The Problem of "Misplaced Ideas" Revisited: Beyond the "History of Ideas" in Latin America

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> The change that has come over this branch of historiography in the past two decades may be characterized as a movement away from emphasizing history of thought (and even more sharply, "of ideas") toward emphasizing something rather different, for which "history of speech" or "history of discourse," if not unproblematic or irreproachable, may be the best terminology so far found
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> J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*[1]

In 1973, Roberto Schwarz published a paper that profoundly marked a generation of thinkers in Latin America: "As idéias fora do lugar" ("Misplaced Ideas").[2] It was originally intended to provide a theoretical framework for "progressivist" authors to counter the influence of nationalistic tendencies that, in the 1960s and 1970s, were particularly noticeable among the leftist political organizations.[3] Yet, the concept of "misplaced

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[1] J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[2] Schwarz, "As idéias fora do lugar," *Estudos Cebrap* 3 (1973), reprinted in *Misplaced Ideas* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), 19–32. For an account of the article's reception and the debates it generated, see José Murilo de Carvalho, "História intelectual no Brasil: a retórica como chave de leitura," *Topoí* 1 (2000): 123–52.

[3] See Schwarz, "Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964–1969," *Misplaced Ideas*, 126–59.

ideas" soon proved especially productive for theorizing the problematic development of ideas in Latin American history. Schwarz's text thus became the fundamental point of reference for those in the field who intended to question the hitherto predominant paradigms in cultural and literary critique, which were mostly inspired by the Romantic-nationalistic tradition. Notwithstanding, a quarter of a century later, Schwarz's original contribution in this regard needs to be reassessed. In the course of the last twenty-five years, the apparent loss of the national states' centrality helped to reveal the inherent complexity of the processes of cultural exchange hidden behind a perspective that still tended to conceive of them exclusively in terms of inter-national relationships. Furthermore, a series of new developments in the disciplines specifically dedicated to analyzing those kinds of exchange processes compels us to reconsider some of the implicit assumptions in Schwarz's concept and reformulate it.

The object of this paper is to explore, in the light of the new realities of the last *fin-de-siècle*, new perspectives regarding the dynamic of ideas and cultural exchange in peripheral areas (of which Latin American is only a particular case), utilizing the new conceptual tools provided by the recently developed disciplines and theories in the field. Ultimately, the present work intends to raise a broader, epistemological, issue, whose relevance exceeds the local context. As it shows, the shortcomings in Schwarz's theory spring from a crude linguistic view, which is inherent in the "history of ideas," that reduces language exclusively to its referential function. A more precise distinction of the different levels of language will thus help to reveal aspects and problems that Schwarz's perspective obliterates. Yet, as this paper also intends to demonstrate, Schwarz's original intellectual project may be disentangled from its linguistic premises and recovered for cultural critique. Applied in a new way, it can still provide a theoretical framework to comprehend the intricacies of the processes of cultural exchange, and, more specifically, the problematic dynamics of ideas in Latin America that Schwarz intended to analyze.

ON PLACES AND NON-PLACES OF IDEAS

In order to understand the sense of Schwarz's notion of "misplaced ideas" we must place it within the conceptual framework in which it emerged. With it, Schwarz aimed to translate into a cultural key the postulates of the so-called "dependency theory," the core of which took shape in the "Semi-

nar on Marx," organized in São Paulo in the early 1960s (and in which Schwarz participated). As is well known, that theory intended to refute the "dualistic" approaches that viewed the peripheral areas as vestiges of a precapitalistic world that tends historically to disappear. The nations in this area would thus replicate the same pattern of linear development of central countries. On the contrary, dependency theory postulated the existence of a complex dynamic between the center and the periphery, the two representing instances *inherent* in capitalist development, thus forming a single, interconnected system. According to it, the "periphery" was a creation of the capitalistic system; its character as such was determined not by its (pre-capitalistic) origins, but by its present position within the world economic order.[4] The paradoxical consequences of modernization in the region thus made manifest contradictions that, rather than being "local anomalies," were intrinsic to the very capitalistic system. "From this perspective," Schwarz later stated, the "Brazilian scene sheds a revealing light on the canonical, metropolitan notions of civilization, progress, culture, liberalism, etc."[5]

Schwarz's specific contribution lies in perceiving the potential contained in the postulates of the dependency theory, hitherto applied exclusively to the realm of economic and social history, for the ambit of literary criticism and cultural theory. This allowed him to dislocate the romantic-nationalist schemes that had shaped the histories of Brazilian literature, portraying it as the epic of the progressive self-discovery of a nation oppressed under the web of "imported" categories, alien to local reality.

Schwarz's ultimate goal was to refute the nationalist belief that it was

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[4] This perspective triggered a work of historiographical revision that profoundly altered our images of nineteenth-century Brazil. The most important studies undertaken by this group of thinkers revolved around the attempt to demonstrate that slavery in Brazil played a functional role in capitalism. The key works on the subject are: Celso Furtado, *Formação económica do Brasil* (Río de Janeiro: Editora Fundo de Cultura, 1959), and Fernando H. Cardoso, *Capitalismo e escravidão no Brasil Meridional. O Negro na sociedade escravocrata do Rio Grande do Sul* (Río de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1977) (originally published in 1962). A good summary of dependency theory can be found in Ruy Mauro Marini and Márgara Millán, eds., *La teoría social latinoamericana. Textos escogidos. Tomo II: La teoría de la dependencia* (México: UNAM, 1994), and Cristobal Kay, *Latin American Theories of Development and Underdevelopment* (London: Routledge, 1989). For a critical review of that theory, see Stuart B. Schwartz, "La conceptualización del Brasil pos-*dependentista*: la historiografía colonial y la búsqueda de nuevos paradigmas," in Ignacio Sosa and Brian Connaughton, eds., *Historiografía latinoamericana contemporánea* (Mexico City: CCYDEL-UNAM, 1999), 181–208.

[5] Schwarz, "A nota específica" (1998), *Seqüências brasileiras. Ensaios* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1999), 153.

enough for Latin Americans to get rid of their "foreign garments," a set of categories and ideas imported from Europe and submissively repeated by the local, European-minded elite, to find their "true, inner essence."[6] Following the tenets of dependency theory, Schwarz maintains that there is no such thing as a "Brazilian national culture" preceding Western culture. The former not only is the result of the expansion of the latter, but also constitutes an integral part of it: "in aesthetics, like in politics," he stated, "the Third World is an organic part of the contemporary scene."[7] In the realm of culture, a complex dialectic operates between the 'alien' and the 'native', just as it does in politics and society. Ultimately, referring to liberal ideas in Latin America, which are the ones at the heart of this debate, he asserted that "it does not help to insist on their obvious falsehood"; our object should rather be "to understand their dynamics, of which this falsehood is a true component."[8]

If it is true that the adoption of foreign concepts generates serious distortions, the point, for Schwarz, is that conceptually distorting their reality is not something that Latin Americans can avoid. On the contrary, it is precisely in these distortions, in always designating local reality with improper names, that the specificity of Brazilian, indeed of Latin American culture resides. "They [Brazilians] are recognizably Brazilian," he stated, "in their particular distortion."[9]

This concept actually maintains an ambiguous relationship with the postulates of dependency theory. Although it is perfectly compatible with them, the former does not necessarily follow from the latter. Dependency theory's mere translation from the realm of politics and economy to that of culture produced torsions in that theory. In Schwarz's case, his fundamentally anti-essentialist stance hinged on the argument that representations always entail a given theoretical framework. And, in Latin America, such a framework is provided by systems of thinking originally alien to the native reality. Hence, for Schwarz, Latin Americans are condemned to "copying,"

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[6] "In 1964," he asserted later, "the two nationalist tendencies [the right-wing and the left-wing] were alike in hoping to find their goal by eliminating anything that was not indigenous. The residue would be the essence of Brazil" (Schwarz, "Nationalism by elimination," *Misplaced Ideas*, 4).

[7] Schwarz, "Existe uma estética do terceiro mundo?" (1980), *Que horas são? . Ensaios* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 28.

[8] Schwarz, "Misplaced Ideas: Literature and Society in Late-Nineteenth-Century Brazil," *Misplaced Ideas*, 28. "To know Brazil," he continues, "was to know these displacements, experienced and practiced by everyone as a sort of fate, for which, however, there was no proper name, since the improper use of names was part of its nature" (*Ibid*).

