

Imagining America*

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We are approaching two dates in our personal and collective calendars that oblige us to pause and reflect on our place in time and on our task in history.

We share the first date with all of humanity. We are coming closer to a new century and a new millenium, leaving behind the epoch of grandeur and servitude that we call "the twentieth century," even though we live our time, like all times, accompanied by its multiple pasts.

The second date on our contemporary calendar is 1992, a date and a theme so intimately our own that we do not even know what to call it.

The Discovery of America – as we have been taught by an ethnocentric tradition?

Or, the Encounter of Two Worlds – as this more generous present suggests to us?

The Invention of America – the result of the European need for a new space for its energies, as the Mexican historian Edmundo O'Gorman proposes?

The Feat of the Renaissance Imagination – as the Spanish historian José Antonio Maravali has declared?

The truth is that all discovery and all encounter is mutual, and if the Europeans discovered the Indians, it is also true that the Indians discovered the Europeans, and they asked themselves if these white and bearded men were as merciful as their crosses proclaimed, or as brutal as their swords made evident.

Christopher Columbus's accomplishment was truly awesome.

Contrary to all evidence, he bet in favor of a hypothesis, and won: if the earth is round, one can arrive in the East by navigating toward the West. The year 1492 expanded and unified the planet.

But Columbus was mistaken in his geography, and this was neither the first, nor the last, Western *disorientation*.

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Believing himself to be in the East, he called our lands the Indies.

But finding himself in a territory devoid of the Asian wealth that he was expecting, and wanting to justify his expedition, he invented this wealth in his letters to the Catholic queen, extolling the riches of the land and the intelligence and the gentleness of its inhabitants.

Columbus – and after him Pedro Mártir, Vaz de Caminha, and Vespucci, who baptized us – offered to the world more than gold; he offered the idea of America as a golden age, a society free, natural, and incorrupt.

But Columbus immediately rejected his own paradise regained, attacking the men whom, one minute before, he had described as naked, disarmed, and friendly – hunting them, enslaving them, and even sending them in chains to Spain.

The golden continent was converted into the hostile continent, but also into the empty continent – empty of history, though, it was hoped, full of gold.

Since then, America has lived the divorce between the dream and the reality, the separation between the good society that we desire and the imperfect society in which we live.

We feel obliged to maintain the idea of the American Utopia, first, to compensate Europe for its own contradiction between the humanist ideals and the religious and political realities of the Renaissance; and second, from the nineteenth century onward, to convince ourselves that our republican and independent destiny was also a chapter of human happiness.

Both persistencies have cost us dearly.

Statistics can be deceptive, but evidence tells us that the population discovered by Columbus in the Caribbean in 1492 had disappeared completely by 1550.

Barbara and Stanley Stein, historians of the colonial experience in America, estimate that the population of central Mexico was roughly 25 million at the beginning of the conquest in 1519. In 1605, there were only one million inhabitants.

In the central Andes, a population close to 6 million in 1525 had diminished to 1.5 million by 1561.

The reasons for this demographic catastrophe were complex, cumulative, and brutal: forced work, the *encomienda* and the *mita*, European diseases and collapsing immune systems, but also, to a certain degree, cultural desperation.

It is not the statistics that are the most impressive.

A single unjust death, a single enslaved human being, serves, like

the caged bird of William Blake, to unleash the scandal from the sky.

The violence with which Europe – and I speak of the Spanish, the Portuguese, the English, the French – implanted its power in America was hardly the statistical index of an irreparable death: the death of great civilizations that, as Miguel León-Portilla has eloquently demonstrated, possessed educational systems, artistic and moral worlds, and forms of human relationships, “in continuous creative evolution.”

Alongside this universe of power, mystical and martial, other ways of being, young and promising, were pulled up by their stems – but not by their roots – by this discovery and conquest.

With it, not only was America lost, but Europe was lost, because with the fall of the American civilizations disappeared alternative possibilities of relationships and imagination that our American societies, but also European societies, might have needed then and surely will need soon in order to direct their minds – and their hearts, in *ixtli*, in *yólotl* – to problems for which Western modernity does not have adequate responses: our relationship with nature, for example, or with death.

But now, according to Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the chronicler of the conquest of Mexico, everything is gone, pissed away, lost forever.

Truly?

In one sense, yes: we will never know how the indigenous civilizations might have evolved without foreign interference. Nor will we ever know, certainly, what would have become of Iberia of Viriatus or Gaul of Vercingetorix without the Roman conquest, or of England without the Norman invasion.

