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# The Poetics of History: A Defense of the Washington Address of Octavio Paz

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Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines labor, let them beware that their speculations, for want of correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate at once the extremes of luxury and want. They have exemplified the saying, 'To him that hath, more shall be given; and from him that hath not, the little that he hath shall be taken away.' The rich have become richer, and the poor have become poorer; and the vessel of the state is driven between the Scylla and Charybdis of anarchy and despotism. Such are the effects which must ever flow from an unmitigated exercise of the calculating power.

Percy Bysshe Shelley  
*A Defense of Poetry*

I began the first draft of this article two years ago with the statement, "Contemporary Mexico is a modern Sleeping Beauty, kissed by Prince Petroleum, and as fond neighbors in the American village we wish them well, only too aware of the angry divorces and bitter separations which end so many of our community's bright, historical hopes." Now of course, the marriage of Mexico and modernization has fallen once again into crisis, "the worst since 1929" it is called by good authorities, a victim of the petroleum glut, the U.S. recession, and its own rigid monetary policies. Now I play pool with a Cd. Juárez executive whose paycheck fell from \$3,000 U.S. per month to \$1,000, then \$400 and finally nothing. Meanwhile, across the bridge the little entrepreneurs still run to my car at stoplights to squirt god knows what liquid on my windshield, rubbing it greasy-clean for whatever pesos or pennies I have on the dash; the "Marías" and their rebozo-wrapped infants, with their little heaps of peanuts, sunflower seeds and chicles still sit along 16th of September Ave.; the traditional Tarahumara still stroll barefoot, arm in arm, through the Continental Arcade past the cacophonies of Pac-Man and Astro Blaster.

Then recently, for the first time since its founding, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional lost the municipal offices of nine Chihuahua cities, including Cd. Juárez and Cd. Chihuahua, as well as Durango, and five out of fourteen State Assembly seats in Chihuahua. Significantly, the army guarded the urnas with scrupulous diligence, apparently determined to block any PRI sponsored "dirty tricks."

Once again Mexican history vindicates Octavio Paz: "No one knows the form of the future: it is a secret . . . which is found neither in the books of Marx nor of his adversaries."

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In Mexico the Spanish conquest destroyed the Indian civilization but . . . the cadaver continued to live. (EOF, 127)

The American lives on the very edge of the now, always ready to leap toward the future. (R:MUS, 148)

In his 1978 "Washington Address" titled "Mexico and the United States: Positions and Counterpositions," Paz identifies the primary qualities of historical and cultural style that distinguish our two nations' behaviours from one another. (The English translation is furnished in Paz 1979a, cited in the text as R:MUS.) It is a discussion which holds no surprises for those who have followed his work through *El laberinto de la soledad* (ELS), *Posdata* (PD), and the diverse pieces issued recently under the title *El ogro filantrópico* (EOF). In fact, the Washington Address sums up many of the issues of U.S. and Mexican history he has expounded through those works and provides an ideal vantage point from which to explicate his mode of historical and cultural analysis, a mode currently out of fashion and under attack in the academies, to our common loss and potential peril. The Washington Address raises an urgent and poignant question: in the especially sensitive and recently expanded dialogue of analysis between specialists above and below the "Rio," will the neo-technocrats with their quantifying language and total commitment to the glories of the future dominate our policy-making processes, or will the less innovative but more rigorous and intuitional language of humanistic analysis, with its steady, tedious focus on value and meaning, be permitted an influencing voice in the discussion? To take Paz seriously is to affirm the latter. More pointedly, can the analyses of a poet have any relevance to the hard facts of Mexico's encounter with its economic destiny, to its massive problems in the areas of employment, transportation, foreign trade, oil development, land tenure, and the evolution of a new U.S.-Mexico order of interdependence? Paz is not anti-materialist (and certainly not anti-socialist); he simply insists there is something more to U.S. and Mexican history than economic analysis can account for—and that "more" is not derivative; it is central.

Through three central sections of the Washington Address Paz explores the cultural distinctions between Mexico and the U.S. as a triad of oppositional categories labeled "North & South," "In & Out," and "Past & Future." By way of

preface to an examination of the issue of method and authority, I will mention only two topics among the many which Paz raises in these sections: the Indian and archetypes of time and change.

Though in the articles of *El ogro filantrópico* he speaks often of the Novohispanic seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a since-equalled period of Mexican cultural achievement and even agrees at one point with historian Cosío Villegas that "Mexico begins with the Independence" (1821), in the Washington Address Paz returns to a theme he has played upon repeatedly since *El laberinto de la soledad*: "Mexico is Mexico thanks to the Indian presence. . . . In the United States the Indian dimension does not appear. This is, in my judgment, the major difference between the two countries" (R:MUS, 140). The Indian, Paz affirms, has absorbed disease, inter-marriage, enslavement, and Christianity (not vice versa) to become the "bone" of Mexico, "its first and final reality," and through *mestizaje* its racial center. The indigenous heritage, he believes, impregnates everything from religious ritual and popular legends to forms of family behaviour, attitudes toward parents, love, friendship, courtesy, cooking, work, political authority, death, celebration, sex, and human fertility. In Anglo North America, on the other hand, "the historical memory is not [indigenous] American but European." This is neither noble savagery nor sentimental escapism but for Paz a fundamental distinction between two very separate cultural histories.

In any such comparison the strong Indian character of many Mexican traditions inevitably indicates their absence in U.S. culture. While he never says it specifically—the closest he comes is repeatedly to invoke Zapata and the *campesino*, precapitalist value system as the possible "seed" of a genuinely Mexican development strategy—Paz clearly considers this Indianization not a detriment but a cultural advantage Mexico has over the U.S., though not without its insidious influences. As every student of American literature is aware, the urge for incarnation and legitimacy, for absorption into native American figures and symbols, is a major hunger of the North American imagination from Thoreau to Faulkner, William Carlos Williams, and Charles Olson and remains still strong as Jerome Rothenberg and Gary Snyder testify. From Las Cruces to Tucson to Denver, the booming sale of Pueblo pottery and Navajo jewelry demonstrates the continuing public desire to somehow buy into the properties of American authenticity. The Puritan horror before and rejection of fallen nature, personified so explicitly in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* as the American wilderness and its human inhabitants, proved finally more persistent than the analogous theology of demonology brought by the Spanish friars to New Spain. The Indian, however diligently John Eliot worked to awaken and save his soul, was ineligible for the New England community of saints and its ecclesiastical history which Mather argues is the only world history that counts. The perspective Paz offers from Mexico enables us to see that the consequences of this cultural decision to eliminate the Indian from history were enormous: "The United States were founded on a land without a past." Only by systematically segregating the Indian (the historical reality of man in America) from his theology, his law, and his genes was it possible for the Anglo-Puritan to establish and perpetuate his myth of the "New Man" with his soteriological, redemptive mission as genuine history on the American continent—which he was then free to define as a "land

without a past." The mestizo, of course, would find the continual refutation of such a myth in the color of his skin. The Franciscan millennialism in New Spain, on the other hand, with its roots in the mysticism of St. Francis and Joachim de Flora, took the Indian as its very focus of perfectibility; in his tragic retrospect on the Indian church, the *História eclesiástica indiana* (1595-96), Fr. Gerónimo de Mendietta describes the lost Franciscan vision of the perfect *gens angelicum* ("angelic man") as the native American brought under the reign of Grace, but with his original morality, humility, and poverty intact.

