

Image and Representation of the Other: North America Views South America

Gilbert Larochelle

Between 1648 and 1652, Cyrano de Bergerac wrote a small satirical work entitled *The Other World*, a fictional account of his imaginary epic voyage to the Moon.* The story not only describes "The States and Empires of the Moon," (its subtitle in the original edition), it provides a critical view of his own civilization as well. The narrator's position in his depiction of the radically different, "other" entity allows him to maintain opinions which, however whimsical, still include elements of social and philosophical examination. In the early stages of world migration, Europe was beginning to see the Other as a place for the expression, if not the transposition, of its ancient dreams; Cyrano, however, takes a different approach. He looks at ways the Other might be used to gain perspective on the Self. Looking down at Earth from above, he proclaims: "People, I declare that this moon is not a moon, but a world, and that world over there is not a world, but a moon."

In the relative space between two worlds (or two moons!), the shift in points of observation may be perceived as a method of representation in which the criteria of Self are exchanged for those of the Other, ultimately, to show the impossibility of considering one in terms of the other. Unlike utopianism, a popular topic at the time, Cyrano's subversion does not function in the service of an ideal. Instead, it decenters; the norm *vis-à-vis* the Other becomes exotic itself – a disorienting change of perspective, which can cause a schism in the subject, as he becomes the object of his own gaze. The point of this shift in perspective is to make the Self seem foreign – to open to criticism both the method of gathering information about the subject and the way it is represented. Thus, univers-

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es with different reference points are no longer just extremes of an unbridgeable gap; as contrasting perspectives spread within each one, the known, the familiar, and the conventional are called into question by the appearance of the arbitrary and the unknown. This is a way to approach the unsolved and always contested problem of identity: to ask how the subject reveals itself as it attempts to reveal the Other. In this respect, Cyrano shows that we only see what we know, or what we think we know, and also that, the image of Self is only revealed and distinguished in relation to the Other. This reasoning leads Cyrano to an examination of the subject in terms of its ceaseless invention of and precarious relationship to the Other; it also casts doubt on the plausibility of any system of discussion regarding two worlds which are presumed, *a priori*, to be unique and representable.

At the time when *The Other World* appeared (1657), the image of the Other was best represented by Latin America. On the one hand, it was considered the absolute non-civilization, while on the other, its image was stereotyped for its mountains of gold, extraordinary adventures, jungles full of exotic spices, and paradisiacal scenery. If the discovery of the New World can in fact be attributed to a navigational error made by a Spanish corsair,¹ this "error" quickly became for Europe the stage of its own representation. Europe's meeting with the Other and the experience of this meeting basically defined Europe's own self-image. With the conquest of the New World, the "utopias" (*u-topos*: non-place) of the old continent discover a site for their own construction. Octavio Paz even writes that "America can only be understood as a chapter in the history of European utopias."² And Fernando Ainsa maintains that America was never discovered, strictly speaking, but "invented," since it was represented before it was explored, dreamed about before it was seen."³ Referred to as the "Utopian Land,"⁴ or the "Far West,"⁵ names which suggest "otherness," Latin America also incorporates the elements which form the conglomeration of its self-identity. Still, Latin America's image implies the co-existence

1. Alain Rouquié, *Amérique latine: Introduction à l'Extrême-Occident*, (Paris, 1987), p. 9.

2. Fernando Ainsa, "L'invention de l'Amérique. Signes imaginaires de la découverte et construction de l'utopie," *Diogène*, 145, 1985.

3. Fernando Ainsa, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–17.

4. Jacques Lafaye, "L'Amérique latine: terre d'utopie, du XVI^e siècle à nos jours," *Cahiers de l'Amérique latine*, 4, 1985, pp. 91–102.

5. Alain Rouquié, *op. cit.*

of various contradictory social entities whose interrelation can – pompously – be called “the dialogue of civilizations.”