An interrupted destiny is never just, but if the fate of indigenous America was to lose its autonomous evolution, it is also true that the very brutality of the conquest made evident the indigenous capacity to survive against the worst challenges.

The Indian culture of the Americas did *not* perish, nor did it prevail. Rather, it survived and was converted into an inseparable part of what José Lezama Lima has called the counterconquest, the Indian, and later the African, response to what was purely European in America – a purity that lasted less than the first night of love between a Spaniard and an Indian. The immediate sexual relationship between Europeans and Indians distinguishes the Iberian conquest from other colonizations, in which physical contact between the conquerors and the conquered was considered repugnant.

Much has been said about the universal astonishment of the Indians when the strange and unfamiliar European appeared and, most of all, when this unknown being seemed to fulfill the prophecies of myths. Hernán Cortés disembarks off the coast of Mexico at the precise time of the prophesied return of the white and bearded god, Quetzalcóatl, the plumed serpent.

But the astonishment is double: indigenous and European. The chroniclers of the Indies and their gossipy, medieval imagination, combined with their Renaissance, willful imagination, reflect the astonishment of Europe in encountering America:

“And the other morning” – writes Bernal Díaz – “we came upon a wide road . . . [that] headed toward Mexico and we were astonished, and we commented that it seemed like the enchanted stories from the book of Amadís [de Gaul] . . . and even some of our soldiers said that what they saw here seemed the stuff of dreams. . . .”

The dream of the conqueror – his astonishment – soon was transformed, however, into the nightmare of the indigenous world. Of the enchanted city that was Tenochtitlán there was left not a single brick: the dreamer was transformed into the destructor. Destruction notwithstanding, let us not forget that the dreamer was also the desirer: bearing the complex desire of fame and gold, of space and energy, of imagination and faith. There is no innocent desire, because we wish not only to possess, but to transform, the object of our desire. Discovery flows into conquest: we love the world in order to change it. The melancholia of Bernal Díaz is that of the pilgrim who encounters the vision of paradise and immediately must destroy it. Astonishment is converted into pain, and Bernal Díaz, the writer, can save both only by means of memory.

The astonishment of Iberia in America is our astonishment, and also our pain.

The astonishing concomitance of the Spanish colonial era, that Spain sacrifices its polycultural vocation – Christian, Moorish, Jewish, a center of inclusions – at the very instant that it discovers and is discovered by the extreme other: the indigenous culture of the Americas.

The astonishing simultaneity of the apogee and the decadence of an overextended empire – excessive, lacking the administrative intelligence that it itself had expelled, genially inspired from the first moment of its imperial glory to compensate for the defeats of history with the triumphs of sanctity and art: the Spanish empire.

But above all, the astonishing fraternity between the death of the

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Indian civilizations and the birth of the Hispanoindigenous civilizations.

We are, all of us, witnesses to the terrible act of our own death and immediate rebirth.

We behold before us, in full view, the act that gestated us.

Eternal witnesses to our own creation, the descendants of Spaniards and Indians in America know that the Conquest was a bloody, cruel, criminal fact. It was a catastrophic fact. But it was not a sterile fact.

María Zambrano used to say that a catastrophe is only truly catastrophic if nothing comes out of it that redeems it, that transcends it.

María Zambrano possessed a tragic outlook, not melodramatic or Manichean, and she was conscious that only time can transform experience into knowledge.

We do not stay in disaster because we are born from it.

From the catastrophe of the conquest we are all born, the Indo-Americans.

We were, immediately, *mestizos*.

We speak, the majority of us, Spanish.

And, believers or not, we were created in the culture of Catholicism, but in a syncretic Catholicism incomprehensible without first its Indian masks and then its black ones.

We are the face of a striped West, as the Mexican poet Ramón López Velarde has said, of the Moor and the Aztec – and, I would add, of the Jew and the African, of the Roman and the Greek.

I say this as a Mexican: from two cultures of death was born one culture of life. Neither a utopia nor simply a crime, perhaps the conquest and the colonization were something more: a tragic event. The important thing is that we do not stay in disaster because we are born from it. And from the first moment we have asked ourselves questions about our identity:

Who are we?

What do we call this river?

What was the old name of this mountain?

Who were our fathers and mothers?

Do we recognize our brothers?

What do we remember?

What do we desire?

And we also asked ourselves questions about justice:

To whom do these lands and their fruits legitimately belong?

