment. Instead of striving towards the perilous elimination of differences through forceful homogenization, which as demonstrated in previous chapters is an impossible task, architects should aim at the incorporation of differences in the creation of transcultural architectures.

### **5.3 Cultural Difference and the Architectural Practices of Minorities.**

The argument developed in the previous section serves to challenge the dismissive attitude of architects and theorists towards popular appropriation of buildings that have been designed by architects. The lack of scholarship on a delicate issue such

as the interaction between people and buildings in the Colombian context was thus made clear. In this section I will examine a similar situation. However, instead of paying attention to buildings produced by architects, I will focus on the architectures produced by the minorities themselves as in the case of the so-called *invasiones*. The aim of this section is to reconsider the validity of these kind of architectures via broader cultural debates.

It became clear in chapter three that the notion of hybridization in Bakhtin, Bhabha, as well as in many Latin American theorists, brings to the fore the existence of a multiplying of cultures that share the space of our nations. Different cultures and cultural elements maintain a constant agonistic and interactive relation yet never disappear in a fusion. National culture, as a homogeneous concept, was therefore rendered inappropriate because incommensurable cultural differences cannot be reconciled by means of totalizing pedagogical projects. The notion of hybridization was understood as a theoretical device that makes visible the interaction of several sociocultural groups thereby revealing minority cultural practices. This concept does therefore make audible the voices, needs, and claims of those diverse groups. However, as discussed in chapters three and four, the notion of hybridization has not been fully exploited within architectural circles so as to shed light on the architectural practices of minority groups. When taken beyond the limits of its merely descriptive capacity, hybridization puts under scrutiny totalizing architectural responses to the problems posed by Latin American cities because it reveals the multiplicity of architectural practices, spatial traditions, and antagonistic ways of dwelling characteristic of diverse groups.

Considering that the term hybridization is based on the concept of cultural difference introduced by Homi Bhabha, the latter is also an extremely relevant term for

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<sup>194</sup> BHABHA, Homi, *The location of Culture*, London - New York, Routledge, 1994 p 148

examining contemporary Latin American architectures. This term has nonetheless been insufficiently theorized within architectural circles. One of the few Latin American theorists who has engaged with the question of cultural difference is the Colombian architect Alberto Saldarriaga Roa. In his book *Arquitectura para todos los días: La practica cultural de la arquitectura* [Architecture for Everyday: The Cultural Practice of Architecture], Saldarriaga criticizes homogenizing modernist approaches because they fail to account for the existence of cultural differences. He then continues to affirm that given the heterogeneous conditions of contemporary societies, it is possible to talk about the coexistence of what he calls "entornos simultaneos" [simultaneous contexts] as well as the existence of multiple identities of inhabitable space.<sup>195</sup> Saldarriaga engages with the notion of cultural difference in an unprecedented way within Colombian architectural circles, and his argument shows a striking degree of theoretical sophistication and political awareness. However, he does not develop further his ideas so as to produce a thorough analysis of architectural practices in Colombia. Despite launching a warning about the lack of scholarship in this area,<sup>196</sup> Saldarriaga abandoned this line of inquiry to focus on the study and development of architectural pedagogy in Latin America.

It is thus necessary to take further Saldarriaga's approach to the notion of cultural difference and to explore its applicability within architecture. For it is the only way in which Latin American architects can overcome their reductive views of cultures and cities. One clear example was the case of Benjamín Barney [see chapter one], who, in his criticism of the increasing number of billboards placed in the public space of the city of Cali, Colombia, dismisses the existence of cultural differences, and the

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<sup>195</sup> See: SALDARRIAGA, Alberto, *Arquitectura para todos los Días: La Práctica Cultural de la Arquitectura*, Bogotá, Centro Editorial Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1988 pp 29 - 31

<sup>196</sup> Saldarriaga maintains that: no se ha trabajado con firmeza en la transformación del entendimiento de las diferencias culturales en planteamientos arquitectónicos epistemológicamente definidos. [Work on the transforming the notion of cultural difference



practices of the minorities, which he qualifies as unfortunate.<sup>197</sup> Barney calls for a homogenizing cultural process so as to eliminate differences and produce a utopian, manageable, ordered city. The notion of cultural difference suggests the opposite: that the existence of different cultures is inevitable and irreducible. The coexistence and tension between diverse and often antagonistic social groups will therefore become apparent within the space of cities. Given their irreducibility, architects are left with no other alternative than to face cultural difference and its complex dynamism as a design factor that requires to be translated, to use Salazarriaga's words, into epistemologically defined architectural solutions.

The terms hybridization and cultural difference make visible and problematize the totality of architectural practices that take place within the space of the nation—minority as well as dominant practices. This is important in order to eliminate the traditionally dismissive attitude of architects and architectural theorists towards non-dominant practices and discourses as in the case of Cristián Fernández Cox, and Enrique Browne [see chapter four]. Within Colombian architectural circles, for example, minority architectural practices have been discarded as "non-architecture" on the basis that they are not 'original.' As Peter Kellett points out:

Some critics deny the architectural validity of such hybrid forms. In a study of spontaneous settlements in Medellín, Viviescas [1985, 1989]: "found considerable expressive potential, which might form the basis for a genuine architectural position. However, the circumstances under which these 'barrios' are established prohibit a reference to architecture. Rather, we are referring to the basic, immediate and desperate need for shelter. [...] The spatial configuration of these

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into well epistemologically defined architectural plans, has never been firmly carried out.] Ibid. p 56

<sup>197</sup> See Chapter one. With reference to Cali, Barney says: It was unfortunate that in Colombia, and in Cali in particular, a simple homogenizing process never took place, nor was a new cosmopolitan society uncontaminated by the local and historical traditions ever achieved. This was the result of multiple socio-cultural hybridizations that became more acute due to the arrival of a misunderstood and incomplete modernization. Due to the transculturation between very diverse elements, new combinations appeared, instead of a simple summative by-product. Such combinations generate social confusion and are fertile for the emergence of false identities. At the same time, those false identities gave rise to our deformed taste, and the necessity for every different group to impose its tastes to the rest [my version].