It is extremely difficult for a North American to comprehend or even see the social, psychological, and political complexities (of which the much-disputed policies of *indigenismo* are only a facet) consequent to the presence of "Indian" qualities in contemporary Mexican society. Paz himself supplies us only a glimpse. It is the aspect of Mexican reality with which U.S. policy-makers are perhaps fatally unprepared to deal.

The analysis of this *mestizaje* is a highly sophisticated and deeply rooted Mexican intellectual tradition, of which Paz is only a late manifestation. The first great age of mestizo historiography in Mexico dawns already in the late sixteenth century among the students of Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún at the University of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, particularly in Antonio Valeriano of Azcapotzalco who served for more than thirty years as native governor of Mexico City. Valeriano had a hand in many of Sahagún's ethnohistorical projects and is the author (very possibly the elaborator) of the first known account (in Nahuatl) of the three apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego in 1531, probably before Valeriano was born. Valeriano died in 1605 and his manuscript was not published until 1649. The mestizo vision of history decidedly asserts itself in the voluminous and monumental labors of Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (*Historia de la nación chichimeca* and *Relaciones*), Fernando Alvarado Tezozomoc (*Crónica mexicayotl* and *Crónica mexicana*), and Chimalpahin Cuauhtlehuanitzin (*Relaciones originales*) between c. 1590 and 1640. It is no accident that most of these works have only recently been or are in the process of being issued in paperback editions and translations (of the Nahuatl texts), making them accessible not only to scholars but to the general public.

North Americans continue to be both enlightened and misled by the clichés of the tourist industry and by slick publications such as the December, 1980 *National Geographic* on "Aztec Mexico." Here, in glorious color, is the panoply of flood-lighted ruins, turquoise masks, folk dancers, Nahua shamans and "sorceresses," the obligatory Sun Stone, and now the magnificent new Coyoxauhqui Stone uncovered in February, 1978, during the excavations of the Templo Mayor Project, which is bringing to light the remains of the pyramid which stood at the center of the Mexica-Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán, now a few hundred yards from the National Cathedral. As Paz repeatedly insists, however, it is not so much in what these images reveal that we will see the real Mexico, as in what they conceal. The symbolism of identity and legitimization latent in the Templo Mayor Project alone are too complex for even a survey here. In the argument between defenders of the colonial architecture standing over the site and the archeologists who wanted to dig, the diggers won hands down; every foreign dignitary of any stature at all gets his tour of the excavations and his moment of meditation before the dismembered image of Coyoxauhqui; the

national, nightly T.V. news program, "24 Horas," offers all of Mexico regular on-site reports of the latest shrine uncovered, the newest Tlaloc figure found. The pyramid of Mexico-Tenochtitlán has clearly risen once again to become a central numen of Mexican cultural and political life. We would be blind indeed not to see in this new commitment to resurrect the central image of Aztec imperial hegemony the secret analogy of aspiration between the fifteenth-century power, self-determination, and control of which that pyramid was the economic and spiritual nexus, and the emerging, twentieth-century vision of petroleum-based, regional influence.

The Templo Mayor Project, in fact, is the vindication, if not the fulfillment, of a controversial historical analysis Paz made in *Posdata*, written in an effort to discover the deeper causes of the 1968 Tlatelolco tragedy:

The critique of Mexico and its history . . . must begin with an examination of what the Aztec world vision signified and what it continues to signify. The image of Mexico as a pyramid is one point of view among others equally possible. (PD, 135)

Implicit in that image, Paz warned, is a double perspective: the view from the top—the view of the priests, lords, pontiffs, viceroys and presidents—and the view from below—the perspective of the immense majority, the victims who pay the tributes of labor and blood. In spite of the Templo Mayor Project, anthropological opinion is now almost unanimous in its identification with the latter view. Without denying the rich inheritance of judicial, philosophical, literary, and commercial institutions appropriated from neighboring and vassal states, few scholars would object to characterization of the Aztec state as a violent, superimposed, exploitive, military-theocratic apparatus. So much more reason, then, if the shrine of Huitzilopochtli rises once more into the landscape of Mexican national symbols to recognize the validity of Paz's initial assertion: "The critique [and understanding] of Mexico begins with the critique [and understanding] of the pyramid" (PD, 135).

In the third central section of the Washington Address Paz identifies the five historical realities to which he attributes the contrasting political identities of our two nations:

1) Because of its vast cultural diversity, colonial Mexico "had a [superimposed, centralized] state and church before it was a nation," whereas in the North an embryonic nation with "a clear-cut and belligerent concept of [its] identity" preceded and impelled the creation of the state.

2) "Harmony, not contradiction, existed between the North Americans' religious convictions and their democratic institutions, whereas in Mexico Catholicism was identified with the viceregal regime, and was its orthodoxy. . . . The establishment of a republican democracy in Mexico meant a radical break with the past, and led to the civil wars of the nineteenth century. These wars produced the militarism that, in turn, produced the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz."

3) The differing attitudes of Protestant reformism and Catholic orthodoxy toward criticism and spiritual authority produced two societies which were both deeply religious, but also profoundly "irreconcilable": "One society fostered the complex and majestic conceptual structure of orthodoxy, an equally

complex ecclesiastical hierarchy, wealthy and militant religious orders. . . . The other fostered free discussion of the scriptures, a small and often poor clergy, a tendency to eliminate the hierarchical boundaries between the simple believer and the priest, and a religious practice based not on ritual but on ethics.

4) The most basic historical divergence, however, occurred when, by shutting itself off from the currents of criticism loosened by the Reformation and which then opened out toward modernism, "Spain and her possessions closed themselves to the modern world." The U.S., on the other hand, "was born of the Reformation and the Enlightenment. It came into being under the sign of criticism and self-criticism." From critical practice evolved the rationalist ideology of progress "which displaced the timeless values of Christianity and transplanted them to the earthly and linear time of history. Christian eternity became the future of liberal evolutionism."

5) This latter divergence is both consequence and continuing agent of the ultimate distinction, from which the others still devolve: separate assumptions on the nature of time. Paz believes that the foundation of reality-sense for any given culture is its unique, largely unconscious metaphor of time, its "temporal archetype." Historically, Mexico and the U.S. have chosen sharply contradictory archetypes. The U.S. "is a society oriented toward the future," while Mexico has been historically disciplined toward the past. This distinction is for Paz a simple, scientific observation and emphatically *not* a criticism of the Mexican perspective; his own repeated and self-consciously idealistic reference to Zapata is just such an imagining. Precisely because of their anti-modernist impulse to "return to the origins," Paz sees in the Zapatistas "a seed of truth" which might grow into something able to replace the doomed (for Paz) modernization project. This, of course, is sheerest romantic nonsense to North American technocracy which looks not to mystical Indians but to management by objectives, micro-circuits, and the MX missile for its own redemption and the progress of the Western world in general. Politically, however, the Mexican attitude has a price: to the detriment of democratic procedure, the state, agent of an enormous thrust toward modernization, "has been able to modernize itself."