Why do so many possess so little, and why do so few possess so much?

A new, truly American civilization was constructed from these questions, whose first emblem was our great cities.

An incomparable succession of Indoafroiberian metropolises, from San Francisco and Los Angeles to Guanajuato and Puebla, from San Juan de Puerto Rico and Havana to Cartagena de Indias, Lima, Buenos Aires, and Santiago del Nuevo Extremo.

No one, ever, has constructed so much over a territory so vast, with so much energy and in so little time, as Hispanic America: cities with printing presses, universities, painters, poets; cities with injustice also; cities whose energy, contrast, and imagination have been the desperate compensation for that which disappeared.

And from these questions the art of the baroque was created, the refuge of the conquered, where first the Indian, and then the black, found space for their old beliefs and forever left their imprint in the churches, secular architecture, handicrafts, art, and literature of a continent where baroque meant something more than in Europe:

We sought responses to essential questions:

What is our place in the world?

To whom do we owe complicity and alliance?

To our European fathers?

To our Quechua, Araucan, Maya, or Aztec mothers?

To whom must we pray?

To the old gods, or to the new?

And which language must we speak: that of the conquerors, or that of the conquered?

Nothing expressed better the ambiguity of these questions than the art of the American baroque, the art of paradox, the art of abundance based on necessity, the art of proliferation born of insecurity, rapidly filling the spaces of our personal and collective history after the Conquest with all that we found on hand.

The baroque: a mutable art, like the very image of time, the mirror in which we see our identity in constant change.

An art dominated by the simple though imposing fact that we were captured between the destroyed indigenous world and the enslaved African world and a new universe – as much European as indigenous, African, and, finally, American.

Beyond the world of empire, of power and gold, beyond religious wars and dynasties, a brave new world was being formed in the

Americas after the Conquest, with American hands and voices.

A new society, a new faith, with its own language, its own customs, its own necessities.

In the Americas, Spain would have to restore its cultural mission, which always had consisted of being the center of the incorporation, rather than the exclusion, of cultures: a Spain Celtic and Iberian, Phoenician, Greek and Roman, Christian, Jewish and Arab, and now, Indian, Black, and American.

But, it is clear, the most important question arising from the new Indoafroiberian culture had to do with fundamental questions of justice, and this also gives Spain a singular character in the history of the colonizations of the New World.

From the sermon of Antonio de Montesinos in Santo Domingo during Christmas of 1511 ("Are these not men; do they not possess a rational soul?"), to the promulgation of the legislation of the Indies in 1542, through the campaigns of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas ("What is to be done about the Indian women?"), continuing with the negation of the humanity of the Indian by Ginés de Sepúlveda and the affirmation of his beliefs by Francisco de Vitoria, for a century Spain was the only empire of the epoch, and the first in history, that debated with itself about the nature and the errors of its colonization policy:

What have I done?

Whom do I subjugate, educate, evangelize, exploit?

Who and what are these men and women?

Are they human beings and not beasts of burden?

Do they have a soul because they have property?

And, furthermore, are there just and unjust wars?

Does the right of conquest justify war?

Only Spain did this; the other colonial powers – England, France, Portugal, and Holland, whose crimes of extermination and slavery are comparable to those of Spain – did not, perhaps because they lacked the self-doubt, the power of speech, the humor that the University of Salamanca permitted to Francisco de Vitoria to ask of his Spanish students:

What would you have thought if, instead of Spain having conquered the American Indians, the Indians were the ones who conquered Spain, and were treating us like we treated them?

If Sepúlveda accused the Indians of cannibalism, Vitoria accused the Europeans of genocide, destruction, and unjust war.

From this debate arose the modern concept of international law, founded upon the universality of human rights, which Francisco Suárez made explicit by situating all authority in the people, thereby making all peoples legally invulnerable to being conquered by others.

Spain and America universalized the idea of the rights of man.

And legality, with all its imperfections, is a practice superior to the utopia and the crime that, nevertheless, continued their long existences in the New World.

The crown's legal protection of the peoples of America's vast agrarian interior was, without a doubt, insufficient. The village *cacique* filled the local positions of power and the *encomienda* was actually perfected by the debt of the day laborers in the form of the *hacienda* and the country estate.

But one may also allege that the agrarian communities had more rights over their water, forests, and land during the colonial regime than during their independent regime.