This label is intended as a response to three problems usually involved in the representation of the Other: first, objectivizing the “identity” of the parties involved in the stereotype of a fictitious entity which tries to present them as a collective group – a ritual consecration of the entity which turns away from its insurmountable differences in a more or less mystical manner; second, initiating “interaction” or even “conversation” among various groups, as if each could mutually benefit from such contact; and third, creating images which convey something other than the contingent, one-sided particularities of the given party viewing the Other. From this point of view, North America’s perception of South America can only be considered a euphemism, or better, a satire whose cacaphony of tongues makes it easy to imagine the impossibility of communication. The challenge implicit in the terms “Latin America” and “North America” is to demonstrate how a linguistic distinction develops into a category with its own potential for investigation, or even into a fully recognized academic discipline. Recognition comes first from the liberal elite associated with the “continental ideologies.” It then spreads through a growing awareness of and emphasis on three things: the concept of an “abstract homeland,” which gives the individual a sense of being the intermediary and progenitor of a unique identity and also affirms his place in the given location; the proclamation of a sense of “authenticity,” which may be Latin American, for example, and may serve as the image of a national entity, providing an active sense of belonging in an imaginary network; and the reference to different legal “codes” of a given State, which simultaneously weaken and support the governance of the entity and the network, while encouraging belief in their particular identity and the framework of institutional legitimacy.

Images of the Other are typically measured geographically, culturally, and juridically. Refusal to identify in one of these ways can cause someone to reexamine his status and the image of the position he occupies in the given system. In addition, Latin America remains a land of welcome for the great utopias, otherwise known as the West. In this respect, the latest publications of the Trilateral Commission on Latin America can help us understand not only how the Other is used in the creation of a self-identity, but also how any proposed image of the Other is itself problematic. In spir-

it, this examination follows Todorov who points out: "An individual never succeeds in knowing others; . . . [because] to know the other and one's self is one and the same thing."⁶

I. The Syntax of the Image: Uniqueness and Exoticism

Relationship to the Other is often analyzed under the presumption that a close rapport exists between the individual and his locale. To some degree, this formula has even influenced contemporary epistemology. Until recently it has been acceptable in scientific debates to ask not only, "Who is speaking?" but also "From where?"⁷ This method reveals a relativistic bias and suggests that all discourse is invariably embedded in society and history; but such reasoning often leads to a confusion of the observer's location in space and time with the identity of the subject itself. The "where" appears to diminish the significance of the "who" by providing it with a profound rationality, as if location alone could explain discourse. The debates about Third World attitudes and the egocentrism of the West provide numerous examples of distorted interpretations of the subject and its place. Superficial concerns germinate and gradually take root in a process which creates a sense of authenticity.

In such a situation, critical arguments or empirical observations are considered extraneous since the location of the subject dictates his means of expression. There are problems, however, with this emphasis on a speaker's location. An environment could be so specific – in respect to its location, orientation and activity – that anyone observing it from the outside would find it inaccessible. Or, on the contrary, distance from the Other could become a condition, even a guarantee of the subject's own objectivity. Karl Popper criticizes what he calls the "astronomical paradigm" and challenges the assumption that observations of an inhabitant of Sirius looking at us would be more original and objective than our own findings about ourselves. If there is nobody nearby (or even far away) for an individual to compare himself with in regard to the Other, then the distinction does not seem to be a factor of location, since identity is not formed from location, in the strict sense – contrary to Friedrich Ratzel's declaration at the end of the last century.⁸ For example, there is no foundation to the statement that to be born and raised

6. Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres*, (Paris, 1989), p. 27.

7. Henri-Pierre Jeudy, *Les Ruses de la communication*, (Paris, 1989), pp. 165–66.

8. Friedrich Ratzel, *La Géographie politique: les concepts fondamentaux*, (Paris, 1987).

in Latin America engenders a specific Latino-American perspective; location does not think, an individual does. This formula also considers that the line between identity and otherness, even between objectivity and subjectivity, can, in fact, be arbitrary.

Only the syntax of the image can give us the sense of geographic Platonism, since it looks at both the function and the symbolic dimensions of the locations involved. It is also essential to know from the beginning what the image refers to, how it functions within the framework of social life, and why this apparent coincidence between space and the universe of reference points has been created. The image discussed here is not a figurative or iconographic reproduction of concrete objects, nor does it include the various advertising media on which its distribution depends. It refers to a mental representation – based on a model – which unifies diverse phenomena and is able to make sense of them. This image should not be confused with the realm of the imaginary, even though they are related. Images only take shape around a meaning. They become its vehicle of transmission to the extent that their existence first deviates from the imaginary factors which, as Raymond Ledrut writes, “mold them to some degree,”⁹ and provide their shape and form.