In characterizing the Mexican temporal archetype as an ahistorical image of "divine immutability," Paz is describing a theory of time which, again, reaches back through mestizo consciousness to the Precolumbian past. Though this quality of immutability appears to stand out in Paz's juxtaposition of it against the modernist time-set of North America, perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of Mexico's vacillation between the contradictory images of time as immutability and as unlimited progress. The Precolumbian vision of time already contained this vacillation in the Nahua ambivalence between time-as-eternal-cycle (as depicted, for example, in the Mexica Sun Stone) and time-as-individualized-history (recorded as *itoloca* "what is said about persons" in paratactic, pictographic chronicles), an ambivalence marvelously accommodated within the complex of cycles and sequences of the *tonalpoalli* or "day-counting" calendar system. Indeed, on one of its many levels, the widely familiar myth of the flight and apotheosis of Quetzalcoatl can be read as a temporal archetype of perpetual tension between the antagonistic theories of mythic (cyclical) and historical (linear) time. Certainly, few contemporary, progressive Mexicans would admit to the pursuit of an "image of divine immutability," but the ambivalence which Paz's statement brings to our attention, the Faulknerian

obsession with images of the past, can be readily exemplified. A 1979 *Los Angeles Times* poll of 1,000 Mexico City residents, covering a broad range of attitudes and perceptions, found that 82% (86% of women) of those questioned were of the opinion that the new oil revenues would not filter down to the lower levels of their society or basically alter those levels for the better. The pollsters deduce that such wide-spread attitudes demonstrate a broad lack of confidence in Mexican political institutions and distribution mechanisms. However, perhaps this pessimism is less a statement about actual economic change in Mexico or about the credibility of the regime than it is another instance of a consistent and historical ambivalence toward the future in general. If we take into account Paz's archetype of immutability, perhaps we can see at least as much myth as disenchantment in such an attitude.

At the very least, the analysis of Paz should convey an implicit warning to North American planners and policy analysts, a warning which only the poetic mode he employs could make concrete and convincing: never underestimate the depth and range of Mexican scepticism toward North American ideals, values, assumptions.

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How are we Mexicans to supervise and watch over a state richer and more powerful at every turn? How are we to avoid the gigantic and ruinous projects spawned by the megalomania of technocrats drunken with figures and statistics? (EOF, 9)

The only objection relevant to the essay at hand, the Washington Address and its antecedents, has two horns: Paz is a passé historian whose speculative mode of analysis can no longer be taken seriously by contemporary historical "science"; secondly, the pessimistic, introspective burden of that analysis is itself an historical statement of the preoccupations of a past generation of Mexican intellectual elite, no longer relevant or even interesting to contemporary Mexico and its new-wave, populist technocrats who look to their nation's future with confidence and optimism. To demonstrate the inadequacy of these objections to Paz's analysis, we must look at his work in a broad but unified perspective, his own perspective, in which the analysis of history is inseparable from his poetic and moral vision. Particularly, we must read carefully the first and last pages of the Washington Address where he reiterates emphatically positions, methodology, and principles he has expounded in detail through other works.

At issue is nothing less than the question of the influence and function of mythic thinking, thinking through the modes of narrative and analogy, in modernist society. The rationalist technocrat shrugs and smiles indulgently: "What myth? That all went out with Darwin. Myths are those wierd stories collected by social misfits among Jivaro headhunters or old Navajo medicine men. Curious stuff, but thoroughly sentimental and useless." As Robert Duncan points out in his essay "The Truth and Life of Myth," for example, Darwin's



theory of evolution is simply the vital, paradigmatic narrative of genesis, the myth, to which we now generally give assent. This is not the place to survey the thinkers and observers from Freud to Unamuno to Piaget, Cassirer, and Lévi-Strauss who point out the persistence of non-rational modes of thought into contemporary life and culture; suffice it that Paz should make his own assumptions clear: "We all know that not only poets, madmen, savages, and children apprehend the world in an act of participation that cannot be reduced to logical reasoning; but each time they dream, fall in love, or take part in their professional, civic, or political ceremonies, other human beings 'participate,' return, form part of that vast 'society of life' that Cassirer regards as the source of magical beliefs. And I do not exclude teachers, psychiatrists, and politicians" (BL, 104). Nor, he adds, can these attitudes be dismissed as "primitive," since "they do not constitute ancient, infantile, or regressive forms of the psyche, but a present possibility that is common to all men."

Here is the root of the whole issue, and the claim to an intellectual territory which Paz makes, implicitly *as poet*. If it is true that all men apprehend their experience "in . . . act(s) of participation that cannot be reduced to logical reasoning," then some component at least of that experience, which is history, must function according to pre- and non-rational processes which can never be reduced to reason or laws of any sort whatever, whose sign is "participation" and whose mode is not logical but analogical. There is only one specialist of the analogical and the mythic in our culture: the poet (which includes dramatist and novelist, of course). Two other apparent candidates, the cultural anthropologist and the psychoanalyst, are not specialists in participation through the irrational but in reducing the irrational to logical schemata. Paz, however, as do his surrealist masters and every authentic poet since Blake, insists there is this fundamental component of experience which will not reduce. Within Paz's understanding, participation is the *sine qua non* of poetry itself: "There is one common note to all poems, without which they would never be poetry: participation" (BL, 14). The "error" of Paz from the North American perspective is his failure to know and keep his place in the academic ghetto. Not having been indoctrinated in the New Criticism distinctions between the language of truth (science) and the language of emotion (poetry), Paz has the temerity to presume that some historical truths are untouchable by science and that the faculty upon which both poetic thinking and social participation alike rest, the imagination, can discover and reveal them.

Paz calls his mode of historical analysis "an exercise of critical imagination," which is "something very distinct from an essay on the philosophy of mejicanismo or from a search for our supposed 'being.' The Mexican is not an essence but a history. Neither ontology nor psychology" (PD, 10). He specifically denies any parallel with the psycholinguistic analysis of Samuel Ramos, who described an Adlerian "inferiority complex" within Mexican culture. Calling his *Laberinto de la soledad* a study within the French "moralism" tradition, Paz says of Ramos, "He gets involved in the psychology; in my case, the psychology is only a means by which to arrive at a moral and historical critique" (EOF, 20). To read Paz as a poet who also dabbles in history is widely and dangerously to miss his point on several counts. Rather, it is precisely by virtue of his discipline and training as a poet that Paz is empowered to see and authorized to analyze Mexican history and the U.S. relationship to it. To misunderstand that

is to misrepresent and underestimate the quality of historical meaning which only the imagination can identify, a quality totally alien to the bad faith and deception, intentional or unintentional, implicit in the Marxist notion of "mystification." As analytical tool, Paz argues and demonstrates, the imagination, when focused and developed, is capable of combining and penetrating knowledge so as to reveal what other modes can only glimpse through speculation. The imagination does not speculate; it demonstrates, and its evidence is concrete. The poetics, the politics, and the historiography of Paz are a seamless fabric, and we cannot study a part without in some general way invoking the structure of the whole.