The identification of economic liberalism with progress, and the identification of indigenous agrarian culture with barbarity (an idea shared by Marx, Sarmiento, and Porfirio Díaz), motivated our republican governments to snatch away the aboriginal and even colonial rights from these communities.

Depriving them of the juridical identity that they had possessed under the colonial regime, the independent republics imposed upon the defenseless Indians and peasants the values of the free market.

The theory was that, in a system of free competition, they would rapidly be transformed into the true owners and exploiters of their lands. In reality, the *haciendas*, country estates, and huge corporations devoured them.

Because of this injustice, there arose modern peasant insurrections, which, like the one led by Zapata, did nothing but reclaim the rights that the crown already had acknowledged.

In 1991, however, the conquest still has not ended and we, the modern Iberoamericans, have behaved with as much cruelty toward the Indian as Nuño de Guzmán or Pizarro, and with less compassion than Las Casas or Vitoria.

I do not refer simply to the extermination campaigns that the governments of Argentina, Chile, and Mexico perpetrated against the indigenous population during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century.

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I do not refer simply to the cultural disdain that led writers like the Argentinian Carlos Bunge to bless alcoholism, smallpox, and tuberculosis because, thanks to them, the indigenous and African populations of the Americas were decimated.

I refer more to our daily indifference, our oppression by forgetting, our constant marginalization of the fate of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

On this point, as on all points, the reflection of 1992 must be directed more toward the future than toward the past:

In five hundred years, will there be even one single Indian alive in the Americas? Is this their destiny? – Fernando Benítez has asked.

For our part, we must decide if we know how to respect the values of the indigenous culture – the sense of community and the sacred, memory and death, the atavistic wisdom and the ritual intensity, the presence of mystery, the local government – making ours, on our own terms, the value of the other that lives among us.

For our part, we must decide if we can respect these values without condemning them to abandonment, but saving them from injustice.

We will not be just men and women if we do not share the justice with them.

We will not be satisfied men and women if we do not share the bread with them.

There is little justice and little bread in the Iberoamerican New World five hundred years after Columbus, and this injustice, this dissatisfaction obliges us to ask ourselves: in 1992, will we have anything to celebrate?

The response would appear to be negative, if we observe, from the Río Brava to the Tierra del Fuego, inflation and unemployment, the growing indicators of poverty and disease, the decreasing indicators of savings, productivity, salaries – and hope.

Our fragile political institutions see themselves threatened by the crisis of the four Ds: Development, Debt, Drugs, and Democracy.

Under these circumstances, is there anything to celebrate?

I would say, in spite of everything, yes: we have the occasion and the right to celebrate, this and all years, the extraordinary cultural continuity of the Iberoamerican continent.

In the middle of economic disasters, in spite of political fragmentation, and in flagrant contrast to both, cultural continuity imposes itself as the most certain and most positive fact of life that we, the descendants of indigenous peoples, Blacks, and Europeans, have

created together in the continent that speaks Spanish and Portuguese.

The negative crisis has been, in at least two aspects, positive.

First, we have realized that this has also been a crisis of explosive and chaotic growth: growth of the population, of urban life, and of civil society, with all their energies, demands, and contradictions.

We approach the gates of the third millenium and the Quincentenary with a population that has doubled itself in twenty years, from 200 million in 1970 to 400 million today, which, in the year 2000, will be double the population of the United States of America.

It is a young population: half are fifteen years of age or younger.

It is a population anxious to find work, education, social services.

Absolutely every Latin American that will require a job in the year 2000 has already been born.

But none of the political or economic systems prevalent in Latin America has been able to give these young people what they deserve: health, education, work, but also political freedom; or a market economy, but with jobs, schools, and hospitals. We have had social justice without economic development, or economic development without social justice.

It is time to unite the three values: economic growth and social justice and political democracy.

And second, we have helped topple many of the political theories and economic schemes that have had little or nothing to do with our real problems.

But in the midst of these topplings, something has remained standing: the culture that, during the past five centuries, all Iberoamericans have been able to build together.

The appearance of culture as the protagonist in Iberoamerican life goes hand in hand with the appearance of civil society as the creator and bearer of culture. We have seen the worst of ourselves, but also the best:

The memory in stone of Chichén Itza and Machu Picchu.

The baroque dream of Oaxaca and Minas Gerais.

The incorporation of the aboriginal world into the Christian world in Santa María de Tonantzintla or in San Lorenzo de Potosí.

The current presence of indigenous forms in Rufino Tamayo or in the African forms of Wilfredo Lam.