[9] Schwarz, "Misplaced Ideas," *Misplaced Ideas*, 25.

that is, to thinking equivocally, using categories inevitably ill-suited to the reality they intend to represent.

This last affirmation, however, would not be equally evident even for many of the followers of dependency theory. Immediately after the publication of the article "Misplaced Ideas," the journal *Cadernos de Debate* published a work by Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco—a well-known student of the slavery system in Brazil—whose very title is illustrative of its content: "As idéias estão no lugar" ("Ideas are in place").[10] Drawing also from the premises of dependency theory, Carvalho Franco systematically refused not only the idea that slavery was imcompatible with capitalistic expansion, but also that liberal ideas were "ill-adjusted" to nineteenth-century Brazil.[11] To Carvalho Franco, liberal ideas were neither more nor less alien there than were the pro-slavery currents. Both constituted integral parts of the complex reality of Brazil. It cannot even be said that they were mutually incompatible: like capitalistic profit-seeking and slavocratic forms of production, individualistic bourgeois attitudes and clientelism (paternalistic relationships) were so intimately imbricated in Brazil that they became barely distinguishable.[12] As she states, with the concept of "misplaced ideas," Schwarz in fact wound up by relapsing into the kind of dualism he intended to counter, that is, in the postulate of the existence of "two Brazils." To the "artificial" Brazil of ideas and politics (which was liberal), Schwarz would oppose some "true," social, Brazil (which was slavocrat).

> We would have, on the one hand, bourgeois, European reason obsequiously adopted for nothing, and, on the other hand, Brazilian favor and slavery incompatible with them. Holding this position is, *ipso facto*, abstractly to separate their terms, in the indicated fashion, thus losing sight of the actual processes of ideological production in Brazil.[13]

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[10] Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco, "As idéias estão no lugar," *Cadernos de Debate* 1 (1976): 61–64.

[11] Carvalho Franco, *Homes livres na ordem escravocrata* (São Paulo: USP, 1997), originally published in 1969.

[12] "In my brief remarks on the genesis and practical meaning of *favor*," she said in connection with her above-mentioned work, "I tried to show how bourgeois ideas were one of their pillars—formal equality—, *favor* does not 'enter' Brazil, as it were, from outside, but it *emerges* in the process of the constitution of the market relations, in which it is inherent" (Carvalho Franco, "As idéias estão no lugar," *Cadernos de debate* 1 [1976]: 63).

[13] Carvalho Franco, "As idéias estão no lugar," *Cadernos de debate* 1 (1976): 62.

Ultimately, Carvalho Franco's contention raised a broader methodological issue. Ideas, for her, were never "misplaced" due to the mere fact that, if they can socially circulate in a given milieu, it is because they serve some purpose in it, that is, because there are conditions in it for their reception. The opposition between "ideas" and "realities" on which Schwarz's theory rests would thus be false; the two terms are never completely alien to each other.

Carvalho Franco's criticism, therefore, points to the core of Schwarz's argument, since she builds her premises on his postulates but reaches opposite conclusions. This criticism would haunt Schwarz throughout his subsequent career, determining the successive reformulations of his theory. As Paulo Arantes remarks, the accusations against Schwarz of remaining within a "dualistic" frame would be repeated until the present.[14] And although his biographer rejects this accusation, he admits that the consistency of the criticism in this regard cannot be due merely to a misunderstanding.

At this point, we must consider the fact that Schwarz's formulation of the issue contains something of a paradox: the expression "misplaced ideas" is actually not completely consistent with the argument it intends to describe. Schwarz's original objective was, precisely, to reject that topic. Indeed, as he demonstrated, the accusation of "political unrealism," that certain ideas were "misplaced" in Latin America, was an easy means of disqualifying the adversary's arguments. Taken literally, this is untenable: obviously, nobody could have ever ignored the fact that, for example, constitutions are not all equally viable at all times and places. The contested point emerged at the moment of determining what, in each case, was "misplaced," and in which sense it was so; and, as is predictable, the misplaced ideas were, in all the cases, those of the others. Furthermore, they also had reactionary implications: typically, the "unrealistic" people have always been those who held the most progressivist ideas of their time. As Schwarz states, "in 1964 the right-wing nationalists branded Marxism as an alien influence, perhaps imagining that fascism was a Brazilian invention."[15] The spread of the topic is, ultimately, incomprehensible if detached from the ideological functions it performed.

This also explains Carvalho Franco's reaction: with his formula, Schwarz would lend credibility to the affirmations that Marxists ideas (like

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[14] Paulo Eduardo Arantes, *Sentimento da dialética na experiencia intelectual brasileira. Dialética e dualidade segundo Antonio Candido e Roberto Schwarz* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1992).

[15] Schwarz, "Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination," *Misplaced Ideas*, 4.

liberal ones in the nineteenth century) were alien to Brazilian reality, exotic imports that were, in sum, "misplaced" in Brazil. Schwarz would thus plainly relapse into the topic, with the potentially reactionary consequences it has always implied. For Carvalho Franco, the very attempt to determine which ideas are "misplaced" and which are not is absurd. For her, both liberal and pro-slavery, Marxist and fascist ideas, were, in that country, "in place"; that is, they were integral parts of Brazilian reality, since, otherwise, having no conditions of reception in local reality, they could have not circulated there. In this regard, as we will see, Carvalho Franco's view is much more consistent than Schwarz's. However, although her criticism is certainly justified, it misses the core of the latter's argument.

For Schwarz, it was not a matter of debating which ideas were "misplaced" and which were not, since, as he stated, all of them were misplaced. Both fascist and Marxist ideas, liberal and pro-slavery ones, were "imported," alien to Brazilian reality. The core of his criticism of Silvio Romero— whom he considered the best representative of the romantic-nationalist views in literature—lay, precisely, in his denunciation of the illusion that ideological maladjustments were avoidable in the region. Romero, he said, believed that it was simply a matter of no longer copying, so that "all the effects of 'exoticism' . . . would vanish, as if by magic."[16] Thus, "by suggesting that imitation is avoidable," Romero "locks the reader into a false problem."[17]

Carvalho Franco's and Schwarz's proposals ultimately represent two different ways of escaping from the topic. The former, by means of emphasizing the reality of ideas (their actual conditions of possibility); the latter, by stressing not the maladjustments between ideas and realities, as Carvalho Franco interprets, but those maladjustments in Brazilian reality itself. For Schwarz, it was not that there existed "two Brazils" in mutual opposition (one fictive: that of ideas, and one real: that of society), but that the most specific feature of Brazilian society (and, by extension, its culture) is to be permanently maladjusted with respect to itself, precisely because of its peripheral-capitalistic character.

For Carvalho Franco, this concept of Schwarz merely renames the old dualistic opposition between two logics of development, two conflicting modes of production: one properly capitalistic, another "peripheral-capitalistic." However, for Schwarz it is not a matter of two diverse logics, but of one and the same logic—the striving for profit—that operates, nevertheless, in different ways in the diverse regions. While in the center it tends

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[16] Ibid., 11.
[17] Ibid., 15.

to generate conditions proper to advanced-capitalistic societies, in the periphery it perpetuates underdevelopment and reproduces pre-capitalistic patterns of social relationships.

Schwarz's view is thus more sensitive to the peculiarities resulting from the peripheral character of local culture, which in Carvalho Franco's perspective seems to become dissolved into the idea of the unity of Western culture. Yet, it does not resolve the original question about the alleged maladjustments of Marxist ideas in Brazil—the fact that the fascist ones are no less maladjusted seems merely a poor consolation.[18] In principle, Schwarz's position leads to skepticism regarding the viability of any emancipatory project in the region. The problems that such an issue poses to him can be observed in his "Respostas a *Movimento*" (1976).