barrios responded not so much to any authentic development initiating from within, but rather to an inevitable (given the material conditions) impoverished superimposition of ideological, aesthetic and environmental values originating in other more affluent parts of the city. [...] The result tends inevitably towards a penurious kitsch."<sup>198</sup>

It is clear from the above that Colombian theorists like Fernando Viviescas dismiss minority architectural practices with the argument that they are derivative. This assumption confirms my view that architects and theorists tend to produce architectural hegemonic narratives that are entirely detached from Colombian sociocultural realities in order to avoid engaging with the complex fragmented nature of Latin American cultures. Here, Viviescas elevates the architectures of higher social classes, or more affluent parts of the city, to use his own words, to the level of originals. Consequently, he tacitly reassembles a taxonomic and hierarchical architectural structure that gives authority to the architectures of certain Colombian social classes. Viviescas seems not to realize the risk of attempting to recreate a referential system with which to judge the validity of non-dominant architectures. As a result of the reconstruction of such hierarchical structures, the totality of Colombian architecture could be seen as derivative, hence inferior, with regard to Euro-American architectures that would reappear as *the* originals. This is because the architectures of those more affluent parts of the city, which Viviescas takes as an allegedly homogeneous referent, are also superimpositions of ideological, aesthetic, and environmental values originating in other more affluent sociocultural, and economic, contexts outside the nation. The notion of architectural hybridization helps dismantle this kind of argumentative linearity and gives political validity to the practices of the minorities, which can no longer be seen as inferior. For the same argument used to disqualify them as architecture also challenges the authority of the assumed architectural system considered referential.

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<sup>198</sup> KELLETT, Peter, "The Construction of Form in the Informal city," in *The Journal of*

Kellett's use of the term of hybridization refers not only the variety of materials with which the houses of rural migrants into the cities are made, but also the different modes of architectural production and dwelling generated by their displacement. He elaborates extensively on the differences with which members of different sociocultural groups, mostly rural people, approach the challenge of urban life as they move into illegal settlements, or "invasiones." These people initiate processes of transformation constantly to adapt their abodes to changing circumstances. Although Kellet himself does not elaborate extensively on the notion of hybridization, it can be understood as a kind of dynamic in-betweenness. In other words, when rural immigrants move into the city, they try to reproduce their own traditional spaces while at the same time aspiring to achieve an urban middle-class status. As a result, not only do their houses but also their way of life change forever: they will never be able entirely to reproduce their rural standards of living in city, nor will they ever be able to achieve the higher social statuses they aspire to. They remain forever in-between. Kellett finds great value in the architectures of the lower classes especially in the way builders reconvert materials, techniques and imagery in order to enter —while, at the same time, always maintaining a way to leave— the space of modern urban life.

The notions of hybridization and cultural difference as developed in cultural theory and as studied in this thesis, not only bring to the fore alternative architectural practices but also provide the tools to theorize them properly. Acknowledging the existence of cultural differences and the processes of hybridization derived from their permanent and unavoidable interaction does therefore lead to the inclusion of minority practices into Latin American architectural studies. It is another aspect of architectural practices that has so far been neglected.



In Colombia, the quantity of architectural solutions produced by rural migrants, or peoples displaced by violence and economic fluctuations who are forced to move into the main cities, is greater than the so-called 'formal' architecture, or that which has been designed by architects. It follows that popular architectures have considerable impact on the morphology and image of Colombian cities. Not only do popular architectures outnumber formal architecture, but they also show, much more clearly than others, the performative dimension of architecture. For, as Kellett demonstrates, architectures produced by migrants and displaced peoples remain in a constant state of adaptation always trying to respond to new socioeconomic circumstances. For this reason, minority architectural practices can no longer continue to be ignored.

In other countries like Brazil and México careful attention is already being paid to the development of "invasiones" and "favelas." In the case of Sao Paulo, for example, where 2'000.000 (approx.) people, out of a total of 5'000.000 (approx.) who inhabit the city, live in favelas. That is equivalent to 40% of the population of the city. It therefore became urgent for local authorities as well as for local architects and students of architecture to create initiatives to analyze, understand, and respond architecturally to these kind of settlements. Their approach is by no means totalitarian, nor is it homogenizing. On the contrary, they have created interdisciplinary groups to study the logic behind the development the favelas, both its urban form as well as that of individual buildings. Another important aspect of their agenda is their interest in making contact with inhabitants to avoid imposing inadequate solutions. Although this project has not run for long enough to prove entirely satisfactory, it demonstrates that a different attitude has stemmed from the collaboration between architects and professionals in other disciplines such as sociologists or anthropologists.

It is clear that the architecture of individual buildings in the favelas, as well as their urban form, does not obey the principles of rational or Euro-American architecture. Perhaps for this reason it was dismissed for many years. However, as studies in other disciplines have revealed, Latin American cultures are complex and heterogeneous formations that do not correspond to rational and structural sociopolitical models. For this reason, it is important to bridge the gap that separates these two disciplinary areas so that the dynamism and sociocultural heterogeneity characteristic of Latin American nations can inform the kind of architecture that architects produce in response to dissimilar and contesting sectors of society.

I have demonstrated that the notion of hybridization not only brings to the fore minority architectural practices, but also endows them with sociopolitical validity. In so doing, processes of architectural hybridization challenge the authority of those architectures that have been considered dominant and referential. In other words, the use of terms such as hybridization and cultural difference within architectural discourses urges the theorization of architectural practices that have been historically neglected for contradicting pedagogically devised notions of nation and national culture, as well as notions of architecture. Apart from making clear that there is a striking lack of scholarship covering the architectural practices of minority groups, this and the previous sections serve to reveal the performative temporality of architecture. That is, the constant process of change to which all architectures are subject, but which is more visible in non-dominant architectures. Change, in this case, is formal but also social, cultural, and political.