The continuity of old collective links in agrarian laws.

The perseverance of the Roman tradition in the practice of urban law.

The continuity of indigenous myths in Asturias, the judeomuslim myths in Borges, the Renaissance myths in Carpentier.

From Inca Garcilaso to Gabriel García Márquez, from Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz to Pablo Neruda, from Machado de Assis to Julio Cortázar, we the Iberoamericans have been capable of creating a fluid, continuous, enduring culture, and in it every one of us can discover ourselves and recognize the rest of the Iberoamericans.

The crisis that impoverished us economically also gave us these riches and permitted us to realize that each and every one of us participates fully and rightfully in each one of the aspects of our poly-cultural and multiracial patrimony.

Few cultures in the world possess a comparable continuity: the fluid vision, not the traumatic one, of Alfonso Reyes and José Lezama Lima has imposed itself.

Precisely because of this, the absence of recognition, continuing uninterrupted from one action, so common in the fields of politics and economy, becomes more dramatic. We have not been able to translate cultural wealth and continuity into comparable economic wealth and political imagination.

And I clarify this immediately: the lyrical Náhuatl, the poetry of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the architecture of Congonhas do Campo – these are self-evident aesthetic facts.

They do not require, in and of themselves, economic or political responses.

But they do indicate, of course, ways of being, manners of thinking, of living, of dressing, of eating, of loving, of furnishing, of singing, of speaking, of dreaming, of moving, of fighting.

A cultural fact symbolizes and conjugates all ways of being – and feeling.

Culture is the way in which a person must respond to the challenges of existence.

A novel of Isabel Allende, Luisa Valenzuela, or Fernando del Paso, a poem of Nicanor Parra or a story of Antonio Skarmenta, a musical composition of Heitor Villalobos, Mario Lavista, or Rubén Blades, a house of Luis Barragán, Ricardo Legorreta, or Lucio Costa, tells us:

Here we are. We can do this. It remains for us to do this. We would like to be here and to do this.

The lack of correspondence between the cultural unity and the political and economic disunity of Iberoamerica is worrisome because it indicates an incapacity, a void.

We have not been able to unite one with the others because, all too frequently, we have looked for or imposed models of development scarcely related to cultural reality.

Culture can, by itself, return to us a necessary vision of the real coincidence of life with politics and the economy.

Culture, finally, is created and borne by those who *also* make politics and the economy: all of us, the citizens, the members of civil society.

For me, this is the great novelty of Iberoamerica first on the eve of 1992 and soon in the year 2000:

Traditionally, our societies have been organized from the top to the center.

This is true of the Aztec empire and of the Spanish empire.

The representative institutions of this situation have been the imperial state, the church, and the army.

The disappearance of the Spanish empire in America created a void filled by tyrants – Rosas, Santa Anna – and a challenge met by nation-states – Juárez, Mitre.

In the struggles to create nation-states opposed to military coups, we have witnessed foreign interventions and an anachronistic dependence on religion and *cacique* politics.

Amidst mass movements and elections, we have seen processes of evolution and also revolution.

Thanks to the creation by these nation-states of infrastructures heretofore nonexistent – communications networks, hospitals, schools – the Iberamerican civil societies frequently have been forged in adversity, but also with the certainty that they are the bearers of the cultural continuity of the continent.

Agrarian syndicates and cooperatives, management organizations, bureaucracies and technocracies, feminist groups, community and religious associations, universities, mass media, intellectuals, students: this open fan of civil society is the most dynamic reality of Iberoamerica today.

Its novelty is that it is moved from below and from the periphery, no longer from the top and from the center.

Its dynamic is that it goes beyond not only the traditional powers – church, army, state – but also beyond its own political parties, which are frequently seen as representatives of civil diversity.

And its danger – the danger of our societies – is that it has neither the time nor the sufficient organization to give concrete, local, Iberoamerican responses to the swift challenges of modernity:

instantaneous communication, global economic integration, and accelerated technological advances.

These are the credentials with which we present ourselves, not in celebration but in reflection, first on the occasion of 1992, and later in the year 2000.

I believe that the problems of 1492 in 1992 are two.

One is hypercelebration.

The other is hypercriticism.

To see the past only as a prolonged crime, or simply as a feat of civilization.

We must not convert ourselves into statues of salt.

Nor can we, however, be our own contemporary executioners.