Prompted by an interviewer's question whether "a naive reading of your essay 'As idéias fora de lugar' [could] lead to the conclusion that any ideology, even a libertarian one, would be out of place in peripheral countries," Schwarz answers:

> Ideas are in place when they represent abstractions of the process they refer to, and it is a fatal consequence of our cultural dependency that we are interpreting our reality with conceptual systems created somewhere else, whose basis lies in other social processes. In this sense, libertarian ideas themselves are often ideas out of place, and they only stop being so when they are reconstructed on the basis of local contradictions.[19]

Both the question and the answer are deeply significant. In fact, with his inquiry the interviewer points out the above-mentioned paradoxical consequence in Schwarz's concept: its affinities with the nationalist view which, in principle, leads to condemning the Marxist ideas of its author as "alien" to local reality. His answer clarifies the point, but raises a new aporia. As we can imply from it, not *all* ideas in Latin America are, always and irremediably, out of place, as he affirmed in his criticism of Romero. On the contrary, he affirms that they could eventually be rearticulated and made to fit local reality. Such an answer, besides marking a new—and always problematic—confluence with the Nationalists, who had seldom refused the need to "adapt" foreign ideas to local realities, leads him back—this time, without

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[18] Here we can hear the echoes of the debates in Russia in 1905 regarding the possibilities of socialism in the periphery of capitalism.

[19] Schwarz, "Beware of Alien Ideologies," *Misplaced Ideas*, 39.

escape—to the search for the distinction between ideas that were (or became) well-adjusted to Brazilian reality and those that did not. Predictably, the maladjusted ones will always be the other's.[20] In any case, thus posed (in its "weak" formulation, shall we say), Schwarz's concept only updates the old anthropophagic dilemma; it does not provide any original contribution to cultural theory in the region.

Regardless, the point is that this affirmation is not really consistent with Schwarz's own concept. It actually dislocates all of his previous argument. If thus reformulated, there is no way to approach the question of "misplaced ideas" without assuming the existence of some kind of "inner essence," which "foreign" ideas would fail to represent appropriately. Even more seriously, and this is the point in which Carvalho Franco's perspective looks more consistent than Schwarz's, this presupposes, besides, the possession of a description of that inner reality which is not mediated by concepts, and eventually allows us to identify and evaluate the respective degrees of distortion in the diverse intellectual frameworks. The opposition between "ideas" and "realities" thereby becomes a mere rhetorical device to hide the fact that what are opposed are always different "ideas," alternative descriptions of "reality."

We finally find here what constitutes the ultimate limit in Schwarz's concept. The formula of "misplaced ideas" leads necessarily to the projection of a definite place as the place of *Truth* (and reduces all the rest to the level of mere ideologies). Carvalho Franco's interpretation, although it tends to dissolve the problem of the peripheral nature of local culture, makes more manifest the eminently *political* character of the attribution of "alterity" to some given ideas.

As a matter of fact, this is also the point upon which Schwarz's original elaboration converged, insofar as he stated that all ideas were equally, and inevitably, out of place in the region. This is the basic tenet of the "strong version" of his theory, which, however, the formula of "misplaced ideas" fails accurately to express, thus paving the way to a simplistic interpretation

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[20] We must here recall that the kind of nationalistic thinking that progressivist forces at that moment tried to counter was not really Romantic nationalism in the style of Romero's, which was clearly reactionary, but the developmentalist-nationalist tendencies which flowered in the 1950s. These sought to make Brazil an advanced capitalistic nation. Schwarz and the theorists of "dependency" tried to show, more precisely, why applying the patterns of development of central countries to peripheral regions was misleading. Ultimately, for him, developmentalist ideas were always and inevitably out of place in Latin America. Now, as we see, this would not necessarily be the case with Marxist ideas, which, while imported, could eventually be adjusted to the local reality.

of his view as a plain denunciation of the "unreality" of ideas, and, more specifically, of the liberal ideas in the region during the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, such an interpretation, although hardly subtle, is not completely unjustified. Schwarz's relapse into the topic, catalyzed in part by the ambiguity of his formula, finds grounds in his own original concept (even though, it is true, it does not follow necessarily from it). Lastly, this relapse only makes manifest its ultimate limit, which Carvalho Franco's criticism lays bare. It confronts Schwarz at that point to which all his own argumentation leads yet cannot thematize without at once dislocating the entire categorical apparatus on which it rests. In the end, Carvalho Franco exposes the blind spot on which Schwarz's concept is founded, the premise on which that concept rests but is unapproachable from within it: that is, the fact that one can never determine which ideas are out of place, and which are not, except from within a given, particular conceptual framework.

In the pages that follow, I will try to analyze where the limitations in Schwarz's concept lie, defined not merely in ideological but, fundamentally, in epistemological terms. That is, we will observe the *conceptual* limitations preventing him from effectively attaining critical distance from the topic (and avoiding his relapse into it), while trying at the same time to recover the core of his theory, which, I think, *is still valid*. As we will see, Schwarz's decisive contribution lies not so much in the solutions he provides, which, as we have observed, are not really adequate, but in the very formulation of the problem he originally posed: how to tackle the issue of the peripheral nature of local culture, approaching the peculiar dynamic that such a condition imposes on ideas in the region, without relapsing into dualistic schemes, and, lastly, into the essentialist views proper to the nationalistic currents. However, before discussing this, we must briefly review another debate in which Schwarz participated. The polemics we have hitherto discussed referred to the field of culture at large, that is, following Paulo Arantes's terms, to the dialectic between ideas and society. The controversy we will now examine relates, instead, to a specifically artistic matter, and involves a second kind of dialectic—which is, more precisely, the one that would eventually yield the critical model that made Schwarz one of the most prominent literary critics in the region: the dialectic between aesthetic form and social content.

ON PLACES, NON-PLACES, AND "IN-BETWEEN-PLACES"

Schwarz's fundamental point of reference in this regard is Antonio Candido's work.[21] For Schwarz, Candido's fundamental contribution lay in

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[21] See Candido, O *discurso e a cidade* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1993).

having succeeded in developing a sociological approach to literature without obscuring the specifically aesthetic dimension inherent in any work of art. Schwarz's Marxist critical method was intended as an elaboration of that model, which we may summarily define, according to Lucien Goldmann's terms, as "genetic structuralist."[22] Basically, it tried to combine aesthetic and socio-historical analyses, an oscillation which, according to Schwarz, characterized a "leftist" approach. This entailed a double rejection: of "content-centered" views, which produced a de-differentiation of spheres and thereby annulled the richness of literary works, on the one hand, and of formalist approaches that detached artistic products from the material conditions of their production, on the other. The key for such a conjunction between two different levels of analysis is the concept of *form*. As he states, this allows one to grasp the social background out of which a work was born, accounting, at once, for the productivity of its specifically linguistic and literary dimensions. It is not in the materials that an artist uses, but in the constructive procedures of the narration that its surrounding world is represented, or, better said, reenacted in a specifically literary manner. Yet, this is so because the social is not merely a neutral content upon which the literary form comes to be impressed. Lastly, the critic can transcend the antinomy between *literary form* and *social content* by conceiving of the latter not as merely a material to be elaborated by linguistic means, but as already structured wholes, *objectives* forms "able to organize either a romance or a deprecatory formula, a political movement as well as a theoretical reflection, *which can be confronted with that mediating practical condition.*"[23] Hence, we can find functional homologies between both textual and extra-textual levels of reality. The "social content" not only *has* a form; it *is* a form. As he says,

> [The social idea of *form*] is a practical scheme, containing a specific logic. . . . It can be translated into an economical-political interest, an ideology, a verbal game, a narrative approach. Regarding its affinities, we are here within the Marxist universe, according to which the material constraints of the reproduction of society are the basis which impresses itself, well or badly, upon the different areas of spiritual life, in which they circulate reelaborated in more or less sublimated or distorted versions; in short, a form working forms. Ultimately, the forms we find in literary works are

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[22] See Goldmann, *Marxismo y ciencias humanas* (Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 1975).
[23] Schwarz, "Adequação nacional e originalidade crítica," *Seqüências*, 30.

the repetition or transformation, with variable results, of preexisting, artistic or extra-artistic, forms.[24]

Actually, at the time Schwarz began his critical *oeuvre*, this concept formed part of the conventional wisdom in the profession. "The combination of structure and history," he would later remember, "was at the center of the theoretical debate of the period." Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, he continues, "made of that combination the cornerstone of the leftist comprehension of the world."[25] Candido's contribution consisted in relating the dialectic between content and form, structure and history, literary analysis and social reflection, with the one between "center" and "periphery." In this fashion, he tried to understand how Latin American reality, which defines the particular conditions of reception of artistic genres and forms (which are, as we should recall, always inevitably "foreign," given the marginal position of the region in the systems of cultural production), eventually alters the latter. As he remarks, in peripheral areas the result of the juxtaposition of these two kinds of dialectic would be both inevitable and problematic.