Colombian architects and theorists should not underestimate the architectural creativity of the minorities and produce theoretical models to accommodate their practices. This necessarily implies that the binary judgmental structures with which popular architectures have been examined have to be reevaluated. It is therefore my

contention that the rhizomatic models of analysis presented in this thesis are more adequate in order to study minority architectures and their performative nature. At the same time, rhizomatic models could be useful to reassess current policies and architectural practices in order to find alternative solutions to accommodate the existence of contesting non-hegemonic architectures and articulate them with those considered dominant.



## **Conclusion.**

Throughout this thesis, Latin American cultures have been seen as dynamic, heterogeneous, and complex formations with discontinuous histories, whose different components maintain an intangible struggle for survival that often acquires violent dimensions. Cultural theorists have aimed their efforts at revealing those areas of conflict where the very fractures of Latin American cultures can be found, and where diverse and often antagonistic sociocultural groups clash while attempting to negotiate their differences. The complexity of this kind of sociocultural dynamics has been revealed in the fact that there exist numerous areas of tension, not only between Latin America and the cultures of the centers, but also within Latin America itself. Instead of seeing the complex reality of Latin American cultures as negative, or as a problem that requires resolution through the elimination of differences, contemporary cultural theorists see it as an opportunity pregnant with possibilities for the mutual interillumination of cultures. This perspective by no means implies that Latin American theorists are unaware of existing circumstances of power, especially economic, with which hierarchical sociopolitical structures are constructed. Such structures prevent the fluent interaction between cultures from happening on a horizontal field as the notion of interillumination suggests. For this reason, theorists work on the creation of a cultural politics of difference in order to deal with situations of cultural multiplicity and inequality. Rather than aspiring towards the elimination of difference, cultural theory provides the tools to generate spaces for transcultural negotiation within conditions of inequality, capitalism, and globalization. The notions of transculturation, translation and hybridization were presented in this thesis as some of the tools provided by cultural theory in order to study the conditions of contemporary cultures. These notions have also played an important role in the theorization of processes of identity formation in Latin America as well as in the

analysis of the cultural relations between Latin America, the centers, and other peripheries.

In chapter one, the notion of transculturation was examined and redefined so as to denote a rhizomatic cultural condition in which all cultures constantly interact without losing their independent identities. It was argued that the theorists of transculturation—Fernando Ortiz, Ángel Rama, and José María Arguedas—succeeded in overcoming the narrowness of the term acculturation and made visible the way in which cultures constantly interact and affect one another. In so doing, they partially dismantled taxonomic and hierarchical structures that support colonizers' claims for cultural superiority. Yet, due to the fact that they relied heavily on structural and positivist methods of critique, they failed to eliminate those structures completely. For this reason, it became the objective of that chapter to reassess the notion of transculturation via post-structuralist theory in order to respond to the new realities of Latin American cultures. In so doing, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, especially the notion of the rhizome, which lies at the center of their work, was used in order to endow the notion of transculturation with a renewed and more effective critical power. In this way, the linear taxonomy that remained implicit in the way Ortiz, Rama, and Arguedas used the term transculturation between the 1940's and the 1970's was eliminated. For the rhizome is a dynamic structure that remains always in a middle point: it does not have a certain origin, nor does it point towards a specific end, and from that point it establishes connections with other systems even if they are of a different kind. Connectability allows the rhizome to regenerate itself constantly so that it is never finished but always in a process of constant becoming. Consequently, the notion of the rhizome appears to be appropriate to model the constant and intricate processes of interaction between cultures—processes which the notion of transculturation denotes—and it explains why and how cultures can maintain their separate identities despite existing always in relation with other cultures.

Transculturation does therefore represent a cultural condition that affects all cultures and implies the existence of numerous processes of cultural interaction. Thus, the notion of translation examined in chapter two was seen as one of the processes that occurs within, or as a result of, transcultural conditions. The notion of translation stood to explain the process of transfer, displacement, and transformation of culture across different and contesting cultural sites. Various approaches to contemporary translation theory were examined in that chapter leading to the conclusion that the act of translation acquires a subversive capacity in that it unsettles foundational structures based upon the law of origin. The work of Walter Benjamin was taken as an illuminating way to analyze how the result of the act of translation reaches a new position in relation to the original. For Benjamin argues that the original, from which the translation *departs*, is an unfinished entity already inhabited by fractures and differences. Hence, the myth of the original as a pure and completed entity is dismantled. It does therefore lose its authority, and the hierarchical structures according to which the translation, as the result of the act of translation, is inferior and secondary are eliminated. For Benjamin, the translation emerges as a new, and independent, configuration that bears the traces of something anterior but which has been displaced in space and time.

More recently, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida carried out an intertextual reading of Benjamin so as to expand the theoretical potential of his work. In this way, Derrida took Benjamin's ideas on translation further by radically proposing that the translation becomes the original. As Derrida maintains, languages and cultures are all formed by weaves of differences and through intricate interactive processes. Therefore, no language is pure, homogeneous, or complete in itself. As a result, Derrida exerts a complete reassessment of the notion of originality in languages and cultures. Such an understanding of the notion of translation appears appropriate to the study of processes of cultural formation in relations of colonialism where



colonized cultures are seen as secondary translations of an original colonizing culture. For this reason, postcolonial theorists appropriated the notion of translation in order to dismantle hierarchical systems of colonial and postcolonial cultural domination. In the work of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and other postcolonial critics such as Tejaswini Niranjana, translation appears as a deconstructive act of re-writing history yet no longer concerned with the Western universalizing agenda, but with the specific realities and historical experiences of previously colonized peoples. In other words, in colonial relations, the culture of colonized groups is seen as a copy of the culture of the colonizing power that has been translated and imposed upon them. For this reason, the culture of colonized groups is seen as secondary in relation to the colonial locus of enunciation. It was argued, for example, that Latin American cultures did not exist as part of *the* universal history before they were allegedly discovered and colonized. They only appeared as historical beings through the eye of the European. For the notion of universal history is itself a Western construct. Therefore, the notion of translation helps to put such a view under scrutiny, and provides the tools to examine in great detail processes of cultural translation, and to carry out a deconstructive translation/re-writing of history from perspectives different from the European. Thus, the hierarchical structures according to which colonizing cultures are considered original and colonized cultures are seen as copies are reconceived.