There is a philosophical tradition from Plato to Hegel that considers the image a mere side issue, subsidiary to the concept – not just an imitation of the genuine, but also a “miming of the unknown.”¹⁰ This indictment suggests that fanciful interpretations may result. On the other hand, in the tradition of Democritus, Aristotle and the 18th century English Empiricists, the image is considered a copy, an imitation of objects which are catalogued by the human mind – image-reflection rather than image-illusion. Neither approach, however, is considered interesting today, since the identity of “Who?” does not appear to be any more plausible than the identity of “What?” Instead, an image comes from the constant exchange between a corpus which already exists *a priori* and the sum of approximate perceptions.

Christopher Columbus’ approach to the Other, as well as the image created of the continent that has been called “America” since 1507, are marked by a perpetual oscillation. In *Conquest of America*, Todorov writes: “Columbus possesses nothing of the modern

9. Raymond Ledrut, “Société réelle et société imaginaire,” *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 82, 1987, p. 44.

10. Pierre Camirade, *Image et Métaphore*, (Paris, 1970), p. 25.

empiricist – the decisive argument is based on authority, not experience. He knows from the outset what he will discover. The actual experience exists as it illustrates a truth which one individual possesses and which should not be questioned.”¹¹ Elsewhere, a different scenario can be seen. Columbus gives the impression of clinging to the rules, especially when it comes to giving names to the places he discovers: “I gave this cape the name *Cape Beautiful*, because it is indeed beautiful”; or, “I called this place *The Gardens*, because the name suits it.”¹² The concept is never understood by itself alone, however, since its validity is not determined by its visualization. *Cape Beautiful* and *The Gardens* are known as such only to the extent that their images are extrapolated beyond the actual representations from which their names are derived. “I am very assured in my soul,” Columbus adds, “that Paradise on Earth is located where I said it is, based upon the reasons and authority stated above”¹³ – including biblical arguments supported by his own observations. The processes of nomination (which represents the functional), appropriation (the structural), and significance (the symbolic) become confused in this mechanism because of the intervention of the image.

In this respect, it must be acknowledged that Columbus does not have the privilege of possessing a “primitive” view on the realm of the Other. His rationale is the same as that of people today who attempt to establish a scorecard for North America or Latin America. According to Paul Eluard, the image has always been an issue of what remains to be seen, rather than what has already been seen, an attempt to conceive more than has been perceived, to unite such notions in the mind despite their diversity. In so doing, our perception of the locale never correlates with the actual location as seen at first glance: the image provides the essential instrument that allows for a temporary replacement of perceptions during the transfer process in both the physical and human sphere.¹⁴ Of course, the objectivized representation becomes a reality unto itself and influences the object perceived or visualized retroactively, as it were, so that the object itself becomes progressively distorted – something between the real and the mind’s own visualization of it. As Kenneth Boulding remarks, “To some degree at least

11. Tzvetan Todorov, *La Conquête de l’Amérique*, op. cit., p. 25.

12. Todorov, p. 34.

13. Todorov, p. 24.

14. Antoine Bailly, “L’imaginaire spatial. Plaidoyer pour la géographie des représentations,” *Espaces-Temps*, 40/41, 1989, p. 55.

images will always be a mixture of the experiences and creations of the individual's own making."¹⁵ However, the image manifests itself at that juncture between what is seen and what is unseen, which, in turn, are themselves unified by the image. For example, the notion of "territory" comes from the formula where the functional is subordinated to the symbolic. This process not only minimizes the object but also abstracts it, retrieving it from existence as a concrete object and changing it to a non-object which can then take on a more mystical image. The process prepares a general imaginary perception of a given culture as well as the reception of its institutional systems of administration.

The mystery surrounding the image lies basically with the problems in its system of reference and its distribution. To some degree, it is destined to produce a similarity: an identification in the realm of the material, an identity in the realm of individuals. In this respect, the image serves as a makeshift device that uses a spectrum of preconceived ideas to combine the pieces of different realities. Reflecting on the "sense and non-sense of the image," Octavio Paz writes that its rationale consists in the rapprochement and reconciliation of "name and object, representation and reality."¹⁶ He adds that the image acts like a unit of measure which combines into a single, total weight such dissimilar items as stones and feathers. That function of the image enriches an object as it reveals it, but can also distort and overshadow it in the process of revelation itself. Strictly speaking, while images are unable to reflect reality, they can approximate it. Images save reality from infinite diffusion by typifying and unifying it. All the same, images are not completely estranged from reality – as Jean Baudrillard concludes, using a mode of critical thinking that has become conventional – because images entirely separate from reality would be impossible to recognize and express.