José de Alencar's work is particularly illustrative of the shortcuts and contradictions generated by the transfer to Brazil of a literary form (the realist novel, as developed in France by Balzac) that was typically bourgeois and, therefore, hardly suitable to represent the Brazilian social reality of slavery, paternalism, and personal dependency. Schwarz's memorable discussion of *Senhora*, Alencar's last novel, discloses how the above-mentioned dialectic between falsity and truth operates at the literary level. Here, the false nature of form, the parodical effect generated by the transposition to the Brazilian context of situations that are specific to bourgeois, realist fiction, exposes the true content of that social reality, namely, a system in which the individual striving for wealth and money is cast into and mediated by paternalistic relations. As Schwarz indicates, Machado de Assis's genius consisted in having turned that parodic effect into a constructive principle of the narration. Parody thus converts into self-parody, becomes the *form* of the narration, whose mode of articulation is *digression*. With this concept, Schwarz marks a milestone in Machadean studies, providing the fundamental clue to understanding the rupture that Machado de Assis introduced in Latin American literature. By means of *digression*, he transcended the effect of verisimilitude, making parodical the very mimetic

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[24] Ibid., 30–31.
[25] Schwarz, "Os sete fôlegos de um livro" (1998), *Seqüências*, 50.

impulse of realist fiction. Reworked "from the periphery," the genre thus makes manifest the discursive devices it must hide in order to constitute itself as such (a situation which leads Schwarz to compare Machado de Assis's work with that of his Russian contemporaries—"there is in Machado," he states, "something of Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Goncharov, and Chekhov").[26]

Here again we observe the same dialectic between truth and falsehood that Schwarz discussed in connection with Alencar, but this time it takes a particular twist. In this case, the "false" content of Brazilian reality discloses the truth of the European *form,* which is its inherent falsehood. In this fashion, "our national oddities," he states, "became world-historical." Hence the link between Machado de Assis and his Russian contemporaries.

> Perhaps this is comparable to what happened in Russian literature. Faced with the latter, even the greatest novels of French realism seem naive. And why? In spite of their claims to universality, the physiology of rational egoism and the ethics of Enlightenment appeared in the Russian Empire as a "foreign" ideology, and therefore, a localized and relative one. Sustained by its historical backwardness, Russia forced the bourgeois novel to face a more complex reality.[27]

Schwarz thus reveals the secret of the universality of Machado de Assis's work. Two dialectics converged in his work: the problematic regarding how to achieve a specifically literary productivity while being socially representative here becomes associated with the issue of how to be universal in the periphery, not by denying that marginality but rather by exploiting it. Yet, it is also at this point that Schwarz's interpretive scheme becomes complicated.

First, it is evident, and Schwarz was by no means unaware of it, that parody, and even self-parody of the genre is not really of Brazilian origin, or a feature exclusive to the literary production in peripheral areas. As a matter of fact, Machado de Assis took his model from a European author, Laurence Sterne. This renders problematic the second dialectic Schwarz discusses, namely, that between "center" and "periphery": even to "subvert" European models, local authors must always appeal to foreign models. At this point, not only the idea (which only a simplistic reading of Schwarz's

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[26] Schwarz, "Misplaced Ideas," *Misplaced Ideas*, 29.
[27] Ibid., 29.

essay may appear to endorse) of an opposition between the "false" and the "true" as correlative to the "local" and the "imported," respectively, starts to crumble. As he remarked, the "true" in this context is not less "foreign" than the "false," and vice versa. Pursuing this argument to its logical consequences, what we would find, in all the cases (that is, both in the center and the periphery), are constellations of contradictory elements, *whose logic of agglutination is not attributable to given contexts*. In sum, this situation would inevitably frustrate all attempts to discover the presumed features that distinguish Latin American culture and identify its "peripheral" condition.

In effect, the observation of "local distortions" generated by the transposition to the region of discursive forms, ideas, and institutions originally alien to local reality does not allow one to draw the conclusion that ideas are always well placed in Europe and always out of place in Latin America, as Schwarz's definition of the concept of "misplaced ideas" may suggest. Evidently, this is not true. "Distorting" ideas and improperly naming realities is certainly not a Brazilian or Latin American peculiarity.[28] We may still accept that the kind of dialectic Schwarz observes in Machado de Assis's work indicates a particular type of distortion, specific to peripheral areas. This affirmation saves Schwarz's theory regarding its object; however, it confronts him with a more serious dilemma. The most disturbing aspect implicit in this attempt to perceive the textual vestiges of the peripheral condition of local culture actually resides in the fact that it ends up leading Schwarz's theory dangerously close to that of one of his fundamental intellectual opponents: Silviano Santiago.

As early as 1970, in "The In-Between Place in Latin American Discourse,"[29] the Brazilian critic Silviano Santiago introduced a number of concepts taken from the most recent French critical theories (reception theory, deconstructionism, poststructuralism, etc.) with the object of developing a concept also implicit in Schwarz's analyses. Like Schwarz, Santiago considered Machado de Assis to be the paradigmatic figure of the particular

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[28] The case of the novel illustrates this. Authors like Friedrich Hebbel, for example, questioned whether, as a literary form, the realistic novel was suited to German reality. Hebbel, like Schwarz for the Brazilian case, considered that this was due to the fact that German history did not have an "organic" evolution. As he said, "It is true that we Germans do not maintain any link with the history of our people. . . . But, what is the cause? The cause is that our history had no results, that we cannot consider ourselves the product of its organic development, like the French and the British" (Hebbel, quoted by Georg Lukács, *La novela histórica* [Mexico: Era, 1971], 75).

[29] See Santiago, *Uma Literatura nos trópicos* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1978).

condition of "Latin American discourse." This condition finds its specific ambit in the "in-between" place, which is that of the deviation from the norm, the mark of the difference inscribed in the very original text that destroys its *purity* and *unity.* The readings in the periphery of capitalism are, then, never innocent. They are not a merely passive assimilation of foreign models, nor are they a means to make manifest an inner being that preexists them. They aim at inscribing themselves as the *other* within the *unity* of Western culture, of which they form a part, thus exposing its inherent inconsistencies.

In Santiago's reinterpretation of Candido's analytical model (and Schwarz's, as well), the proper mode of conceiving patterns of interaction between local and Western cultures should transcend the concept of "influence" and put in its place that of "writing," understood as *work* over a tradition. Peripheral areas participate in this tradition and, at the same time, dislocate it by revealing their local maladjustments as constitutive of its very concept. Santiago's idea of the "in-between" place thus questions the definition of the relationships between "center" and "periphery" in terms of "original" and "copy." Neither Santiago nor Schwarz saw Machado de Assis's work as a degraded version of some original European (and, presumably superior and self-contained) model. Machado de Assis's peripheral condition allowed him somehow to overcome his French model, revealing its intrinsic limitations. In fact, this view is perfectly consistent with Schwarz's recent reading (or rather re-reading) of the postulates of dependency theory, when he remarks that the contradictions in capitalistic development in the periphery "shed some revealing light on the canonical, metropolitan notions of civilization, progress, culture, liberalism, etc."[30]

Nevertheless, having reached this point, Schwarz raises some reservations regarding his own conclusions. For him, the concept implicit in this view about the "advantages of backwardness" (an echo, again, of the discussions in 1905 in Russia) runs the risk of turning into a kind of celebration of underdevelopment.[31] This poses a dilemma, namely: how to explain the universality of Machado de Assis's work without denying its definite connections with its peripheral condition, which after all defines its particular context of emergence and thereby converts it into an authentically representative work, and, at the same time, without ending up diluting its marginal position in Western culture. (It is significant here that the theories

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[30] Schwarz, "A nota específica" (1998), *Seqüências*, 153.
[31] Cfr. Haroldo de Campos, "De la razón antropofágica: diálogo y diferencia en la cultura brasileña," *De la razón antropofágica y otros ensayos* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 2000).

that Santiago applies to the Latin American context are also originally European.) Thus, in the face of Santiago, Schwarz would insist on the need to pose the peripheral condition as a *deficiency*, without resorting to the naïve, nationalist perception of it as merely a *lack* (a misrecognition of an inner self). In sum, this was a complicated dilemma, whose very formulation represented a fundamental contribution to cultural theory in Latin America, insofar as it delineated a horizon of inquiry definitively multifarious and absolutely relevant. Yet, Schwarz himself could not find any solution to that dilemma which was consistent with his own concept.