Considering that Latin American cities and buildings have been historically constructed through consecutive and conflictive processes of translation, it is clear that the notion of translation requires the attention of architects and architectural theorists.<sup>199</sup> Not only because there have never been appropriate theoretical models

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<sup>199</sup> It became clear in chapter one, when reviewing Ángel Rama's book *La Ciudad Letrada* that the present urban form of most Latin American cities derives from the translation/transmission of an alien system of thought so as to represent in the colonies what

to study Latin American cities and buildings according to our own historical experiences, as demonstrated in chapter four, but also because translation sheds light on the necessity to reevaluate contemporary architectural practices.

Chapter three provides a comprehensive analysis of the notions of hybridity and hybridization within cultural and postcolonial theories. Like translation, hybridization is understood as an unfinalizable process, one of the processes that take place within the cultural condition of transculturation. For this reason, this chapter starts by looking at the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, especially his use of the term heteroglossia. Since Bakhtin's main work was focused on the evolution of languages, as well as writing, heteroglossia is aimed at picturing the existence of a multiplicity of languages that coexist, and constantly interact, within the social field. Heteroglossia, does not represent a process in itself, but suggests the existence of numerous processes always at work between differing and contesting languages. In this sense, the notions of heteroglossia and transculturation are similar. Both denote a condition of multiplicity and dynamism, yet in order to examine in detail the effect of the interaction between the languages of heteroglossia, or the cultures of transculturation, one needs to look at the processes that take place within them. That is why Bakhtin developed a series of different terms, amongst which we find the notion of hybridization, in order to explain how individual languages constantly change. Despite his acknowledgement that languages mostly hybridize spontaneously and unintentionally, he decides to concentrate on what he calls "intentional hybridization," which occurs when an author deliberately mixes various languages of heteroglossia.<sup>200</sup> The hybridizing act does therefore become a politically

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was not possible to achieve in Europe. And, in chapter two, Brasilia was examined as another case of architectural translation in the Latin American context.

<sup>200</sup> In chapter three, heteroglossia was considered to be a condition that pertains both to languages and cultures. It not only denotes the existence of a diversity of languages —as Todorov sustains. As a condition, the term heteroglossia also attempts to encompass the

charged one, for not only is the agency of the author revealed but also the heterogeneity in every language. The effect of hybridization between the languages of heteroglossia is that it challenges the idea that languages are finished and homogeneous systems of codes. It can be seen as a subversive political act in the context of the Soviet nation for it brings to the fore the heterogeneity of Russian sociocultural reality.

Precisely for this reason, other theorists have appropriated the notion of hybridization to examine in great detail the way in which cultures constantly mutate. Sometimes diverse cultures mix and disappear as a result of such mixture, yet, in most cases, hybridization generates changes in the interior of every individual culture without leading to their elimination as separate entities. This is the line of argumentation of the theorist Homi Bhabha who is indebted to Bakhtin's work on the notion of hybridization.

Bhabha's argument is complex. However, given the fact that it is based upon post-structuralist methods of critique, his point of departure is the existence of differences. "Cultural difference" is the term he uses to highlight the existence of diverse sociocultural groups which maintain agonistic relations within the space of the nation. Cultural difference is the opposite of cultural diversity and multiculturalism for it does not suggest that diverse groups have to comply with the rules of a dominant culture. According to Bhabha, the terms cultural diversity and multiculturalism are normally used to describe pedagogically the existence of various cultures within the space of the nation. It is therefore implicit in the notion of multiculturalism that different cultures have to accommodate themselves to the norms imposed by the host nation.<sup>201</sup> In this

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agonistic and endless interaction between different and conflictive worldviews that cannot be thoroughly defined: the languages of heteroglossia.

<sup>201</sup> As Homi Bhabha puts it in his book *The Location of Culture*: "cultural diversity is an epistemological object —culture as an object of empirical knowledge— whereas cultural



way, it obscures the realities of tension and antagonism between those diverse groups. For this reason, the notion of cultural difference is, according to Bhabha, more appropriate. It does not only bring to the fore the existence of differences, but also reveals the complex and agonistic relations always at stake between them.

Hybridization occurs when different sociocultural groups interact. They exchange cultural elements and affect each other in irreversible ways. For the result of the interaction between cultures —Bhabha focuses mainly on colonial relations—, is that cultures will never return to be what they were before they entered into contact with other cultures, nor will they ever be equal to those other cultures. They remain in a state of in-betweenness. However, in-betweenness is not a static state, on the contrary, it suggests dynamism. It can be seen as a kind of rhizomatic middle point from where cultures continue to interact, always renewing themselves, but never completely fusing. Thus, hybridization unsettles the notion of nation as a homogenous and immutable entity that is complete in itself.

It thus becomes clear that the notion of hybridization is not only a descriptive term useful to highlight the existence of cultural, racial, or aesthetic multiplicity. It also carries a greater political and subversive value that contests the traditional binarism with which transcultural relations are approached. Additionally, the concept of hybridization creates theoretical spaces for the study of diverse and antagonistic modes of cultural productivity that result from the coexistence of different

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difference is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity. Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism it gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of unique collective identity." See: BHABHA, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, Routledge, 1994 p 34

sociocultural groups within pedagogically created cultural spaces. This clarification is important when hybridization is taken into architectural debates where it has been used almost exclusively as a descriptive term. It was demonstrated in chapters three and four that the notion of architectural hybridization opens doors for deeper architectural theorization, and even for interdisciplinarity.