We must not take on the task of prosecutors that our historical critics, with consummate hypocrisy, have been performing for the past five hundred years, loading onto our shoulders crimes for which there is no absolution – save masochism.

All of us have been born from the facts of the past.

We are who we are because together we made the culture that unifies us: Indian, European, African, and, above all, *mestizo*.

A culture that predicts the nature and the problems of the world in the twentieth century.

The world to come will be like ours has been: a world of *mestizaje*, a world of migrations, but this time instantaneous; not on Columbus's caravel, but in a jet.

All of us in the Americas come from *other parts*, from the first men and women who crossed the Bering Straits thirty thousand years ago, to the last migrant worker who crossed the border last night between Mexico and the United States, sneaking by those most illustrious of undocumented peoples, the English Puritans, who disembarked in Massachusetts, without visas, in 1620.

We find ourselves confronting, five hundred years later, the problem of the other: the encounter with different men and women, of another race, of another culture.

This phenomenon repeats itself today on a global scale, from New York to Los Angeles, from London to Berlin, from Paris to Naples.

In the twenty-first century, we will see migrations en masse from East to West.

This will be the great theme of the coming century.

If only the modern immigrant could encounter his father Bartolomé de las Casas and be defended by his father Francisco de Vitoria.

The peoples of Iberia and America have been great when we have practiced a culture of inclusion.

When we exclude, we impoverish ourselves.

When we include, we enrich ourselves.

The fortitude of our culture – the most important balance of these past five hundred years – will permit us, if we know how to take advantage of it, to act responsibly at home and abroad.

At home, we must come closer to making institutions correspond to societies – the two are now dangerously divergent – with the purpose of renewing development, but this time with economic justice and political democracy.

Five hundred years after Columbus, our countries demand no less: development with justice and democracy.

Abroad, the Iberian New World has sufficient cultural strength to open up and embrace, without fear, all the cultures of the world.

They are no stronger or richer than our own, the Angloamerican culture or the French culture, to cite two examples that have kept us awake, anxious, for the past two hundred years.

We can withstand all encounters and benefit from them.

We are all that we are.

We can deny neither the grandeur nor the servitude of our past: neither its life nor its death.

We will continue existing in the future only if we confront it united, with all the burdens of our history, but with all its problems, too.

There is a world after the Quincentenary, a world of crisis and extraordinary challenges of all kinds, and if this world finds us disunited, it will defeat us in the name of what we *are not*.

We have much to bring us into the future, on the condition that we do not paralyze ourselves either in pure celebration or in pure self-flagellation.

Between the festivity and the masochism of the public, indigenous, African, and Iberian America have a modern opportunity, because our experience has been what it has been, to restore a minimum of tragic sentiment to life:

Neither Utopia nor Apocalypse, but a life of tension between competitive values and alternative visions.

We are in the world.

In it, we are free because we act.

But we are not, because we die.

Only culture, which is love and friendship, creation and criticism, *eros* and *tanatos*, ensures the continuity of life despite the inevitability of death.

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To give, beginning with this conviction, real, critical, human content to the technological and economic exigencies of our time is something that the Indoafroiberoamericans can do, starting with our own history of encounters and incorporations, for our own benefit and for that of the new multipolar world that succeeds the sterility of fifty years of cold war.

Because of this, the theme of culture will be the great theme of the twenty-first century: the encounter with the multiplicity of civilizations, and the politics and economies that are born of this encounter.

When we speak of the two dates, 1992 and soon the year 2000, we are speaking of the time and the ways in which we live. Time is different for all people.

The ancient Mexicans celebrated and at the same time feared the succession of the five suns that would announce the end and the beginning, death and rebirth, in much the same way that the ancient Peruvians imagined time as a series of horizons fusing together, forever out of reach, endlessly expansive.

In the West, I think that the most beautiful definition of time is given by Plato in *Timaeus*, when he tells us that "Time is the mobile image of eternity."

Courting this movable image, accompanying this succession of suns, within this fusion of horizons, we ourselves inevitably act, think, speak and write, desire and remember, live and die.

May we know, in 1992 and in the coming century, to respect the pauses of time without sacrificing the movement of time.

May we know to animate the plurality of our cultures so that they are reflected in our public institutions, giving them vigor, substance, and justice.

But may we know, above all, to go beyond the discovery or the encounter toward imagining America, unending, unfulfilled, defiant, because only in the end will we discover what we first imagined.

The next five hundred years begin today.

Translated from the Spanish by Katherine Hagedorn