Paz has always granted the utility, even necessity, of quantitative historical analysis and says so explicitly in the opening of the Washington Address: "Of course, the differences between Mexico and the United States are not imaginary projections but objective realities. Some are quantitative, and can be explained by the social, economic, and historical development of the two countries." However, the poet-analyst affirms in this opening section entitled "Poverty and Civilization," "the really fundamental difference is an invisible one, and in addition it is perhaps insuperable." These are the "more permanent [differences]," which "though also the result of history, are not easily definable or measureable" (R:MUS, 136).

Here, on the first page of the Washington Address, Paz forces us to confront the issue of his authority. By what "discipline" does he presume to find these "invisible" differences between our two cultures? This is a question which rests implicit in the problem of method and determines our confidence in the validity and utility of the author's mind and its work. It is an issue of some importance for U.S.-Mexican relations. The riddles of that relationship are currently being transformed, with all possible dispatch, into computer fodder of various sorts by statisticians and economists who strongly suggest, even insist, that all which cannot be averaged out, incorporated into data sets, assembled into indices, or brought "on line" simply isn't hard knowledge and can be dismissed as speculation. Unfortunately, such puritanical epistemology (which results when the social scientist forgets he is a scientist by analogy only) must eventually bring confusion, frustration, and bafflement into the sincere and hopeful efforts of both North Americans and Mexicans to be understanding and of mutual assistance. No set or combinations of sets of data will ever fully prepare us for what Mexicans will feel or do in any given situation, now or in the future. Neither will the numbers tell us what to feel or do in return. If the purpose of our studies is to discipline or at least prepare for the future, for the color of its passions and the cost of its energy, then perhaps the "critical imagination" working to analyze the symbolic categories of national consciousness, its patrimony of historical constants, might be of assistance. It can hardly prepare us any more poorly than the graphs of the sociologists and the indices of the political economists. Perhaps taken together, as Paz suggests, we may get something approaching a reasonable picture.

But never a full one. A fundamental tenet of Paz's analysis is the ever-mysterious, incalculable quality of the future, a function of the necessarily selective and reductive process involved in all historical summations or paradigms which seek to project themselves as predictions. In the first paragraph of the Washington Address he sets forth his reasoning in detail.

If man is not the king of creation, he is at least the exception of Nature, the particularity that defies all rules and definitions. Scientists express amazement before the unexpected behaviour of elemental particles, but what are these physical (nuclear) eccentricities compared to the psychological and moral extravagancies of a Nero or a Francis of Assisi? The history of societies is no less rich in irregularities and rarities than are the biographies of individuals. What is anthropology if not the description of astonishing customs and delirious rites? Societies are as unpredictable as individuals and so it is that the catalogue of the flawed prophecies of the sociologists, even the greatest, is greater and more impressive than that of the astrologers and the clairvoyants. History accumulates incoherencies and contradictions with a sense of humor both involuntary and perverse. (MEU, 5)

This is a position he has expressed repeatedly, most notably in the conclusion to his 1969 Hackett Memorial Lecture, "Mexico: la última década," which would appear in 1970 as section two of his book *Posdata* under the title "El desarrollo y otros espejismos" (Development and Other Mirages):

No one knows the form of the future: it is a secret—that is the lesson of this half century of reversals—which is found neither in the books of Marx nor of his adversaries. (M:UD, 26; PD, 100)

What Paz supplies in his discussion is not research, data, or even a system of information analysis. He assumes the fundamental necessity of these, but himself seeks to offer that without which they are meaningless: a wisdom of the human context, a revelation of the unique language of value by which a culture marshals information into the service of its mutual interests, aspirations, needs, and dreams. His distinction from the academic researcher and the foundation of his contribution are precisely that which the "scientific" scholar too often misunderstands and maligns: the refusal to be bound or committed to any given language of analysis or terminology of interpretation not of his own making. He accepts no system but his own experience and sees all languages of analysis as so many metaphors of reality, like all metaphors limited and partial in their comprehension. From Freud, Breton, Hegel, Nietzsche, Jung, Marx, Blake, Kant, Keynes, Reyes, Prebisch, Lévi-Strauss or Heidegger he takes whatever suits his purpose and recognizes no obligation to account for the rest, remaining committed at every point only to the integrity of his own disciplined intuition. Beyond the intricacies of statistical analysis he sees the ancient, metaphorical trope of synecdoche, the part standing for the whole. Beneath (or above or through) the text of the primary historical source he sees the fictional figure of the narrator, subject to all the limitations and freedoms of the novelist (Roa Bastos' *Yo el Supremo* would seem to be an especially emphatic statement of this reality). His analysis of history, then, is not so much a method—it is constructed strictly for his own use—as a pattern. Needless to say, it is a skill which cannot be taught. The poet-analyst can only be self-trained, and his utility for the rest of us is directly proportional to the quality of his discipline, his ability to harmonize with the infinite but overlapping rhythms of our socialized lives.

While the future lies ever virgin and intact, there are powers and symbolic presences implicit within the immediate dynamics of any culture which tend to influence its behavior. Paz insists that historical analysis must go beyond the material framework in which Mexican life evolves, beyond the numbers of development and underdevelopment, to take into account the particular imaginative forms of the culture's hopes and nightmares. "Our countries . . . are separated more by profound social, economic, and psychic differences than by physical and political frontiers. These differences are self-evident, and a superficial glance might reduce them to the well-known opposition between development and underdevelopment, wealth and poverty, power and weakness, domination and dependence" (R:MUS, 136). To see the fundamental, "invisible" differences, however, we must be willing to look beyond the material framework of development and underdevelopment to the larger, more durable and resilient context of "civilization," the symbol-structure of identity and meaning to which a people submits its personal and collective life.

The reality to which we give the name of civilization does not allow of easy definition. It is each society's vision of the world and also its feeling about time. . . . Civilization is a society's style, its way of living and dying. It embraces the erotic and the culinary arts; dancing and burial; courtesy and curses; work and leisure; rituals and festivals; punishments and rewards; dealings with the dead and with the ghosts who people our dreams; attitudes toward women and children, old people and strangers, enemies and allies; eternity and the present; the here and the now and the beyond. A civilization is not only a system of values but a world of forms and codes of behaviour, rules and exceptions. It is society's visible side—institutions, monuments, works, things—but it is especially its submerged, invisible side: beliefs, desires, fears, repressions, dreams. (R:MUS, 136, 138)

In a 1971 roundtable at Harvard Paz suggested that Dumézil's notion of "ideology" approximates his own conception of this complex of "beliefs, myths, ideas . . . which together compose a particular manner of viewing the world and society. This 'ideology,' in its turn, depends upon certain traditional mental structures which are unconscious models of a sort according to which we classify and understand both objective reality and ourselves" (EOP, 127). However, in the introduction to "Critique of the Pyramid," the final section of *Posdata*, Paz has provided the most detailed discussion of the object of his analysis. Fully aware that he flies directly in the face of contemporary analytical fashion in the social sciences, he is nevertheless firm as to his subject as well as his mode. After noting the "scientific" reality of a divided Mexico according to socio-economic criteria, he goes on to indicate an entirely distinct stratum of socio-historical reality, "the other Mexico," which cuts completely across the socio-economic indices and is immune to their quantitative terms.