In a lecture delivered in Buenos Aires in April 2001, Schwarz summarized his proposal in this regard in terms of a double "disentangling." As he remarks, Candido's contribution consisted in having "disentangled" the opposition between "center" and "periphery" from the opposition between "superior" and "inferior": as the example of Machado de Assis first showed, the peripheral character of the local literary production does not condemn it to a situation of inferiority vis-à-vis the European one. However, he still rejected the "poststructuralist" attempt to "disentangle" that opposition between center and periphery from the one between the "model" and the "copy." Schwarz here went back to an issue he had raised in "Nationalism by Elimination" (1986), when he discussed what he called the new theories of the "French philosophers" (Foucault and Derrida). According to them, stated Schwarz, "it would be more accurate and unbiased to think in terms of an infinite sequence of transformations, with no beginning or end, no first or last, no worse or better."[32] By annulling the notion of the copy, he said, such theories "would enhance the self-esteem and relieve the anxiety of the underdeveloped world," without, however, solving the problems that have sunk the region into underdevelopment.[33] These theories would thus simply ignore the actual asymmetries among the different regions both in terms of material and symbolic resources.

Lastly, Schwarz thinks that poststructuralist theories represent merely a kind of intellectual adjustment to the process of commodification of artistic production, nowadays projected on a global scale. In the context of economic globalization, the old formalism acquired a new sense. In the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism, he states, "its aesthetic pseudo-radicalism, an abstract cultural subversion, especially in language, became the general literary ideology."[34] The postmodern symbolic disloca-

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[32] Schwarz, "Nationalism by Elimination," *Misplaced Ideas*, 6.
[33] Ibid., 6.
[34] Schwarz, "Discutindo com Alfredo Bosi" (1993), *Seqüências*, 85.

tion of hierarchies is, ultimately, only the counterface and complement to their reinforcement in actual practice. The permanent revolution at a formal level would thus be a functional adjunct of the material counterrevolution allegedly underway in our period.

What we have seen explains the paradox observed in the previous section: Schwarz's resorting to a formula like that of "misplaced ideas" which is, in actual fact, barely appropriate to its goal of rendering problematic the nationalist postulate that European ideas are out of place in Latin America. This paradox is thus clarified when we place it in the particular context of debate in which Schwarz elaborated his concept. By the early 1970s, the issue of "periphery" and the criticism of "nationalist" deviations within the Left had actually started to lose their former centrality, ceding their place to the question of the consequences for artistic and critical production of Brazil's development of an advanced-capitalistic market of cultural goods, with its apparent capacity to absorb all attempts of transgression, assimilate them to its logic, and turn them into instruments for its own reproduction.[35] Schwarz was therefore writing in a context that was increasingly hostile to the postulates of dependency theory. He thus clung to the formula of "misplaced ideas," even though it tended to smooth over the intricacies of his thinking, because it at least permitted him to preserve the notion of the presence of asymmetries between center and periphery, between European "model" and local "copy."

As we observe, Schwarz framed his criticism of postmodern theories in an ethico-political perspective. And this allowed him to refute them on the basis of pragmatical considerations, that is, their inability to generate actions conducive to overcoming a region's cultural dependency. Lastly, he thought that postmodern theories were merely forms of symbolic compensation for actual contradictions which they thus helped to perpetuate. Yet the issue at stake here was not really ethical or political, but one of an eminently epistemological nature. More concretely stated: is the opposition between "model" and "copy" really an appropriate description of the kind of cultural asymmetries he intended to underline and analyze?

Going back to his scheme of "disentanglings," even though the dilemma formulated by Schwarz is highly significant, we must say that the solution he offers—to accept the first disentangling produced by Candido, but not the second one realized by Santiago—is clearly fragile. One may argue that the former disentangling already presupposes the latter. In effect, the

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[35] See the series of essays compiled by Florencia Garramuño and Adriana Amante, *Absurdo Brasil* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2001).

dissolution of the opposition between the 'superior' and the 'inferior' as a parallel to that between the 'center' and the 'periphery' also demolishes its parallel with the third opposition: if a "peripheral" production stops being "inferior" we must assume that it is because it somehow overcame its condition as a merely degraded "copy" vis-à-vis some assumed "model" and gained certain "originality" of its own.[36] At any rate, following Schwarz's own argument, Candido's disentangling makes Santiago's disentangling redundant insofar as Candido demolishes the opposition between center and periphery far more than Santiago does. Weighing the two perspectives according to the yardstick of their practical effects, which is the context in which Schwarz himself intends to frame the discussion, it is no longer clear why one should accept Candido's disentangling but not Santiago's.

In any case, Schwarz's insistence on preserving the scheme of "models" and "deviations," although hardly effective in theoretical terms, has important (and mostly regrettable) consequences in historiographical practice. His proposal ultimately reinforces problems which are inherent in the tradition of the history of "ideas" in Latin America.[37]

THE LIMITATIONS INHERENT IN
THE HISTORY OF "IDEAS"

The paradox implicit in Schwarz's formula developed, in turn, into a certain tension between his critical method and its historiographic and intellectual implications. In the course of its translation into the ambit of conceptual discourses, the subtleties of his insights tend to be missed, laying bare the heuristic strictures of the scheme of "models" and "deviations" as a grid for understanding the erratic evolution of ideas in Latin America.

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[36] The ultimate question that Schwarz's definition raises is: how can we draw, in practice, the line separating the context in which ideas are well-located from that in which they are "misplaced"? To give an example taken from literature, *Noches tristes y día alegre* (1818–19) by Fernández de Lizardi, is an "imitation" of *Noches lúgubres* (1771) by José Cadalso, which is, in turn, an "imitation" of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742–45), which is probably an "imitation" of previous works, and so on. Furthermore, the "imitators" of Fernández de Lizardi in Mexico have been numerous. Now, how can we distinguish, in the series of its displacements, the "original" (or "originals") from the "copy" (or "copies")?

[37] The "history of ideas" we are talking about is the discipline that conceives texts as sets of "ideas," understood in the sense of *statements*; that is, representations of reality which can eventually be deemed to be true or false (either accurate or distorted descriptions of their objects).

Following this scheme, the historiography of ideas in Latin America has been organized, since its very inception, around the goal of identifying the "distortions" produced by the transposition to the region of liberal ideas that were allegedly incompatible with the region's inherited traditions and culture.[38] Historians of local ideas thus converge in postulating that the result of the collision in the nineteenth century of an atavistic native culture and the universalistic principles of liberalism was a kind of compromise ideology which José Luis Romero termed "liberal-conservative."[39] When confronted with an environment which was strange and hostile to them, "modern" liberal ideas acquired a conservative bent.

Such a scheme tends to reduce all problematic aspects in local intellectual history to what in legal language is called *adjudicatio*, the application of a norm to a specific case. In this sense, it impedes historians from critically interrogating the putative "models," foreclosing the possibility of their problematization, which is, precisely, as Schwarz showed, the most interesting aspect in Machado de Assis's work: *how it made manifest, from within the genre, problems which were inherent in it*. Hence from the perspective of "misplaced ideas," the fact that the ideas of a given author departed from the postulated "ideal type" of liberalism (the *logos*) can be interpreted only as symptomatic of a hidden *pathos* (conservative prejudices, economic backwardness, an atavistic culture, and so on). Models are simply assumed as perfectly consistent and their meaning transparent. Textbook definitions are simply taken as valid; the only problem that the "history of ideas" apparently raises in Latin America is something actually external to ideas: whether or not they are "applicable" to the specific local context.[40]

From a methodological perspective, the main consequence of the previous point is that, as Schwarz lucidly observed, the approaches to the "history of ideas" systematically and necessarily fail in their attempt to find

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[38] In the words of one of the most lucid historians of ideas, Charles Hale: "The distinctive experience of liberalism derived from the fact that liberal ideas were applied in countries which were highly stratified, socially and racially, as well as economically underdeveloped, and in which the tradition of centralized state authority ran deep. In short, they were applied in an environment which was resistant and hostile" (Hale, "Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870–1930," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 4: 368).

[39] Romero, *Las ideas políticas en Argentina* (Buenos Aires: F.C.E., 1984), chapter V.