Elsewhere, the image of Self and the Other develops only through the "totalization" of diverse material and the individual subjects involved. In addition, images become specified as a so-called culture emerges from the same likeness as the images themselves. Through their specific images North America and Latin America become the appointed representations of each other's respective entities. Their respective realities are not only universal and unitary, but are formed through a certain originality which has

15. Kenneth Boulding, *The Image*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1966), p. 6.

16. Octavio Paz, "Sens et non-sens de l'image," *Médiations*, 2, 1961, p. 11.

been determined itself through differentiation. Culture is a result of this process; it spreads through an area and invests it with symbols that enable comprehension and visualization to coincide in an image. The cult of authenticity then comes to the aid of imagistic representations in the description and assimilation of their unknown empirical manifestations. Juan Liscano, for example, has argued that Latin American literature is saturated with this kind of description, which attempts to transmit social reality, history, and national identity through a type of literary realism. Liscano even claims that a writer "believes himself to be the subject of an original world" and that he must subordinate his artistic creation to it.¹⁷ In this manner, according to Liscano, the writer practices a particular kind of fiction, the fiction of that culture and that locale. The individual subject merges with the collective body, and the collective body justifies its claims to existence and legitimacy.

In this light, the issue of belonging quickly becomes significant. Jacques Hoarau writes that its influence on behavior creates "a structure that is imposed like a seal of fate on the subject's nature, imposed like a decision or a mission not made by himself . . . in such a way that the authenticity the subject may or may not possess becomes a culture's saving grace, or better yet, may define its race."¹⁸ Excitement over the issue of authenticity presupposes its participation in an ontological order; the strength of its ties to area and culture finds support in the institutional stability of the powers that administer this order. Of course, the distribution of these images – applied as generic definitions for North America and Latin America – is only reduced as they evolve into pure illusion, less even than reflections of the image. The degradation of image occurs gradually not by the technique of "fait accompli," but rather by "symbol accompli." This transition is not just a shift from the imaginary to a lesser reality. It also affects the lateral distribution by which the Latin American liberal elite have imposed the concept of "Latin Americaness" as an example and promoted it as an ideology for that continent.

The image for such vast demographic entities, however, does not exist, strictly speaking, separate from the actual individuals who promote it. It should not be understood as the equivalent of the collective consciousness (*à la* Durkheim), since nobody perceives

17. Juan Liscano, "L'identité nationale dans la littérature latino-américaine," *Diogène*, 138, 1987, p. 62.

18. Jacques Hoarau, "Éléments de géologie négative," *Espaces-Temps*, 42, 1989, p. 6.

his native continent exactly like his compatriot, even though both are products of the same "culture." Nor can image be the caprice of a given individual, since it is impossible for him to be objective about his own world – compare Nietzsche's comments that the ego is only an artificial creation of the self. So image is "singular" in its ancestry and "plural" in the diversity of imagistic forms that compose the symbolic fabric of society. An image that covers a huge collective body is determined only when it produces objectivization – when it becomes a homogeneous entity that even its constituent components acknowledge. It forms the collective identity and allows for the subsequent acceptance of the power that will govern and even defend it.

Resistance to the symbolic order is the only intellectual program that allows its dynamics to be understood and is able to grasp the idea behind the image. In his recent book, *The Image*, Jean Aumont offers a complex model that can be simplified according to need.¹⁹ Although he discusses figurative images, his outline can be adapted to the study of discursive images, if the distinction of Scott Lash, an American sociologist, is applied. He focuses on five basic issues: a) What is the essence of "visualizing" an image or what fundamental characteristics does it possess? b) Who is the audience addressed by the image? c) What is the system that mediates the relationship between audience and image? d) How does the image produce meaning? e) What are the criteria that determine its categorization? At first glance, these issues appear similar to the well-known questions which Harold Lasswell, an American political scientist, popularized in the field of communications: "Who says what to whom, through what kind of medium, and with what effect?" Jean Aumont, on the other hand, avoids diffuse questions like "Who?" and "What?" which are generally used as functional equivalents. Aumont's advantage over Lasswell is that he provides a pragmatic approach to the image's interpretation and primarily focuses on its efficiency; he simply bypasses claims of identity and speculations about reference systems, which are often considered the best way to understand an image-based universe.