The division of Mexico into two parts, one developed and the other underdeveloped, is scientific and corresponds to the social and economic reality of our country. At the same time, in a distinct stratum, there is another Mexico. I do not mean to suggest in any way an ahistorical or atemporal

entelechy. It is possible that the expression "the other Mexico" lacks precision, but truth to tell I have found no other more suitable for the purpose. With it I propose to designate that gaseous reality formed by the beliefs, images, and concepts which history deposits in the sub-soil of the social psyche, that cave or basement in continual somnolence and, therefore, in perpetual fermentation. . . . The phenomenon [in question is] the existence in every civilization of certain complexes, pre-suppositions, and mental structures, all generally unconscious and obstinately resistant to the erosions and changes of history. (PD, 109, 110)

I speak of realities forgotten and negated obstinately and obtusely by the modern world and which, nevertheless, reappear now with renewed energy: that entire complex of attitudes toward the world and the supra-world, life and death, the self and the other, which constitute everything we call a civilization. (PD, 63)

Nowhere in *Posdata*, however, does Paz offer so brief and irrefutable a proof of his matter of analysis, this unique and influential complex of "ideology" which emerges from the perdurable mental structures of the social psyche within a given culture, as he provides in the Washington Address. Our response to this proof will determine not only our attitude toward all that follows in the essay, but will decide our capability to understand and use most of what he has written about United States and Mexican history.

To prove that [the fundamental difference between the U.S. and Mexico] has nothing to do with economics or political power, we have only to imagine a Mexico suddenly turned into a prosperous, mighty country, a superpower like the United States. Far from disappearing, the difference would become more acute and more clear cut. (R:MUS, 136)

Granted the validity of Paz's act of imagination, we must then admit not only the possibility but the necessity of the stylistic analysis he performs—regardless of what we feel about the specific observations or conclusions he draws. If we admit that the roots of our antagonisms and misunderstandings are something more than the repercussions of development vs. underdevelopment, then any complete attempt to address those roots must include an analytical language capable of addressing that "something more" of cultural style.

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The imagination is the faculty for discovering the hidden relations between things. (EOF, 38)

Historical events rhyme among themselves, and the logic which orders their movements evokes less a system of axioms than a space where echoes and correspondences merge and separate themselves. (EOF, 39)

Historical analogies are useful as rhetorical figures. They are not historical laws, they are metaphors. (EOF, 68)

I don't know if history repeats itself; I know that men change little. (EOF, 262)

With the object of the analysis located, we proceed to the mode of this "exercise of the critical imagination." If Paz's authority is poetic, his pattern is metaphoric, and there are two foundation metaphors from which the pattern emerges: history as a poetic text, and social dynamic as psychological dynamic, the "social psyche." Combined, they constitute the guiding principle of Paz's analytic pattern: history as an unfinished, poetic text-ure written by a unified but irrational and unpredictable cultural mind. The intent: to analyze the "style" of this text—which is a culture—as the visible structure of the authorial mind, in order to achieve the ultimate, moral purpose of the whole process: the enactment of a kind of psychoanalytical "therapy" within that social psyche. In *Posdata* Paz has asserted the first metaphor explicitly.

The history we live is a text; in the text of visible history we must read the metamorphoses and changes of invisible history. This reading is a deciphering, the translation of a translation: we will never read the original. (PD, 115)

Of course, there is no authorial "mind" in history and there cannot be a "text" written by it, no "original" in Paz's words, but men certainly act and speak as though both mind and text were as visible and concrete as themselves; hence the necessity of the metaphors: to render an invisible, illusory reality both visible and actual, to perform something like a reading of a thing which behaves very much like a text of imaginative literature.

Paz defines the characteristics of such a text in his still-classic discussion of poetics, *El arco y la lira* (*The Bow and the Lyre*). There he speaks of two irreducible realities which combine to create the poetic phrase, the basic unit of all literary discourse: the image and rhythm. The image Paz defines as the verbal approximation or unification of realities which are disparate, opposite, or indifferent to one another. Rhythm in the poetic text is its quality of creative repetition. In its essence, rhythm is the manifestation of the phenomenology of time, and provides man means to situate himself simultaneously within and beyond its flow, to define both time and its opposite. "The poet enchants language by means of rhythm." By means of poetic language he enchants time. This mastery rests in the poet's commitment to the ancient, non-rational trope of magical and mythic thought: the analogy. "The belief in the power of words proclaims the triumph of analogical thinking over rational."

Poetic discourse does not deny rational discourse—Dante stands forever as witness—but through its focus and dependence upon the rhythm of analogy it does deny reason priority. Poetry subordinates all rational discourse to a figural or tropological context governed by the principle of analogy. In superseding or balancing the principle of contradiction (This cannot at the same time be that), the principle of analogy (This is at the same time both itself and that) creates both a return to something original and an expectation, a rhythm.

The culminating meaning of the rhythmic image that the language of poetry creates, Paz believes, is participation, by the rhythm of analogy and the re-creational power of the image, in what Cassirer has called "the society of life."

Man reveals himself in rhythm, the emblem of his temporality; rhythm in return, declares itself in the image; and the image returns to man as soon as two lips repeat the poem. By means of rhythm, creative repetition, the image—a bundle of meanings that rebel at explanation—is opened to participation. (BL, 101)

There is one common note to all poems, without which they would never be poetry: participation. Each time the reader truly relives the poem, he reaches a state that we can call poetic. The experience can take this or that form, but it is always a going beyond oneself, a breaking of the temporal walls, to be another. . . . The reader struggles and dies with Hector, doubts and kills with Arjuna, recognizes the rocks of his native coast with Odysseus. He relives an image, denies succession, overflows time. (BL, 14-15)

Of course, as Paz himself reminds us, the "other" can always and only be within the self, and the encounter, the participation with the "other" is always a "going beyond ourselves to the encounter of ourselves." The poetic (and the mythic) experience is *like* magic, but the force of irony stops it short of magic itself. Paz certainly maintains that poetry is a privileged form of discourse, but he does not assert that this existential instant is either sacralized or reified.

If man has no essence but his desire to become what he is not, to be "other," then his history is a record of signs and images of becoming: "The Mexican is not an essence but a history," a history of images, figures, and masks. The mask of identity, which functions as a leit-motif throughout *El laberinto de la soledad* and on into *Posdata*, is Paz's master symbol of a centerless individual abyss which all personal and social qualities of identity and behaviour strive to obscure and cover. Names, nouns, and pronouns are all masks, "and behind them there is no one. But while we live we can escape neither the masks, nor the names and pronouns: we are inseparable from our fictions—our features. We are all condemned to invent a mask and, later, to discover that this mask is our true face" (PD, 11). The events of man's history, therefore, can certainly have no more essence or integrity than man himself. The gathering of historical data is the generation of an image of events (often more integral than the image of those who experienced them); the writing-up of that data is a projection of that image as a figure of the author's imagination.

Perhaps now we can also understand in what way Paz considers history to share the dynamic of poetic experience. The analysis which the critical imagination enacts is one of these historiographic forms whose various patterns rest finally on the principle of analogy rather than on the principle of contradiction as must all rationalist descriptions of history. Poetic experience, in Paz's vision, is the model of historical experience. It follows, therefore, that certain qualities and characteristics within historical experience can only be read "poetically," that is, according to the analytical principles of the imagination and its analogical focus.