[40] In *La invención de una legitimidad. Razón y retórica en el pensamiento mexicano del siglo XIX (Un estudio en las formas del discurso político* (Mexico: F.C.E., 2005), I seek to demonstrate how the progressive dissolution of the Mexican political system eventually laid bare aporias which are intrinsic to the liberal-republican concept.

anything particular to Latin America. To postulate the finding of a "Latin American peculiarity," whatever it may be, these approaches must necessarily simplify the history of European ideas, smoothing over the intricacies of its actual course. Yet, even so, they can hardly find a way of describing the postulated "idiosyncrasies" with "non-European categories." As Schwarz remarks, it is clear that terms such as "conservatism," and indeed the ideological mixture expressed in Romero's formula ("liberal-conservatism"), are not less "abstract" and "European" categories than their opposite "liberalism." Notwithstanding, it is still true that insofar as the general consensus maintains that we cannot say that Latin American thinkers have made any contribution to the "universal" history of ideas, within the framework of these approaches the only thing which may justify the study of Latin American ideas and make them relevant is the expectation of finding "distortions" (how ideas "deviated" from the presumed pattern). Here we find the basic contradiction in the approaches focused on "ideas": *these generate anxieties about peculiarity that they themselves can never lessen*. In short, *the "history of ideas" leads to a dead end*.

Having to postulate a goal that is unattainable for the history of "ideas," intellectual history undermines its own foundations. Schwarz is particularly aware of this situation—the simultaneous necessity-impossibility of distortions in the local history of ideas—but he takes as a characteristic of Latin American intellectual history that which is, in fact, a problem inherent in the very approach to it. If historians of ideas fail to find the presumed features that particularize ideas in the local context, it is ultimately due to the fact that the kind of approaches they utilize prevent it: seen from the perspective of their ideological contents, every system of thought necessarily falls within a limited range of alternatives, none of which may aspire to appear as exclusive to Latin America. Within this scheme, the ideas of a given author can be either more conservative than liberal, or vice versa, or lie in some middle point between these two extremes (and the same with the rest of the topics around which traditional histories of ideas are normally organized). Ultimately, when we approach the text exclusively at the level of its proposition-contents, the spectrum of possible results can be perfectly established *a priori*; eventual controversies are thus limited merely to how to categorize them.

The problems found in historicizing ideas (discovering their distinguishing marks) spring from the fact that "ideas" are "ahistorical" by definition; the conditions for their eventual emergence in specific contexts

denote circumstances which are external to them. Hence the tendency among the historians of ideas to complement their descriptions of intellectual contents with quasi-historical explanations, that is, referring them to their social, "external" context; in sum, taking the presumed "deviations" as indicative of a "social malaise." Yet, as Pocock remarked, this form of "contextual reductionism" cannot "rescue the historian [of ideas] from the circumstance that the intellectual constructs he was trying to control were not historical phenomena at all, to the extent they had been built up by non-historical modes of inquiry."[41] In this kind of approach, while the "models" are *a priori* constructions, "local cultures" appear as eternal substrata. The end result is a quasi-historical narration that combines two abstractions.

Here we find the fundamental limitation against which Schwarz's concept collides. If it cannot account for the epistemological reasons for that necessity-impossibility of "distortions," this is because his concept itself still hinges on the same premises determining that impossibility-necessity. The last root of this lies in a crude linguistic view, which is inherent to the "histories of ideas," that reduces language to merely its referential dimension. This provides the grounds for the opposition between "ideas" and "reality" on which the problem of "misplaced ideas" rests, and this is so only within the framework of the former opposition: as soon as we undermine it, the whole problem of "copying" becomes meaningless.

REPRESENTATION AND USE OF IDEAS

As we saw, the traditional approaches to the history of ideas that we have hitherto discussed actually represent a simplification of Schwarz's critical method. Even so, the traditional explanatory pattern on which they hinge—the scheme of "models" and "deviations"—finds some conceptual grounds in his own original perspective. They are associated, as we said, with a poor linguistic perspective that determines the exclusive concentration on the semantic contents of the texts, their referential dimension. Once again, an expression by Pocock is particularly relevant and highly enlightening: "the point here is rather that, under the pressure of the idealist-materialist dichotomy, we have been giving all our attention to thought as conditioned

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[41] J.G.A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 10.
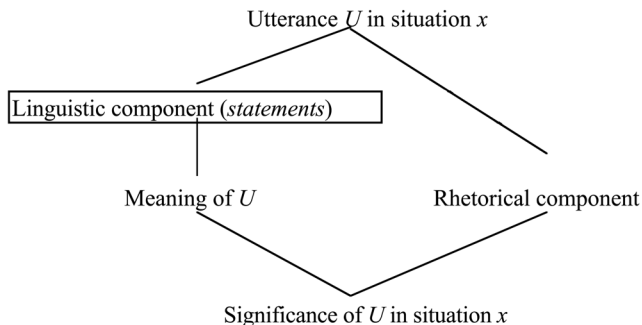
by social facts outside itself, and not enough attention to thought as denoting, referring, assuming, alluding, implying, and as performing a variety of functions of which the simplest is that of containing and conveying information"[42]

In effect, Schwarz's identification of the fact that ideas in Latin America are "misplaced" with their being inadequate descriptions (distorted representations) of local reality indicates that his perspective still hinges on the basis of that traditional concept of the "history of ideas" which reduces language to its merely referential function. However, the issues he intends to thematize far exceeds the strictly semantic ambit of language. In fact, if understood in this sense, Schwarz's formula is simply a *contradictio in adjectio*. The definition of a given discourse as out of place involves a reference to its pragmatic dimension, the conditions of its utterance. Some conceptual distinctions will allow us to clarify the problems Schwarz's formula of "misplaced ideas" raises.

If this formula represents a terminological contradiction, this is because Schwarz collapses two very different linguistic instances in it; he introduces a *pragmatic* factor into the *semantic* level of language, which necessarily engenders a conceptual discrepancy: it leads him to describe ideas in terms of propositions and their meaning, while attributing to them functions that are proper to their use. "Ideas" (the semantic level) involve *statements* (affirmations or denials regarding the state of the world). These are context-free: the semantic content of a proposition ("what is said") can be established independent of the specific context and mode of its enunciation. Contextual considerations relate, instead, to the proposition's *pragmatics*. Its unit is the *utterance*, not the *statement*. What matters in an utterance is not the *meaning*, but the *significance*. The latter, unlike the former, cannot be established except in connection with the context and mode of its enunciation. It refers not only to "what is said" (the semantic content of ideas), but also to *how* it is said, *who* says it, *where*, to *whom*, etc. The understanding of its *significance* entails the comprehension of its *meaning*; yet these two instances are of a very different nature. The latter belongs to the order of *langue*, it describes events or situations; the former belongs to the order of *parole*, it implies the realization of an action. What we have seen so far can be represented as follows:[43]

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[42] Ibid., 37.
[43] See Oswald Ducrot, *El decir y lo dicho* (Buenos Aires: Hachette, 1984), 31.

Utterance *U* in situation *x*

| Linguistic component (*statements*) |

Meaning of *U*   Rhetorical component

Significance of *U* in situation *x*

In the context of the present discussion, the critical point is that *statements* ("ideas") are *true* or *false* (right or wrong representations of reality), but they are never "misplaced"; only *utterances* are. Being "misplaced" is necessarily a pragmatic condition; it indicates that something was said in a wrong way, or by a wrong person, or in a wrong moment, etc. Conversely, utterances, as such, can be "misplaced," but they cannot be *true* or *wrong* (i.e., "distorted representations"). Only statements can. An utterance may eventually contain a false statement ("distorted representations"), but it is still "true" (real) as such. Utterances actually undercut the distinction between "ideas" and "realities": they are always "real" *speech-acts*, to put it in Austin's words. This explains the paradox commented on by Schwarz: that an utterance containing wrong statements (distorted representations of reality) is still "true" as such. Yet, this does not relate to a Brazilian or Latin American peculiarity, but to a property inherent in language.