This five-point model can facilitate an understanding not only of the image's ability to function, but also, indirectly, of the object which is represented by the image. The model's tools of analysis can also be useful when studying the relationship between Self and the Other, or in this case between North America and Latin

19. Jean Aumont, *L'Image*, (Paris, 1990).

America. The final documents of the Trilateral Commission, in fact, focus on Latin America and highlight the way North America uses this continent as an imaginary reference point in its attempts to establish its own identity and destiny.

II. Exotic Lands and Utopic Images: Latin America as Seen by the Trilateral Commission

"Latin America has always been a land of great promise." This statement could easily be attributed to Christopher Columbus or his sailors hungry for gold and a luxurious paradise; in fact, it belongs to the three signatories of a recent report commissioned by the Trilateral Commission, *Latin America at a Crossroads* (1990).²⁰ Recall the origin and purpose of the Commission:²¹ it was founded in 1973 through the work of David Rockefeller, Jimmy Carter and Zbigniew Brezinski. It took shape within the context of international turbulence, including not only the oil crisis but also major disagreements between the United States, Western Europe and Japan. The Commission is a private organization, but it owes its existence and even its origins to the basic idea that the challenges faced by the great industrial powers of the Northern Hemisphere cannot be dealt with on an individual basis. The Commission's leaders believe economic, political and social problems are similar and require concerted, large-scale action, action that would affect all areas of society. This idea not only assumes that intense collaboration and a global effort are necessary, it also emphasizes that these three regions share a common fate, as it were.

The founding principle of the new group relies on the overall acknowledgement of the close interdependence between the three regions, an interdependence which is their common destiny, through which the contemporary structure of Western civilization is created. The "concept of interdependence" justifies the newness of the bonds that unify the developed countries of the Northern Hemisphere. This concept also serves as the building block of the new community of nations whose formation the Commission is attempting to define. It is worth adding that this new theoretical slogan is intended as a countermeasure to the "dependence theory," which was popular during the sixties, because of its description of the situation in the Southern Hemisphere, in particular, the so-

20. George Landau, Julio Feo, Akio Hosono, *Latin America at a Crossroads*, The Trilateral Commission, 39, 1990, p. 53.

21. Landau, p. 53.

called development of unequal exchange. To put it simply: the leaders of the Commission intend to use this concept to promote common interests, to define the similarity of the stakes involved, and finally, to attribute a common identity to this social collective. The relationship with the Other is an important consideration for those involved with the social group, whether attempting to build a sense of belonging, to develop plans for its future, or finally, to transfer the utopias which inspire it and are located beyond its strategic boundary onto this "land of great promise" – Latin America.

a) *Visualizing the Image*. The report of the Commission on Latin America begins by describing the intrinsic diversity of this continent: "The Latin American and Caribbean region includes all countries from the Rio Grande and the Caribbean Seas to the Land of Fire. The extreme diversity of this region and the non-Latin character of many of its constituent groups are well-recognized by the authors."²² As soon as these prerequisites were established, the signatories added: "As our audience acknowledges this region as Latin America, for reasons of clarity and usage, we will retain this established name."²³ From that point, the status of the participants – the Trilateral World and Latin America – gradually became simplified by semantic terms including the location, the role and the objectives of these nations assimilated into the rationale of a unified whole. The proposals formulated in this relationship are indistinguishable from those of the Other regarding its internal structure, in the same sense that the trilateral countries consider themselves elevated to the level of a collective capable of expressing itself in a unified voice. These proposals also try to provide an image of the different countries involved – simultaneously marked by the concepts of both totality and specificity. The consistent characteristic of Latin America is its condition for dialogue – something the trilateral countries must respect before entering into discussion. Thus, the terms themselves reflect the formational process of these entities: "the mutual benefits of future cooperation,"²⁴ "a climate of respect, of realism and of reciprocity,"²⁵ "reinforcement of economic connections,"²⁶ and "integration of Latin American democracies,"²⁷ etc. In brief, these represent the many slogans that evoke a