As do poetic images, the "historical structures" of a given society repeat themselves, Paz believes, according to a vast, analogical rhythm. This recurrent quality of rhythmic identity provides his mode of analysis its urgency and its applicability to the present. In the past as past Paz has no interest whatsoever; it is the past which will not rest that invigorates and terrifies him:

That which actually passes away, of course, is past, but there is something which does not pass away, something which passes without passage of time, a perpetual present in rotation. The history of every society contains certain elements which are invariable, or whose variations are so gradual as to be imperceptible... The past reappears because it is an occult present. (PD, 111)

The continual social process of reoccurrence is intensified, Paz feels, in times of crisis: "I believe," he affirms in the Washington Address, "that whenever a society finds itself in crisis, it turns its eyes instinctively toward its origins and searches in them for, if not an answer, a sign, an indication" (MEU, 12).

To read history as poetic text, then, is to search out those definitive statements of action, those story-images through which a society has composed the ceaseless, fragmented chaos of its experience into meanings, which it will continue to "read," remember, and "recite" (re-enact) for as long as it retains an identity. Those images are identity, both visible and invisible, both social and personal. Anyone can recite a poem; fewer can sufficiently comprehend the tension and potential of its image fully to read it. To judge is a still further level of participation requiring "critical imagination." The entire process affirms "the triumph of analogical thinking over rational."

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I spoke before of the moral; now I should add another word: therapeutic. Moral criticism is a self-revelation of that which we have hidden and, as Freud teaches, a relative ... healing. In this sense my book was intended as an essay of moral criticism: description of a hidden reality which harms us. (EOF, 20)

The criticism of writers and of artists is not an ideological criticism: it is a criticism which penetrates to strata of conscience and consciousness deeper than ideology. (EOF, 104)

The contributions of both Freud and Marx to the process of the critical imagination as practiced in *El laberinto de la soledad*, *Posdata*, and *El ogro filantrópico* are acknowledged, but they do not, Paz insists, either separately or in combination, provide the concepts necessary to sufficiently explain or defend that process, which is "neither ontology nor psychology."

I do not refer in any way to an ahistorical or atemporal entelechy, nor to an archetype in terms of Jung or Mircea Eliade... The conceptions of



Marx and Freud do not seem to me to explain the totality of the phenomenon. . . . (PD, 109–110)

Hence the reference back to the autonomous, paradigmatic experience of poetry, and from those foundations the second fundamental metaphor: society as a *kind of individual mind* to be exposed *somewhat* after the manner of therapeutic analysis. Paz no more asserts that society is an individual than he says a poem is a sacred object which bestows upon its creator eternal consciousness.

The purpose of the pattern, even more than in psychoanalysis, is always therapeutic, never merely scientific or disinterested. The diverse articles in *El ogro filantrópico*, Paz says in his "Propósito," in addition to being descriptions and interpretations of a multiple past, ". . . are a therapeutic for its present ills. The function of history was not otherwise in Thucydides, in Machiavelli, in Michelet" (EOF, 11). Paz's discussion is fueled by a moral impulse which leads the analysis always to a critical finale. His continual concern is to meet the present with neither simplistic illusions nor distorting, "neurotic" obsessions: "In my political utopia, we are not all happy, but, at least, we are all responsible" (PD, 101). In writing both *El laberinto de la soledad* and *Posdata* he assures us, ". . . I had no interest in the definition of *mejicanismo*, but only . . . in criticism: that activity which consists, as much or more than in knowing ourselves, in liberating ourselves. Criticism unfolds a possibility of liberty, and thus is an invitation to action" (PD, 12).

As in the ethic of psychoanalysis, Paz seeks, through the agency of critical imagination, to liberate the "patient" into responsibility and therefore independence, to release all natural powers of growth, regeneration, and awareness from the control of self-destructive repetition compulsions. The action to which the social critique of the imagination invites is always subject to the virtue of harmony; the ethic of Paz's analysis, in other words, is inseparable from his aesthetics. Against the background of those immanent, psycho-social structures by which he "reads" the deep structure of social rhythm or identity, the poet-historian launches a two-part, critical therapy. First, he seeks to purge by exposure the "pathogenic ignorance" behind which destructive repetition compulsions unique to a given society repress their origins or rationalize their necessity. It is helpful to remember that the central problem Paz sets for himself in *Posdata*, where his analytical pattern receives its most overt discussion, is to explain to his own satisfaction the unique "ferocity, there is no other word," of the Mexican regime's attack on the Student Movement rally at the Plaza of Tlatelolco in October of 1968 in which over 300 demonstrators died and countless more were wounded. In the summarizing response with which he opens the book—and later argues at length in "Critique of the Pyramid"—we can see the psychoanalytic analogy in formulation, its terms extending into the "infancy" of Mexican history:

The regime demonstrated that it neither could nor would make an examination of conscience; very well, without criticism and, above all, without self-criticism, there is no possibility of change. This moral and mental weakness led it to physical violence. *Like those neurotics* who upon confronting new and difficult situations draw back, pass from fear to rage, commit senseless acts, and so regress to instinctive, infantile, and animal

behaviours, the government regressed to earlier periods in the history of Mexico: aggression is the synonym of regression. It was an instinctive repetition which assumed the nature of a ritual of expiation; the correspondences with the Mexican past, especially with the Aztec world, are fascinating, astonishing, and repulsive. The massacre of Tlatelolco reveals to us that a past which we thought buried is alive and erupts among us. Each time it appears in public, it comes masked and armed; we do not know who it is, only that it is destruction and vengeance. It is a past we have not known, or have been unable to recognize, name, unmask. (PD, 40; emphasis added)

In the analogy with the neurotic a pattern is suggested: if the subject behaves "like a neurotic," then the critic, or historian, ought to react and behave like an analyst.

... In every symptom of every disease ... always and everywhere the meaning of the symptoms is unknown to the sufferer ... analysis inevitably shows that these symptoms are derived from unconscious mental processes which can, however, under various favorable conditions, become conscious ... As soon as the unconscious processes involved are made conscious the symptom must vanish. You will perceive at once that here is an opening for therapy. (Freud, 289-90)

By exposing the "meaning of the symptoms" the critical imagination liberates the citizen to responsibility for participation in or denial of the repetitious image of violence which his society proffers.

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... A dangerous commitment which can become a mortal sin if the writer forgets that his office is an office of words, among which one of the briefest and most authentic is NO. (EOF, 333)

Poetry is to debunk by lucidity. (Ezra Pound)

It might appear that very little of the method or product of the "exercise of the critical imagination" is particularly helpful or encouraging to the bureaucrat who simply wants to get on with his job and the business of launching Mexico into the twenty-first century. Paz does not intend to be "helpful," but he certainly intends to be prophetic (though he would never use the term). Certainly, Paz sees much to criticize in both U.S. and Mexican society. "Petrificada petrificante" ("The Petrifying Petrified"), a poem in his 1976 collection, *Vuelta*, takes a concept worked out mythically in "Critique of the Pyramid" with reference to pre-1968 Mexican political life—"Stability is transformed into petrification" (PD, 147)—and elaborates it with a passion and anger like nothing so much as the invective of frustration in the Old Testament prophets Hosea and Amos.