We can now synthesize the fundamental hypothesis of this article: the definition of a model which could account for the problematic dynamic of ideas in Latin America, insofar as it entails the consideration of the pragmatic dimension of language, cannot be achieved with the kind of conceptual tools Schwarz handles (which are the traditional ones in the "history of ideas"). Only the simultaneous consideration of the different levels of language permits us to trace significant relationships between texts and their particular contexts of enunciation, finding a link which connects the two channels of the "stereoscopic vision" (literary analysis and social reflection) proposed by Schwarz,[44] thus rendering intellectual history a truly hermeneutical undertaking.[45] By focusing exclusively on the referential level of discourse, there is no way of tracing in them the vestiges of the contextual conditions of their utterance, since they do not reside at that level. Hence,

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[44] Schwarz, "Adequação nacional e originalidade crítica," *Seqüências*, 28.
[45] See Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time*, 105.

following the habitual procedures of the history of "ideas," students cannot find in Latin American discourse any mark that singularizes it: only the consideration of their pragmatic dimension permits their comprehension as *events* ("speech acts"). Ultimately, the search for the contextual determinations conditioning the modes of appropriation, circulation and articulation of public discourses leads us beyond the reach of the history of "ideas."

FROM "IDEAS" TO "LANGUAGE"

Rethinking the kind of question that Schwarz intended to thematize and thus rescuing it for cultural critique involves, at the same time, the revision of the tenets on which it is founded. An example may help to clarify the point. The model elaborated by Iuri Lotman is particularly relevant in this regard.[46] The application of Lotman's concept of "semiosphere" to the analysis of the issue raised by Schwarz will allow us to observe in which sense an approach centered upon "languages" may provide a more sophisticated set of categories to carry out Schwarz's own project, enlightening the nature of the limitations resulting from its inscription within the frameworks of the traditional history of "ideas."

As is well known, semiotics is the discipline which has come to occupy, in part, the place left vacant by the decline of classical rhetoric, trying systematically to analyze the processes of communicative exchange. Its cornerstone was the definition of the basic communicative unit represented by the scheme "emitter → message → receptor." However, for Lotman, this monolingual scheme results in an abstract, highly stylized, and static model of the processes of meaning-generation and transmission of ideas. As he observes, no "code," "language," or "text" exists in an isolated fashion; every communicative process, he says, entails the presence of at least two codes and a translating operator. The concept of "semiosphere" indicates precisely the coexistence and juxtaposition of an endless number of codes in the semiotic space, which determines their dynamics. This concept may help us to rearticulate Schwarz's theoretical proposal and simultaneously preserve the core of his original insights, which is, I think, still valid.

First, Lotman's model clarifies an aspect that is only partially articulat-

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[46] See Iuri M. Lotman, *La semiosfera I: Semiótica de la cultura y del texto* (Barcelona: Cátedra / Universitat de València, 1996), and *La semiosfera II: Semiótica de la cultura, del texto, de la conducta y del espacio* (Barcelona: Cátedra / Universitat de València, 1998).

ed in the texts of the Brazilian critic. As the Russian-Estonian semiologist affirms, although every code (e.g., a national culture, a disciplinary tradition, an artistic school, or a political ideology) is permanently interacting with those elements which form its semiotic environment, it always tends to its own closure in order to preserve its internal balance or homeostasis. Thus, it generates a self-description or metalanguage by which it legitimizes its particular discursive regime, demarcating its sphere of action and internally delimiting and confining the possible uses of the symbolic materials available within its boundaries. In this fashion, it also establishes the conditions of appropriation of the "extra-systemic" symbolic elements: an idea pertaining to a given code cannot be introduced into a different one unless it previously undergoes a process of assimilation to this latter. Lastly, this shows that semiotic "cannibalism" is not a Brazilian peculiarity, much less Tupi's cultural legacy, as Oswald de Andrade imagined.[47]

This model helps to clarify Schwarz's first criticism of the nationalists' rejection of "imitation" of "foreign" models: his insistence that imitation is not self-explanatory, that we must look at Brazilian reality to find the conditions for its tendency to adopt alien concepts to (always inappropriately) describe local reality. Ultimately, he said, in the very action of "imitating," Brazilian culture made manifest its intrinsic nature. But this also shows that, as Carvalho Franco remarked, "ideas" are actually never "misplaced"; that is, that communicative exchanges never involve merely passive receptions of "alien" elements. In order to be assimilated, they must be (or become) legible by the culture that is going to incorporate them. Otherwise, they would be irrelevant for this latter, invisible from its particular horizon. This observation forces Schwarz to confront a problem: how may ideas be assimilable as proper and still be alien? Apparently, the only alternative left is to postulate a divorce between culture and nation; that is, the existence of a more authentic substratum, a hidden essence of nationality which its own "superficial" culture fails to express or represent, which is precisely what the nationalists assert. Here again we meet the two horns of the dilemma: either to dissolve the question of the peripheral condition of local culture, or to go back to the dualistic framework of the nationalist

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[47] In *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die Sozialdemokratie* (Vienna: Verlag der Wiener Volksbuchhandlung, 1924), the socialist leader, Otto Bauer, synthesized this idea in his notion of "national apperception." His definition of it is strikingly similar to Oswald de Andrade's concept of "cultural cannibalism." On this topic, see Palti, "The Nation as a Problem. Historians and the 'National Question,'" *History and Theory* 40 (2001): 324–46.

perspective. There is, however, a third variant, which Schwarz outlines, but does not consistently elaborate.

Actually, the touchstone of Schwarz's concept is a fundamental shift he produces in the ways of approaching the topic. His inquiry no longer refers to the presumed "alienness" of ideas in Brazilian culture but, rather, to how they came eventually to be perceived as such by certain sectors of the local population. The reference to Lotman's ideas may be helpful also in this regard. As Lotman remarks, even though the processes of cultural exchange do not involve a merely passive reception of "alien" elements, indeed precisely for that reason, semiotic ambivalence is inherent to them. This has two origins. First, the equivocation springing from the fact that codes, like the semiosphere at large, are not internally homogeneous: they contain a plurality of subcodes, which coexist and intercross, and tend, in turn, to their own closure, often rendering impossible their mutual translatability. Second, the very openness of the codes to their semiotic environment, which also permanently produces new internal unbalances. In order to make an external element assimilable, a system must eventually adjust its internal structure, reorganize its components, and thus destabilize its present configuration. This is linked to what Jean Piaget studied under the name of the processes of *assimilation* and *accommodation*, the two fundamental mechanisms, for him, for the equilibration-disequilibration of cognitive structures.[48] Following this concept, it must be said that ambivalences are simultaneously the cause and effect of unbalances. Uneven developments necessarily result in asymmetries among codes and subcodes (hierarchies and differences in power-relations). Thus in every exchange-process there is present some semiotic *violence*, operating in both the mechanisms of systems stability and the dynamic impulses that dislocate them, along with the insufficient compensations that result.[49]

What Schwarz perceives as the determinant of "Latin American peculiarity" (the problematic interaction between the "center" and the "periphery") should be interpreted as an expression of the above-mentioned uneven developments and asymmetrical exchanges in the field of culture, resulting in a double phenomenon. On the one hand, codes in the periphery of a system would always be more unstable than in the center, and their

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[48] See Piaget, *Biology and Knowledge: An Essay on the Relations Between Organic Regulations and Cognitive Processes* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

[49] The notion of symbolic compensations as the procedure that permits the reversibility of cognitive structures (without which there is no true knowledge) was developed by Piaget in the above-mentioned work, *Biology and Knowledge*.

capacities to assimilate alien elements are relatively more limited. On the other hand, the semiotic distance separating them from the center would make the pressures for accommodation more powerful in them. From this perspective, Carvalho Franco's and Schwarz's views lose their antagonistic aspect. The two would emphasize, respectively, two different aspects, equally intrinsic in every phenomenon of cultural exchange. While Carvalho Franco's concept focuses on the mechanisms of *assimilation*, Schwarz's concentrates on the processes of *accommodation* which the former mechanisms, in turn, generate (and the inevitable tensions they involve).

This reformulation condenses the core of Schwarz's theoretical program.[50] Yet, at the same time, it implies a revision of his concept in three fundamental aspects. First, in this linguistic perspective, "centers" and "peripheries" are not stable and fixed; they move in time and space. Determining them is not, therefore, a simple task. They are not only historically changeable, but also relative at every given moment (what is a "center" in one regard, may be a "periphery" in another; both centers and peripheries contain, in turn, their own centers and peripheries; etc.).[51] In sum, it is simplistic and misleading to speak about "centers" and "peripheries" as if they were homogeneous, fixed entities—a habit that necessarily leads to abstract and generic views of "Europe," "Latin America," and their mutual relationships—that is, as if they were objects whose nature and defining characteristics could be established *a priori*.