- 22. Landau, p. 1.
- 23. Landau, p. 1.
- 24. Landau, p. 54.
- 25. Landau, p. 14.
- 26. Landau, p. 50.
- 27. Landau, p. 44.

sense of "otherness": the image of a reality different from the Other, but whose delineation is only permissible for territorial reasons. From this, an implicit assumption arises that these entities can, in spite of everything, justify the heterogeneity that the architects of the Commission claim to have acknowledged from the beginning. In general, the visual image of Latin America, at least in the framework of discourse, involves the disintegration of this diversity and the creation of a unity by means of providing it with a sense of self. In this process, lexical recourse is used only to define territory, but this sort of linguistic shortcut gradually becomes part of a network of reference which is superimposed on the memory.

b) *The Audience*. Due to the polarization of two worlds with different norms and different identities, the image of Latin America is only formed – in fact, is only identifiable – in relation to a specific audience: the populations of the three great regions, especially their political leaders. "The goal of this work, it is stated, is to help the legislators of the trilateral countries find a place for the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean in the framework of future international order."²⁸ The sub-heading of the report provides a better illustration, since Latin America is perceived in it as *the challenge of the trilateral countries*. Its relationship with the Other only becomes tangible, even interesting, to the extent that it allows Latin America to better understand itself, even to discover the specific role that will force industrialized regions to account for its concerns, even if this means that its legitimacy is only given *de facto* recognition in the international order.²⁹

The experience of "otherness" does not assume a normative function in the polarized system of the Northern Hemisphere; this would imply – yet again – recognition of that hemisphere's ontological homogeneity. This homogeneity is based on the premise that Latin America is a mere observer that might one day, in the vague and distant future, possibly join the league of developed nations: "The trilateral countries should encourage a greater integration of the Latin American democracies in the sphere of the industrialized world."³⁰ At that point, it is presumptuous to extol the dialogue between the various civilizations in the manner of the representatives of the Trilateral Commission who frequently

28. Landau, p. 1.

29. Landau, p. 48.

30. Landau, p. 14.

appeal for intense collaboration, especially if it takes form through the assimilation of external values that may be applied to those which are universal to its nature. Thus, the difference between Self and the Other is nothing more than the conditional state from which unity is created. This discussion is introduced in an effort to bridge the differences, by attempting to describe the sought-after similarities.

c) *The System of Implementation.* The method used for this discussion of the Other originates in the differentiation of the two idealized continents, though the method is not limited to this sphere. The first stage of its implementation involves the recognition that an "us" cannot exist independent of a "them." The triangle formed by North America, Japan and Western Europe represents the spatial archetype of centralization – including centralization of the universe. This region's abundant concentration of economic potential immediately dismisses any alternative possibilities. In another report, some of the signatories of the Trilateral Commission consider Latin America an "identifiable community and vital economic nucleus." This reflects the spirit if not the definition of the area.³¹ The system which sustains the image of Latin America likely arises from various world political orientations whose policies are held out as a promise and hope to those whose national fate has not included them in the group of highly industrialized countries.³² This distribution of norms can only make developed countries apprehensive about Latin America: "The trilateral countries should educate Latin Americans as to how their systems of political policy function, so that they themselves may become more effective in handling their interests and issues in conjunction with the governments of industrialized countries."³³

In other respects, the categories of center and periphery only constitute a transitional phase in Latin America. Its image is descriptive as it relates a narrative of the long but determined historical hegemony, culminating in the international order co-opting the region and bringing it into the realm of western norms. This co-opting is not exactly classic imperialism, rather, it is a latent system of promulgation meant to convey some of the industrialized countries' values to Latin America. Japan's integration into the

31. Myriam Camps, Ryokichi Hirono, Karsten Laursen, "The Trilateral Countries in the International Economy of the 1980s," *Triangle Papers*, 23, 1982.

32. Landau, p. 7.

33. Landau, p. 52.

West attests to the viability of this system and of integration policy in general. Of course, not all areas under expansion are "real" – some are imaginary and exotic places which, above all, represent a distributional system intended as a guide for the political behavior of other nations.