We have dug up Rage  
 The amphitheater of the genital sun is a dungheap  
 The fountain of lunar water is a dungheap  
 The lovers' park is a dungheap  
 The library is a nest of killer rats  
 The university is a muck full of frogs  
 The altar is Chanfalla's swindle  
 The brains are stained with ink  
 The doctors dispute in a den of thieves  
 The businessmen  
 fast hands slow thoughts  
 officiate in the graveyard  
 The dialecticians exalt the subtlety of the rope  
 The casuists sprinkle thugs with holy water  
 nursing violence with dogmatic milk  
 The *idée fixe* gets drunk with its opposite  
 The juggling ideologist  
 sharpener of sophisms  
 in his house of truncated quotations and assignations  
 plots Edens for industrious eunuchs  
 forest of gallows paradise of cages  
 Stained images  
 spit on the origins  
 future jailers present leeches  
 affront the living body of time  
 We have dug up Rage

On the chest of Mexico  
 stairway of the centuries  
 the disinterred dances  
 the blind in combat beneath the noon sun  
 beating each other with rocks  
 the men are crushing  
 within there is a water we drink  
 water whetting thirst  
 tablets written by the sun  
 spiral terrace of wind  
 anger painting thirst  
 thirst panting anger  
 the blind are beating each other  
 the stones are crushing  
 bitter water  
 Where is the other water?

Hardly the stuff that nationalist dreams are made of, and far from the sublime assurances of a Walt Whitman.

However, to "accuse" Paz of pessimism, to consider the harshly critical register of his voice an obstacle to national development, is to kill the messenger for the bad news he brings. Such a response neglects entirely the

question of the validity and authority of the poet's analysis. The pessimism of Paz's analysis must be viewed in the light of several considerations. First, as demonstrated above, the very nature and intent of "critical imagination" is to seek out and expose the negative, the humiliating, the self-destructive. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. Lest we mistakenly assume that Paz has some bitter, personal bone to pick with his own nation, consider the scope and focus of this denunciation from the conclusion of the Washington Address:

The sickness of the West is moral rather than social or economic. . . . The real, most profound discord lies [not in society] but in the soul. The future has turned into a realm of horror and the present has become a desert. The liberal societies spin tirelessly, not forward but round and round. If they change, they are not transfigured. The hedonism of the West is the other face of desperation; its scepticism is not wisdom but renunciation; its nihilism ends in suicide and inferior forms of credulity, such as political fanaticisms and magical chimeras. The empty place left by Christianity in the modern soul is filled not by philosophy but by the crudest superstitions. Our eroticism is a technique, not an art or a passion. . . . In the so-called Third World, with different names and attributes, a ubiquitous Caligula reigns. (R:MUS, 152)

This is not a voice of embitterment locked in the cycles of its own fantasy; it is rather a voice of careful, reluctant, and painful judgment, unswayed by sentimentalities of either the right or the left, an indictment, drawn out of lengthy and patient observation.

As the passage (at the opening of the Washington Address) on imagining Mexico as a superpower is a touchstone for the authority of the imagination within Paz's pattern of analysis, so this passage at the close of the same address is a touchstone for the vision and moral imperatives which that analysis works to demonstrate and enact. Those who feel serious disagreement with either of these two statements will find scarce comfort or encouragement anywhere in the work of Paz. Those, however, who find this vision accurate and compelling will necessarily be implicated in his search for its roots and its therapy. Paz divines those roots and defends the legitimacy of his moral imperative through an extensive and thoughtful historical analysis which goes far beyond Mexico itself to encompass the entire modern situation of the West. The "negative obligation" of the modern artist which Paz so clearly fulfills is cast against the great modern orthodoxy, "the last widely held *Weltanschauung* of the West: the progressive and optimistic, rational and kindly dogma of liberal humanism" (Fiedler, 506), and Paz has demonstrated that it reaches to the Marxist critique of liberalism as well. This modernist, post-Romantic tradition of the artist as severe critic is one of the deepest strains of Paz's literary and social commitment and the founding principle of first *Plural* and later *Vuelta*. As Fiedler indicates, however, the "negative obligation" of the modernist is only the other face of his deepest commitment in a world of mass media mendacity, public relations chatter, jingoism, and convenient or dogmatic simplifications: telling the truth.

As Paz concludes in the Washington Address after his gloomy assessment of the West's predicament, "Our only effective arm against the orthodoxies is

criticism, and in order to defend ourselves against the vices of intolerance and fanaticism our only recourse is the exercise of the opposing virtues: tolerance and freedom of spirit" (R:MUS, 152). The "our" suggests a solidarity well beyond any political or national stripe in which we are each implicitly and personally assumed to participate, not as a rhetorical category of audience, but as individual emotional, intellectual, and moral totalities. We see clearly, then, that the focus and final context of Paz's historical analysis is moral and individual. The founding virtue is lucid responsibility: "In my political utopia we are not all happy, but, at least, we are all responsible" (PD, 101).

In his effort to expose that "moral sickness of the West" to which Mexico is only a recent party, the "critical imagination" of Paz the poet goes far beyond Fiedler the literary critic. Unlike Hosea, Paz does not refer to the dicta of Yahweh for his legitimacy and moral foundation; nor does he, in the mode of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, or A. Solzhenitsyn, point nostalgically backward to a better, brighter time. Instead, through a complexly interwoven analysis of "the idea of the modern" in poetry, politics, and history, he identifies what he perceives as the "mortal wound" of Western civilization: its defunct vision of time as continuous and unlimited progress, and points to the present as our way out.

Through a panoramic review of literary development in every major Western language since Romanticism, Paz examines the historical context of the contradictions and reactions between poetry and history, between poetry and the various permutations of modernism—Enlightenment, critical reason, liberalism, positivism, Marxism—and arrives at these conclusions: "The modern age is the age of schism and of self-negation, the age of criticism. It has identified itself with change, change with criticism, and both with progress. Modern art is modern because it is critical" (CM, 145). Beyond this affirmation of the critical principle, Paz describes another, final negation which marks the slouching birth of that other rough beast already hard upon us, the post-modern age. "Today we witness another mutation: modern art is beginning to lose its powers of negation. For some years now its rejections have been ritual repetition: rebellion has turned into procedure, criticism into rhetoric, transgression into ceremony. Negation is no longer creative" (CM, 149).

With this judgment we come to the paradoxical center of Paz's pattern of social analysis, and the broadest context in which he reads the history of U.S.-Mexico relations. This loss of creativity in the principle of critical negation is not simply the passing of an artistic fad, but, as the Washington Address specifies, the leading edge of a failure within the whole organism of Western culture, including the Soviet Union. Contrary to the fashionable Marxist conviction of his youth ("that we were witnessing the final crisis of capitalism"), Paz now sees that crisis not within any single socio-economic system but within our whole civilization.

Today we know that modernity, in its two versions, the capitalist and the pseudo-socialist of the totalitarian bureaucracies, is mortally wounded in its very center—the idea of continuous and unlimited progress. (R:MUS, 151)

Through the lectures of *Children of the Mire* Paz dissects the decline and demise of this faith in continual progress and points us toward a more fruitful

metaphor of time modeled on the "perpetual present" of poetic experience in which a more humane and generous "ethics and politics of the now" could flourish, eventually to replace the dried, disappointing fruits of progress and revolution.