It is not my intention to favor anyone of the above notions over the others. They all refer to a common ethos of complex dynamic cultural interaction, but each implies a different process, has a different theoretical potential, and offers different possibilities for criticism. They are also associated with different disciplinary and sociopolitical contexts. The notion of transculturation, for example, is the only one of the three main terms studied throughout this thesis whose "milieu" is Latin America due to the fact that it was created by a Cuban anthropologist and further developed by various Latin American theorists. It has an anthropological background and gains sociopolitical significance within sociological and literary debates. It does therefore carry contextual specificity and political values always in connection with Latin America. None of the other terms examined in this thesis has the same potential. But, while transculturation appears to be appropriate to model a cultural condition that affects all cultures, like the term rhizome itself, it seems to be epistemologically ill-suited to examine what happens at the interior of every culture, nation, language. That is why the notions of translation and hybridization were brought into the discussion. Translation, for its part, carries more physical connotations for it is associated with linguistic and literary practices that connote displacement, transmission, and transgression. In the case of colonial and postcolonial relations, the concept of translation is subversive because it serves to reconsider the structures that view previously colonized cultures as inferior copies, and endow them with political validity as originals in their own right. Hybridization, as explained above, appears to be an appropriate tool to examine the dynamics of change and renewal

that occur at the interior of specific sociocultural contexts due to its biological and semantic backgrounds. All these terms share the view that there exist incommensurable cultural differences that cannot be eliminated. They all carry an important political and subversive potential for they unsettle hierarchical structures of cultural authority, and require contextual specificity. Nonetheless, they also carry different critical connotations that preclude the prevalence of one of them over the others. Instead, it is my contention that in order to preserve their implicit political and critical capacities they require to be used interactively.

Architects and architectural theorists have not been unaware of these debates but, unlike cultural theorists, they seem to take the realities of Latin American cultures in a negative way. It is perhaps for this reason that they feel themselves obliged to find remedies for what is seen as a problem, and try to reconstruct architectural paradigms so as to provide a sense of order and homogeneity —something that has never truly existed, hence could never be truly "re-created." Architecture appears to have an immense power in the construction of a collective sense of order because it is in charge of creating the physical environment which people inhabit and within which transcultural negotiations occur. Such apparent power has traditionally withdrawn architects from the realities of the social sphere. They have believed that through practices like master planning, for example, they could improve the quality of life of Latin American peoples. Architects seem not to have realized that they are ignorant of the heterogeneous nature of Latin American societies and the real needs of their peoples by assuming such uncritical and radical positions.

Thus, architects feel compelled to construct a univocal architectural narrative, which has generally depended only upon the features of a few paradigmatic buildings, which are comparable with hegemonic architectural Euro-American models. That explains why the majority of theorists who elaborate on Latin American architectures



coincide in using the same case studies. This approach runs the risk of positing the architectural value of the buildings that theorists have chosen as referents on the basis of the similarity to buildings that have been designed and built in other contexts. In other words, the values of the so-called "other Latin American architecture" are not inherent in the buildings themselves and in the relation they establish with the sociocultural context where they exist, but in their compliance with pedagogically devised architectural narratives. This reconstitutes a binary logic that categorizes Latin American architectures as an inferior *other*. One of the reasons why this has occurred is because architects and theorists have been unable to connect recent advances in cultural theory directly with architectural practices. They focus on the analysis of the formal attributes of buildings in response to climatic and technological conditions. Such an analysis implies comparison with other buildings. as a result, it appears as if the gap that separates the work of architects and that of cultural theorists were increasing.

Chapter four provides a thorough analysis of the three most sophisticated architectural theses produced in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. More than a straight literary review, these theses were analyzed in the light of the notions studied in previous chapters. It became clear that despite the effort made by Cristián Fernández Cox, Enrique Browne, and Marina Waisman to theorize Latin American architectures, they remained tightly attached to conventional models of architectural criticism. The methods of architectural critique chosen by the above-mentioned architects/theorists are inconsistent with their views on the complexity of Latin American cultures. They operate within a binary system of comparing and contrasting formal features through which a certain linear evolution is reconstructed. In this way, they are able to produce a referential system so as to establish judgmental parameters to evaluate Latin American architectures. The paradox lies on the fact that they agree upon the fact that Latin American architectures are different,

thereby challenging the authority of universalizing discourses, yet they reconstitute totalizing and hegemonic methods of architectural critique via the production of a validating referential system.

In his thesis "appropriated modernity," for example, Cristián Fernández Cox presents a dichotomy between the question of modernity in the broadest sense, and the question of modern architecture in Latin America in particular. Fernández maintains that the notions of modernism and modernization cannot be straightforwardly appropriated from Euro-American contexts for their historical experiences are different from those in Latin America. However, he does not propose clear alternative strategies of modernization that can be *appropriately* applied in Latin American contexts. Quite abruptly he turns to architecture and establishes that in order to respond to the conditions of a modernization that comes from abroad architectural practices have to change. For modernization—which in Fernández's discourse is synonymous of industrialization—leads to the reevaluation of traditional built forms. The paradox lies on the fact that, on the one hand, Fernández calls into question the notions of modernism and modernization because they may not correspond to Latin American sociocultural realities, while, on the other hand, he calls for a non-nostalgic acceptance of the effects that such modernization has on traditional modes of architectural production, which are mainly seen in the formal changes generated by conditions of mass production, speculative housing, and the increasing cost of land and labor.