Thus, the strategy used to form an image of Latin America – an image connected to the image of the West (including Japan) – mostly depends on the individual efforts of the report's three signatories. They speak not only on behalf of the Trilateral Commission, but also for the countries of the triangle, for Latin America, and for international order. "The realization and the preservation of a stable and functioning democracy in this region is the main political goal shared by the trilateral countries, including the people of Latin America and the Caribbean."³⁴ To this end, a common ground needs to be formed to encompass both their own interests and those of the entire world. As a result, the feeble intervention of international political representatives in the affairs of Latin America would be discouraged. "Latin America's major problem at present is perhaps its own influence in the sphere of regional affairs, which is too weak rather than too strong."³⁵

Thus, this image of the Other merely serves to characterize the image of Self, since the view of the trilateralists essentially develops only to valorize what is known and privileged to them. Anything south of the Rio Grande, to speak in extremes, is only of interest to the extent that it provides a better image of Self, as the three participants of the Commission attest: "In the aim of developing a policy suitable to the challenges that confront us in Latin America and the Caribbean, the trilateral countries should treat this region as a high priority that demands the rational calculation of our interests."³⁶

d) *The Development of Characteristics*. The paradox of the situation lies in the simultaneous acknowledgement and refusal of Latin America as the Other. This two-part approach, which is initially complementary, begins to take shape in the trilateral discussions by considering the Other both a "tragedy" and a "hope." The lament then justifies the dictate. The image of the continent, as it were, is first revealed in a crucible. History itself attests to the region's secular isolation. If the conquest and colonization of Latin

34. Landau, p. 52.

35. Landau, p. 40.

36. Landau, p. 43.

America mark the beginning of its "disenslavement," or liberation, they also represent the region's weakness and marginality in international affairs. As the Commission participants note, until the mid-nineteenth century Latin America served as a source of raw materials for various European countries: Spain, Great Britain, Portugal, France and Holland. On the other hand, the numerous countries gaining their independence at the time managed to consolidate, "although erratically at times, an increasingly autonomous and respectable position in the sphere of international affairs."³⁷ The winds of democratic change blowing over most nations on this continent in the following years were a sign of their influence on the world's big political powers.

The tragedy in all this is that the established political structures are weakened by the socio-economic turbulence shaking the continent. The list of the Other's failures only points to the triumph of the values of the side that cares to detail them: a widening gap between rich and poor, a decrease in personal income in eleven of the countries since 1980, an uncontrollable growth of debt, a surge in crime, terrorism and drug trafficking, environmental problems – especially in the Amazon, a "brain drain," etc. All of these problems have contributed to an archetypal image of Latin America. "The 1980s have been the decade of decline as far as the socio-economical development of Latin America is concerned," as the three commission representatives acknowledge.³⁸ The Other is perceived through an image formed largely because of a certain estrangement; reconciliation is only seen as one step toward a definitive restoration of relations.

The hope that motivates the trilateralists involves action as well as dreams. The historical tension characterizing Latin America's evolution is a result of this dual consideration: the proposed image is subordinate to the practices and ethics of its development. This recalls the 18th century belief that the world can be mastered by a combination of reason and rationalism in the sphere of human action. This image becomes meaningful when Latin America is thought of as a collective entity. Moreover, through this process, Latin America considers itself involved in a world-wide reconciliation, especially with Europe – its long time oppressor. The trilateralists write: "The success of Latin American efforts to revitalize their economies and institutionalize pluralist democracies consti-

37. Landau, p. 2.

38. Landau, p. 4.

tute a step forward, toward the type of world order the Europeans would like to see develop."³⁹

e) *The Place: Utopia*. The distinction between Latin America as "promise" and Promised Land remains precarious, at least in the framework of this discussion. Without yielding to easy possibilities for rapprochement, it seems initially that the trilateralists make use of a Biblical tenet: after the fall of the Other, the moment of redemption arrives and takes the shape, in this instance, of individuals who need to be reconciled with themselves and to create a unified view encompassing certain rules and values. From this perspective, it seems false and petty to assume that the Commission's representatives are motivated by unbridled individualism and by their own commercial interests. To them, Latin America is a utopia with a collective identity to be developed and valued. Similarly, Eastern Europe's ideological and political break up greatly satisfies the Commission, because it actually represents the realization of their ideals.⁴⁰ This region then takes part in the procession of countries marching toward these goals, not simply through democratization,⁴¹ but more importantly through the realization of its dreams, dreams of economic change. Today Latin America faces an image of itself at a "great historical junction"⁴² regarding the *pax universalis* that needs to be developed.