Second, semiotic dislocations are not placed on the level of the semantic component. It is not that ideas are "distorted representations of reality." Unbalances here do not refer to the relationship between "ideas" and "realities" (a concept that always has implicit—at least, as a counterfactual—the ideal of a fully organic society, in which "ideas" and "realities" would converge), but to that of ideas with respect to themselves. And these kinds of dislocations are, in effect, inevitable. As we saw, they spring from the coexistence and superposition of heterogeneous codes in one single system. This means that, whereas ideas are never "misplaced," since the *meaning* of a given idea does not preexist its own conditions of intelligibility, they are simultaneously always "misplaced" due to the fact that every system shelters mutually contradictory protocols of readings. More specifically stated, they are "always partially dislocated." This is so not because alien

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[50] In "Discutindo com Alfredo Bosi" (1993), he gets the closest to this formulation. In this text, he discusses Bosi's idea of "cultural filter" (Bosi, *Dialéctica de la colonização* [São Paulo: Companhia de Letras, 1992]).

[51] Cfr. Haroldo de Campos, *De la razón antropofágica*.

ideas and institutions cannot become adjusted to local reality (in fact, they are always, in some sense, well adjusted, *in place*), but because that process of assimilation is always contradictory due to the presence, in the interior of every culture, of a plurality of agents and modes of appropriation ("a complex, plural society," states Pocock, "will speak a complex, plural language; or rather, a plurality of specialized languages, each carrying its own biases as to the definition and distribution of authority").[52] Thinking that they could be completely dislocated would imply postulating a state of total *anomia* (the dissolution of every system), which is never empirically possible, as even a situation of civil war entails some rules. On the contrary, imagining a state in which ideas were perfectly adjusted would amount to supposing the existence of a fully organic system, a completely regimented order, which has managed to erase every contradiction and fill its internal fissures, in brief, fix its metalanguage, which is not really feasible in relatively complex societies.

Social perceptions regarding the "alienness" of Brazilian culture observed by Schwarz can thus be explained as an expression of the dislocations produced by this complex dynamic within the processes of cultural acquisition. Such an "alienness" is not merely a fact that "popular opinion" records, as the nationalists think, but, as Schwarz eventually suggests, the product of the contradictions and ambivalences generated by the very process of production, transmission, and appropriation of discourses. We could no longer speak of "misplaced ideas," that is, categories or notions which are, by their very nature, maladjusted to local reality and thereby the source of distorted descriptions. Maladjustments are rather an expression of the fact that every assimilation is contradictory. What is important is to understand the very process of *misplacing* ideas. And this leads us to the third, and the truly problematic point since it definitively escapes the reach of Schwarz's categorical horizon.

The third aspect that the introduction of the consideration of the pragmatic dimension of language obliges us to revise in Schwarz's concept lies in the fact that, as a consequence of the preceding considerations, not only are ideas never completely "disjointed" or "misplaced," because if the appropriate conditions of reception by a given system were lacking, they would be irrelevant—invisible—for it, but also the sense of their mislocation cannot be defined except in connection with a given, particular code. That is, the determination of ambivalences for a specific system is

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[52] Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time*, 22.

itself equivocal, a function of the particular, pragmatic context of enunciation. There is not *one* "place of reality" in which one could determine which ideas are "misplaced" and which are not. Lastly, the definition of what is "misplaced" and what is "properly placed" is already a part of the game of equivocation, where, as we saw, the "unrealistic" ones were always those of the others. Recognition of this completely redefines the objective of intellectual history. Its aim now becomes trying to comprehend what is "misplaced" in each particular discursive context: how certain ideas or models and not others come to appear as "misplaced"; how, for some people, some ideas or models are "misplaced," while, for others, they are well adjusted to local reality; finally, how some ideas or models that in certain circumstances appeared, to certain people, as well placed came eventually to be seen, by these same people, as "misplaced" (and vice versa).

Schwarz's classical example of Brazil's 1824 constitution is enlightening on this point. The drafters of the 1824 Brazilian Constitution reproduced the formula in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen affirming that all citizens were free and equal before the law. As Schwarz observes, this was too obviously a misrepresentation of reality: at that time, about a third of the Brazilian population was in slavery. In sum, it would be another example of the series of maladjustments produced by the transposition of liberal ideas to a social context in which the conditions that had created them did not exist. However, the Declaration was not necessarily contradictory with regard to the existence of slavery. This was so only under the assumption that *slaves were subjects of right*, which was precisely what the slavery discourse denied. The fact that it seems "misplaced" to us is revealing only of our own current beliefs (i.e., that we assume that *all* men, including slaves, are subjects of law; in sum, that we no longer share the slavery discourse), which is not relevant in the framework of a historiographical work. Yet, Schwarz was correct when he said, against Carvalho Franco, that the Declaration was "misplaced." It does not matter what *we* think about it; the point here is that, in effect, it seemed so for the *very actors* (or, at least, for some of them); and, in the course of the nineteenth century, especially in the second half of the century, this perception rapidly spread. This was not a confrontation between "ideas" and "realities," but between two opposing discourses (as Lotman asserts, the generation of contradictions or semiotic ambivalences entails the presence of at least two mutually heterogeneous codes), which, in specific circumstances, came into contact and collided. At any rate, the fact is that the "mis-location" of the constitutional charter is not something "natural" or

"fixed," nor is it something which becomes immediately apparent as soon as we read its text and contrast it with the "social reality" of its time. It is, rather, a historical result, the contingent product of a series of uneven developments which determined the particular conditions for the public articulation of discourses in that country at that specific moment. Contrary to Schwarz's assertion, its being "misplaced" cannot be understood if we detach that circumstance from the decomposition process that the institution of slavery was then undergoing in a country whose economy, however, depended fundamentally on that institution. It ultimately reflects how the premises of the slavery discourse were becoming undermined.

This makes us move back to a definition centered on the semantic contents of discourse ("ideas"), but now within a perspective that incorporates the consideration of their pragmatic dimension. This shows why the question whether liberal ideas were misplaced in Brazil cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no". It leads us to situate our approach on a different level of analysis (a movement which Schwarz initiates, without ever completing). A history of the "always partially disjointed ideas" must be defined as a kind of history of "the ideas about misplaced ideas," a history of a second order of ideas, that is, a history of political languages and the modes of their social articulation, circulation, and appropriation.

In sum, we may say that Schwarz's concept of "misplaced ideas," thus reformulated, that is, reinterpreted in terms of the "always partially disjointed ideas," is highly enlightening of the processes of symbolic exchange, in general, and the uneven dynamics of cultural developments in Latin America, in particular. It supplies a more sophisticated conceptual tool to comprehend them than that provided by the scheme of "models" and "deviations" within which Schwarz inscribed his theory, which leads him to analyze "ideas" in terms of meanings and propositions, while attributing to them functions that are proper to their use. As we saw, an appeal to more complex linguistic models allows us to recover the "strong" core of his original proposal, how to account for the maladjustments generated by asymmetrical exchanges from a non-dualistic perspective of cultural developments in peripheral areas, while reformulating it in such a way as to prevent a relapse into the topic. Indeed, the point is to gain critical distance with respect to the topic, to de-familiarize and de-naturalize it, thereby turning it into an object susceptible of critical scrutiny.

Ultimately, such a revision of Schwarz's interpretive framework not only is one of the possible directions in which it can be developed, but also it turns out to be more compatible with the antiessentialist assumptions

implicit in Schwarz's own contention. Yet, the price we must pay for this greater sophistication is the renunciation of all expectations of finding any generic trait, describable in simple terms, that would identify local intellectual history; that is, of discovering some particular feature perceivable in the cultural dynamic of the region that would reveal the commonality of all types of discourse throughout the respective countries and historical periods and, simultaneously, distinguish this cultural dynamic from that of the discourses from all other regions). In short, we must renounce the aspiration to define which ideas are "misplaced" and in which sense they are so in Latin America as a whole, independently from their particular context of utterance. In the last instance, I understand that the basic tenet of the present argument has been perfectly condensed by Schwarz himself in his criticism of Tropicalism: "the generality of this blueprint [tropicalism]," he said, "is such that it embraces all the countries of the continent, at every stage in their history—which might seem to be a defect. What can a formula say about Brazil in 1964 which is equally applicable, say, to nineteenth-century Argentina?"[53]

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[53] Schwarz, "Culture and Politics in Brazil, 1964–1969" (1970), *Misplaced Ideas*, 143–44.