"The future," Paz says flatly, "the promised land of history, is an inaccessible realm." The outlines of this critique of the future are evident in the Washington Address, but it is developed most clearly in Chapters Two and Six of *Children of the Mire*, "The Revolt of the Future" and "The Twilight of the Avant-Garde."

I have already made reference to Paz's observation that every society or "civilization" has within its baggage a "temporal archetype," a founding metaphor of time "invented not by a poet but by a race." The function of this archetype is to offer ideal solutions, through the translating, interpretative agency of philosophers, shamans, theologians, or social scientists, for the threatening internal conflicts which every society must face. "Passing through the sieve of reason and criticism, [these collective metaphors of time] become versions, more or less well-defined, of the principle of identity" (CM, 24). Modernity, therefore, is one such image whose antecedents, evolution, and decay are historically identifiable. It is initiated by a "revolt of the future" within the Christian image of time, according to which "the future was under sentence of death"; the triumph of eternity (which is imagined and described to the faithful as a perpetual frozen present) after the Last Judgment marks "the closing of the doors of the future" (Dante's phrase). The Modern begins, lives, and dies with a critical negation of this Christian image, placing eternity, including its attributes of perfection, firmly within the future of sequential, irreversible time, called history.

Modernity begins as a criticism of Christian eternity. Its criticism recombined the elements embodied in the Christian idea of time; the values of heaven and hell were transferred to earth and grafted onto history. Eternity was abolished; the future was enthroned in its place. Modernity sees itself ruled by the principle of change: criticism. This criticism, called *historical change*, adopts two forms: evolution and revolution. Both have the same meaning: progress. (CM, 32)

*Children of the Mire* is the narration of the history of this idea in Western society from the end of the eighteenth century to the present. Now, however, Paz believes that it confronts exhaustion. "Now, in the second half of the twentieth century, certain signs indicate a change in our system of beliefs. The conception of history as a progressive and linear process has been proved inconsistent" (CM, 150). Since Marxism has been "probably the most coherent and daring expression of history as a progressive and linear process," Paz focuses his exposure briefly on that vision to point out "what we all know: if the violent changes of the twentieth century confirm Marx's apocalyptic vision, the form in which they have come about denies the supposed rationality of the historical process" (CM, 152). The dialectic is defunct as a "scientific" description of historical necessity. Above all, by whatever socio-economic route we have preferred to posit its arrival, the future has become not a promise but "a horror." The marvels of technology have become its disasters. Political movements of

liberation degenerate with disheartening regularity into oligarchical tyrannies, or are obliterated by brutalities as tediously repetitious as they are shocking. "In the name of building the future half of the planet has been covered with forced labor camps" (CM, 154), and what the philosophers from Hume to Marx said of religion is now equally applicable to the future: "it is not real and it robs us of reality; it does not exist and it robs us of life" (CM, 157). Only by forgetting the future, Paz suggests, do we have hope of restoring its credibility.

The "No" of Paz is the profound no of moral outrage which gives the lie in the face of all those who say "yes" in optimistic opportunism, who read all moral issues in terms of body count, trade-off, overkill, balance sheets, ends and means, greater and lesser—in any terms whatsoever which violate the physiological and psychological wholeness of the single human body. It is the basic message of the artist since the industrial revolution: the individual life is a universal, absolute, particular value, the moral equivalent of the poetic image, a value of which the body is the unequivocal sign.

Pulling together finally all the threads of Paz's analysis, from the search of the critical imagination for the particular structures of the historical constant (through the dual metaphors of history-as-text and the social psyche) to the political/poetic declaration of the Revolt of the Present, we come to some implications and conclusions for the root issue of modernization and the complementary (or contradictory) functions of the U.S. and Mexico. First, Paz makes it plain that the entire concept of modernization itself is a metaphor, and rests, therefore, not on that fond bedrock of "reality," "truth," or "the way things are" but on the all-too-human marshland of moral assumptions, self-concepts, and internalized values. Secondly, for Mexico the question of modernization cannot be simply a question of numbers and quantities; it is very much a question of values and models. It is primarily an issue of respect, equality, and justice and only secondarily an issue of socio-economic structures and changes brought about to reflect those qualities. The institutions of North American technology and experience, developed in their own context of theology, geography, and social mythology, cannot simply be transposed to Mexican reality, however ingenious the adaptation, without a risk of self-victimization and social loss. The very distinctions of "development" and "underdevelopment" conceal prejudiced attitudes as damning as the theological categories of medieval religion.

There are hardly any barbarians, Infidels or Gentiles left; rather the new Heathen Dogs can be counted in the millions, but they are called "undeveloped peoples."...The tendency to identify the modern age with civilization, and both with the West, has become so widespread that many people in Latin America talk about our cultural underdevelopment. How can a culture be underdeveloped? Is Shakespeare more "developed" than Dante? and is Cervantes "underdeveloped" in comparison with Hemingway? (CM, 21)

Though it may seem that in the realm of technology the terms "development" and "underdevelopment" have obvious and inescapable meaning, it is there that Paz finds them particularly equivocal and dangerous.

The unthinking adoption of North American technology in Mexico has produced no end of misfortunes and a progressive degradation of our life and culture. This is not nostalgic obscurantism; the only real obscurantists are those who cultivate the superstition of progress at any price. I know that we cannot escape; we are condemned to "development," but let us make the penalty less inhuman. (CM, 21)

Even more essential than the petroleum which provides the collateral for Mexico's venture in modernization, Paz believes, is the ability to think creatively about the "habitable present." Mexico must invent its own road into this present, and that road must take the past as its origin, not its obstacle. "To avoid new disasters," he concludes in the Washington Address, "we Mexicans must reconcile ourselves with our past: only in this way shall we succeed in finding a route to modernity" (R:MUS, 150).

North Americans err egregiously if they assume this critique of the future is so much rhetoric for internal Mexican consumption and that Paz is the voice of one crying in the wilderness. My reading of the current Mexican media (particularly *Proceso*) suggests that while they may not share his analytical terminology many commentators share his conclusions. To the Mexican with an eager foot on the loading platform of the Twenty-First Century Limited, Paz echoes the profoundly ironic and conservative query of Thoreau: "And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to heaven in season?" Of the North American engineers and conductors equally eager to take on these newly affluent passengers, he asks, "What makes you qualified to drive?" If both nations are permanently to transcend the politics of paranoia (behind every move the U.S. makes is multi-national manipulation and a CIA connection; behind every Mexican project is a personal aggrandizement and a payoff) and initiate a new era of mutually respectful, beneficial, and mature relations, certainly we will need voices of critical imagination with the lucidity, independence, and power of moral vision we have come to expect from Octavio Paz.

Poetry,  
 suspension bridge between truth and history  
 is not a road toward this or that:  
it is to see
 the stillness within movement,  
change
 within stillness.  
 History is the road  
 going nowhere,  
 we all walk;  
 truth is that walking:  
 We neither go nor come:  
 We are in the hands of time.  
Truth:
 knowing,  
 from all time,  
ourselves suspended—
 Fraternity above the abyss.

(*Vuelta*, 80)



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