Fernández's argument leads towards the study of mass domestic architecture. He follows a linear argumentative logic according to which (a precarious) industrialization has motivated rural immigrants to move into cities and, therefore, mass housing had to be produced quickly to resolve the problem of their accommodation. Thus, he argues that neither traditional housing typologies nor imported architectures respond

to the new exigencies of industrialization. Therefore, Latin American architects need to "appropriate" from various sources simultaneously in order to respond to new and ever-changing conditions. The problem lies on the fact that at no point does Fernández thoroughly develop the notion of appropriation. Instead he opts for analyzing the work of a few paradigmatic architects —Luis Barragán, Eladio Dieste, Rogelio Salmona— who have mainly designed private projects commissioned by middle and higher social classes in their own countries. Despite the fact that these architects use local materials and reconfigure traditional typologies in order to provide innovative solutions, they do not provide an answer to the question that Fernández had brought to the fore, namely the problem of mass housing resulting from the arrival of an uneven modernization. It is clear that Fernández's theoretical work is not connected to its architectural analysis.

It was therefore concluded that the notion of translation would provide the necessary tools to develop the idea of appropriation upon which Fernández's thesis is based. For the notion of translation, as explained in chapter two, serves to analyze the process of transfer, displacement, and transformation of different elements across contesting cultural sites. In this way, it would be possible to elucidate in major detail the implications of appropriating architectural referents, techniques, and modes of production from various contexts simultaneously in order to respond to specific environments in Latin America. The notion of translation would also help address questions regarding the social, cultural, and political dimensions of the architectures that result from processes of appropriation. In other words, the use of the theoretical devices examined throughout this thesis contribute to bridging the enormous gap that exists between architectural analysis and cultural theory.

Enrique Browne, for his part, produces an interesting thesis entitled "Another Latin American Architecture." The title suggests that there exist numerous architectures



and that those produced in Latin America belong to a system that involves many. The title itself shatters the linearity of traditional architectural history, and poses a number of questions that challenge hierarchical structures according to which all contemporary architectures derive from Euro-American modernism (although Browne himself seems oblivious to the fact that his thesis has this effect). Unlike Fernández, Browne's thesis does not present a dramatic dichotomy between theoretical and architectural issues, for he has cautiously decided to focus almost exclusively on questions of architecture. Yet he relies heavily on traditional architectural methods of analysis such as critical regionalism that have already proven to be inadequate to deal with the complexity of Latin American contexts. The existence of "another Latin American architecture" can be taken as the result of the coexistence and interaction of numerous architectures within the specific conditions of our continent. As the title of his thesis suggests, what gives value to these architectures is precisely the notion of "otherness" that qualifies them as differential within a, possibly non-hierarchical, system of multiplicity. This is only a possibility because Browne does not engage with the question of social, cultural, or political hierarchy. Despite the intrinsic potential of the notion of otherness, Browne does not explore its implications, on the contrary, it is taken only literally.

In spite of the fact that Browne's thesis tacitly implies that the question of Latin American architecture is dynamic and manifold, the structure of his analysis takes the form of a linear descriptive history of the different styles and movements that took place in Latin America throughout the twentieth century. He describes and celebrates buildings that use a modern architectural language, or which combine local materials with modern features to respond to local conditions. In his book *Other Architecture in Latin American*, Browne talks about fusions, combinations, mixtures, all of which give rise to architectures that differ from Euro-American models despite bearing traces of them. Yet, the reasons why they are different are not discussed or examined.

Another problem found in the work of Browne was his selection of mostly paradigmatic buildings across the continent in order to exemplify the characteristics of "another" Latin American architecture. Although this appears to be a common mistake amongst Latin American architectural theorists, in the case of Browne it is particularly problematic because what could be intended as an anti-hegemonic postulate at a global level in fact reconstitutes a hegemonic system within the Latin American context. In other words, the possibility of understanding Browne's idea of the existence of other Latin American architectures as participating in a rhizomatic, hence anti-hegemonic, system that involves many other architectures, is jeopardized by the implicit reconstruction of a referential architectural system based upon an exclusive selection of examples.

For this reason, it was concluded that the notion of hybridization might complement Browne's theoretical standpoint. The notion of hybridization corresponds with the idea that Latin American architectures result from a complex and dynamic interaction between different elements that coexist within specific sociocultural contexts. Hence, it introduces a larger political dimension to the discussion breaking the linearity of Browne's discourse, and bringing to the fore other non-dominant forms of architectural production. If another Latin American architecture were seen via the notion of hybridization, a selection of paradigmatic examples would no longer be satisfactory because hybridization makes visible the whole range of architectural practices and their different dynamic identities. It would also imply that Latin American architectures could not be theorized in one single stroke as Browne does, that is, picking examples across the continent in order to support a theory applicable to the whole continent. The notion of hybridization implies that contextual specificity is required in order to analyze Latin American architectures. As a result, architectural analysis would become more politically effective, and would also transgress the limits of merely formal studies.

The case of Carlos Rueda is similar to Browne. Rueda engages directly with the notion of hybridization, but makes the same mistake in the sense that he concentrates merely on the formal analysis of certain paradigmatic buildings thereby reducing hybridization only to its descriptive capacity. If Rueda took into consideration the broader implications of the notion of hybridization, his work could complement that of Browne for they both seem to operate within the same critical frame.

Although I have criticized Latin American architects and architectural theorists for exclusively concentrating on the analysis of finished buildings, it by no means implies that this type of work is implicitly wrong. It depends on the demarcation of the limits of the inquiry. Ricardo Castro, for example, uses the notion of syncretism in order to study the work of Rogelio Salmona. Castro deliberately sets aside complex cultural debates and works carefully on the superimposition of forms and referents in the buildings of Salmona. In this way, the notion of syncretism, which I have also criticized due to the fact that it denotes a sense of finitude, appears to be appropriate because Castro refers to buildings as finished objects somewhat detached from their sociopolitical dimension. Taking the work of Alejo Carpentier as a point of departure, Castro discusses the multiplicity of referents that are mixed in Salmona's buildings. Such a mixture, Castro argues, creates a marvelous architectural reality, and generate a sense of wonder. Castro's work on Salmona is a clear example of how the specific demarcation of the limits of a theoretical inquiry validates formal architectural analysis, and even the use of a term that, in other context, would have proven to be inappropriate. However, it remains unclear whether or not Castro's judgement is based upon modern architectural paradigms such as unity, order harmony and proportion in which case his argument suffers from the same problems found in Fernández and Browne's work: the celebration of buildings that correspond to the hegemonic and universalizing principles of modern architecture. I did also