It is important to recognize that utopia is only a fantastic and ambiguous notion about Latin America's origins, specifically, the fantasy of Christopher Columbus – who saw Latin America as paradise on Earth, and of Las Casas – who idealized the friendly nature of the continent's native peoples. What is to be made of this today? The problem underlines the difficulty of perceiving the Other, as long as notions like those held by Christopher Columbus five centuries ago or even those held by representatives of the Trilateral Commission today continue to recur. The representatives don't seem nostalgic for the times of the great empires, nor are they true cynics. Their perception of Latin America is the same as numerous international organizations that rely on ethical inculcation to communicate the "right way" to the Other; in other words, they transfer the legitimate functions of their own institutions.

This view, when viewing itself, will always be punctuated with

39. Landau, p. 15.

40. Landau, pp. 6, 9.

41. Jacques Zylberberg, "Mythologies contemporaines: la démocratisation de l'Amérique latine," *L'Analyste*, 26, 1989, pp. 27–31.

42. Zylberg, p. 9.

its petty judgements and long silences. Petty judgements will exist about the location of the subject's normative state, because of its arbitrary proportions and the uncertainties of its relational scope. Long silences will exist, as the Other manifests the same inconsistencies as the entity observing it. The identity of the collective, so difficult to determine in this case – as if the population were amassed into an abstract realm by means of a sort of geographical Platonism, homogenized into a culture that only magnifies the “inaccessible Latin American character,”⁴³ to use Juan Liscano's expression – makes its appeal only in correlation to the misunderstandings, indeed, the usual lack of constraints that reveal themselves in discussions about the Other. This observation ends with the illusory sovereignty of the “who” and the “what” which are both problematic in indistinctly polarized realms. The philosopher Marcel Conche writes, “A person cannot understand an object, unless his powers of observation are trained *how* to see that object precisely.”⁴⁴

The chief purpose of this study has been to develop an approach to a specific method of observation as it pertains to Latin America. This study also posits deliberately that the image created by the observer reveals not only the subject under observation, but also the observer himself. This is not an apology for the overall subjectivism by which only the symbolic and tyrannical dimension could continue to exist (tyrannical in its symbolism after becoming hegemonical as well). No, the definition of “otherness” and identity through the accumulation of authenticity traits is not enough to interpret, let alone conduct, an imaginary dialogue between the great collective entities. Even worse, this process leads to a deadlock (*cf.* Hoarau) from which hope alone was once the only means of escape – hope and the application of various philosophical, political, and theological tenets. In addition to hope, cultivation of the specific characteristics of a given race has often been used as an instrument to break deadlocks, a strategy repeated in many contemporary situations.

This study cannot be grasped by a mere understanding of this concept alone. The arguments in favor of defining the Other through the scope of Latin America or North America imply that a basic definition needs to be worked out which will conform to the particularities of the social order. From that point, dialogue

43. Juan Liscano, p. 59.

44. Marcel Conche, *Orientation philosophique*, (Paris, 1990), p. 30.

between societies that have become too distanced from each other can be initiated as soon as they have been transformed into what Descartes called "distinctive species" which should be able to "work in a philosophical mindset." In this approach it is necessary to identify a particular virtue or vice in the large, amorphous collective entities, and to proceed as if no real people were involved. This idea also apparently recalls the ancient image of Homer – who contemplated a flying arrow according to its inherent "vice," the wound it would inflict. According to Alain, this kind of thinking is the foundation of mythology.

All the same, to instruct Latin America to go out and discover its own specific character and characterize itself through literature, science, and politics will help it identify its basic particularities, by participating in the anthropocentric dream of self-conceptualization and by introducing the reality of the surrounding world to its "Self." It must be added, not without a touch of humor, that it is just because Latin America is "inaccessible" that its specific character traits will likely be able to survive, not necessarily in the long-term – always unpredictable – but in the course of contemporary history. This is the trick of objectivization that was discussed above as the technique of determining a symbol's particularities, through which the moral character of the vast integrated entities becomes apparent. The moral and rational character of a given nation will gradually make itself clear to those involved in recasting its cultural features, for whom such an endeavor represents an interest or actual profession. What remains then to consider is the incessant mobility and the seemingly infinite fragmentation of characterization systems. These two elements, in particular, need to be interpreted so that the image's power of persuasion and its inherent specificity may be preserved.