make clear my disagreement with Castro over the issue of whether referents taken from diverse contexts do not really fuse. As I argued above with regard to the notion of hybridization in Canclini, a view which in this case also applies to the work of Salmona, despite the masterly arrangement of diverse referents in a building, different elements never really fuse, nor are their differences thoroughly reconciled. On the contrary, it is my contention that instead of fusing or mixing into a new entity within the building, different elements are put in a situation where the tension between them is highlighted, and differences become even more dramatic. I do acknowledge, however, that the tense coexistence of different, and perhaps antagonistic, elements in the finished architectural object could be precisely the basis of what Castro refers to as the sense of wonder produced by Salmona's buildings. Although Castro's work appears to be theoretically sound, it would also run the risk of conveying the wrong message in an academic environment where architectural students might lose sight of issues beyond form. This is due to the fact that Castro's approach does nonetheless reduce architectural debates to a formal analysis. Considering that architecture goes beyond mere forms, it would therefore be necessary to clearly note that Castro's is a highly advanced theoretical effort, and that there is a deliberate demarcation of the limits of architectural analysis.

It becomes clear from the analysis of these theses that there still exists the need for architects and architectural theorists to reconstitute a sense of order and referential systems of judgment. The latter applies not only to the way that cities and buildings are conceived, but also to the way that they are theorized. Marina Waisman was the only theorist whose unfortunately unfinished work moved towards the dismantling of such paradigms. Her notion of symbiosis appears to be informed by advanced methods of critique more in keeping with the realities of Latin American cultures. She explores the way in which different and contesting architectures (central and

peripheral) interact, giving rise to a "de-centered" architecture.<sup>202</sup> The use of the word de-centered allows Waisman to talk about an architecture that is not central, but which cannot be qualified as peripheral, thus avoiding the negative connotations of the second term. Unfortunately her work was truncated by her sudden death and has not been taken forward nor tested on the ground.

In chapter five, the concepts that were examined and the theoretical models that were created, throughout this thesis were used in order to analyze three cases in the context of Colombia. As a result, an enormous deficit of scholarship on different areas of architecture was revealed. The analysis of the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya*, for example, brought to light the fact that despite complying with hegemonic architectural narratives the museum occludes the historic and current circumstances that surround *Quimbaya* people. Consequently, the political validity of the building was placed under scrutiny. The ambivalence of the narratives that endorse Salmona's architecture with authority is made visible. As a result, not only is the architecture of the museum called into question, but also the validity of the concept of the museum itself. The study of the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya* demonstrates that the theoretical models created in this thesis connect the analysis of buildings with larger sociocultural debates revealing areas of architectural practice (design) that are commonly overlooked. In addition, it was also proved that further architectural exploration is necessary so as to be able to produce more adequate spaces in response to the complex and fragmented realities of Colombian peoples. The second case proves that the same lack of engagement with sociopolitical issues that prevents architects from responding to specific situations beyond materiality reduces the efficacy of architectural criticism. In his analysis of the houses of *La Palestina*, Germán Téllez appears to be theoretically incapable of dealing with the dynamism and creativity of heterogeneous peoples who alter the architecture of Rogelio

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<sup>202</sup> Waisman uses the Spanish term: "descentrada."

Salmona in order to adapt it to their own individual circumstances. Téllez feels therefore compelled to forcefully reconstruct a hegemonic judgmental structure with which to radically dismiss popular appropriations and validate the superiority of Salmona's architecture. In the third case, Fernando Viviescas uses a similar argument in order thoroughly to discard the architecture of the minorities. Viviescas qualifies minority architectures as derivative: as being a translation of the architectures of more affluent parts of the city. He seems to be oblivious to the fact that his argument reimposes a hierarchical structure according to which the entirety of Colombian architecture could be discarded for being a translation of architectures produced in other (more affluent) sociocultural contexts. Throughout chapter five, the notions of transculturation, translation and hybridization were used to make visible areas that have not been theorized. As shown in chapter four, this is due to the fact that traditional methods of architectural critique in Latin America have not been prepared to deal with the complexity of conditions of transculturation. Terms like transculturation, translation and hybridization return political validity to the architectural practices of the minorities and provide architects with the tools to theorize them properly. Additionally, these terms reveal numerous issues that need to be taken into consideration both in order to interpret buildings and to produce them. It was therefore concluded that the theoretical models devised in this thesis allow architects to visualize those aspects of their practices that have so far remained invisible, provide tools to theorize them properly and encourage further architectural exploration.

The question remains as to whether there is a way to take the heterogeneous, fragmented, and complex dynamic nature of Latin American cultures in a positive way rather than as a kind of pathology that has to be remedied through architecture. A question to which I reply, without hesitation, yes, there is. Yet, it would be necessary to rethink contemporary Latin American architectural practices.



## **Rethinking Practices.**

Cultural and postcolonial theory, as well as post-structuralist methods of critique, have been used throughout this thesis in order to reveal the shortcomings of recent Latin American architectural theories and practices. It was demonstrated that the three most notorious architectural theses produced in Latin America during the past twenty or thirty years are ill-equipped to undertake the task of describing and analyzing contemporary architectural practices in our continent. It was also demonstrated that notions such as transculturation, translation, and hybridization, which have had an immense repercussion in contemporary cultural theory due to their intrinsic political and subversive values, have, in architecture, been reduced to merely descriptive tasks. These notions were put to work in the final chapter of this thesis in order to open up new areas of architectural inquiry, some of which have been neglected precisely due to the lack of broader critical engagement in existing Latin American architectural discourses.

One of the most notorious topics brought to the fore in this thesis, and which has scarcely been explored in previous works, relates to the existence of cultural difference and its effect on cities and buildings. It was argued that the dynamic interaction between different and often antagonistic cultural and social groups has an effect on the built environment. For this reason, the aim of architecture can no longer be the production of finished spatial objects suitable only for homogeneous imagined communities. On the contrary, the existence of cultural difference generates permanent processes of transformation, re-codification, and reevaluation of architecture that result from the interaction of diverse and unequal cultural and social groups. This effect makes visible what I have called the performative temporality of architecture based upon the work of Homi Bhabha. The performative temporality of architecture requires that we understand cities and buildings not as static products

taken at a definite moment in their history, but in relation with the entirety of social, cultural, political, and economic practices to which they are inherently attached with political specificity. Political specificity is crucial for it differentiates the alternative theoretical models created here from previous theses such as critical regionalism that attempted to cover all the peripheries at once, or that of theorists like Browne and Fernández who theorized the entire continent in one stroke.

Larger political engagement implies that traditional architectural practices have to be reassessed. Totalizing practices as well as the construction of hegemonic narratives do not match the complex and dynamic cultural realities of Latin American nations. Architects, planners, and authorities need to develop strategies to respond to the heterogeneity of Latin American cities instead of continuing to develop homogenizing projects. The theories and examples examined in the thesis make clear that cities are designed to provide the physical spaces where diverse cultures and social groups interact, though often maintaining antagonistic relations. However, it has also been made clear that cities become affected as a result of such interaction, and by the constant displacement of living masses, economic fluctuations, natural disasters, and other similar phenomena.

For this reason, in the case of Colombia, for example, practices such as the “Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial” need to be sharply questioned. In chapter one, the notion of the POTs was criticized because it clearly overlooks the numerous cultural differences that share the space of Colombian cities. However, the POTs also fail to respond to the speed with which urban changes occur in Colombian cities. History proves that Colombian, and most Latin American cities change dramatically every five years. An “invasión” or “favela” may suddenly appear within the city as an illegal formation, and five years later may have become an official settlement serviced by the municipality. Colombian cities have seen entire residential neighborhoods

transform into commercial or recreational zones in less than five years. It takes only a few years for new avenues, bridges, or shopping malls to be built and to change the morphology and image of the city. Colombian cities are affected by the sudden movement of peoples displaced by guerrilla wars, natural disasters, or economic fluctuations that drive peoples to centers of production. Constant economic fluctuations also reshape Colombian cities by creating new centers of commercial activity. These are unpredictable occurrences that POTs cannot foresee. It is therefore incomprehensible that the POTs have a validity of twenty to sixty years conditioning the growth of entire cities.

It is by no means suggested that strategies to control the growth and development of the city ought to be eliminated altogether, but they need to be revised in the light of more comprehensive methods of analysis and critique that reveal the complex reality of the societies that inhabit Colombian cities. POTs, for example, should no longer be the result of extensive studies based upon the analysis of abstract statistics and other data carried out by architects, planners and some municipal officials detached from the daily realities of the people. POTs should instead be permanent interdisciplinary committees that constantly regulate, control and survey cities. Permanent committees would be able to respond to the above-mentioned conditions more efficiently. In other words, instead of chronologically precise plans that determine and condition the growth of entire cities or parts of cities, it would be necessary to create design strategies whose different dimensions are interconnectable and susceptible to constant modification in keeping with the realities of urban growth. That permits immediate reaction to abrupt and unexpected changes, rather than implementing corrective measures after problems have occurred and may be irreparable.



Rethinking architectural practices such as the POTs does ultimately lead to the production of different architectures. Or, in other words, to the production of alternative architectures intrinsically associated with the specific political realities of the contexts where they are inserted and with the historical experiences of the peoples to which they are addressed. For this reason, I have maintained that the theories examined in this thesis are not only interpretative tools to describe and analyze contemporary Latin American architectures because they also provide the necessary tools to challenge conventional architectures.

It is necessary that architectural practices do not occlude situations of oppression, inequality, displacement, and the like. On the contrary, architecture could be used as a means to make visible the fractures that exist in Latin American cultures and the whole range of differential and contesting identities with their differing historical experiences, modes of dwelling, and ways of conceiving urban life. This implies that architects ought to carry out a continued exploration of forms, spatialities, and technologies given the fact that univocal architectural approaches to Latin America have proven to be inadequate. In other words, architects should permit the dynamism and sociocultural multiplicity characteristic of our continent to inform the kind of architectures with which we respond to the Latin American peoples instead of occluding that reality by implementing synthetic and homogenizing responses. Consequently, it would no longer be possible to generalize about Latin American architecture for there are already many. There are, and have always been, numerous Latin American architectures. In this way, foundational and unidirectional architectural narratives would be shattered, and the authority of dominant architectures challenged, multiplying the possibilities for further exploration and introducing political validity into such practices.

The theories examined throughout this thesis bring about countless possibilities to rethink architectural practices. I have mentioned only a few that concern Colombia in particular. However, it is also necessary to examine in more detail questions related to mass housing, the "favelas," or the architecture of paradigmatic buildings, and also at methods of architectural education. Throughout this thesis I have tried to cover as many aspects as possible: cultural and architectural theory, cities and buildings, specific cases of mass housing (legal as well as illegal) were analyzed along with some paradigmatic buildings such as the *Museo Cultural Quimbaya*. However, the theoretical model provided in this thesis is far-reaching, and its applicability is vast, making it impossible for me to cover the totality of its potential applicability. This is perhaps the conclusion of a first stage in the continued research into contemporary Latin American architectures. Future stages will provide opportunities to put to work the theoretical model created here so as to examine other specific cases in Colombia as well as across the continent. This thesis is a vehicle to demonstrate that engagement with issues outside traditional architectural discourses adds a larger political ingredient to architecture and opens a vast understudied territory that requires the attention of Latin American architects and cultural theorists.

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