



Languages of Culture in Peruvian Literature, 1941-1994

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LANGUAGES OF CULTURE IN PERUVIAN LITERATURE, 1941-1994

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This dissertation seeks to explain, from the viewpoint of the Peruvian experience, how literature has served to both create and scrutinize the language of culture. I depart from the methodological assumption—extrapolated from language-oriented intellectual history—that concepts weave a distinct semantic field or “language game” that, while allowing us to recognize entities, state problems, and perform actions, also produces its own entanglements and paradoxes. My hypothesis is threefold: First, I argue that the term “culture,” widely understood at present as a whole way of life that provides the ultimate basis for personal identity, is indeed part of a specialized and institutionalized language. Second, I maintain that this particular idiom, especially in peripheral countries, was furnished during the last century by anthropology. My third claim is that, in twentieth-century Peruvian literature, a gradual shift takes place from an early understanding of culture as pristine essence to one of effective resource. Thus I demonstrate that cultural identity emerges as topics of discussion and concern in Peru with José María Arguedas, whose poetic encloses the Andean people in a hermetic space, the touchstone of which is collective sensibility. In doing so, he brings to the fore the question of the currency of Andean culture and precipitates a then-

unprecedented conflict between tradition and modernity. The more sophisticated response to this essentialist view of culture, which by definition overlooks any possibility of cultural change, is Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Storyteller* (1987), a fable of identity that finds in nomadism a metaphor for the theory of the social contract and thus endeavors, using Arguedas's own language, to solve his predicaments, albeit in an individualistic fashion. But the most significant shift in the language of culture is to be found in the stories of "bricheros," the *gringa* hunters from Cusco who impudently benefit from the stereotypes of Andean tradition and therefore redefine culture as a source not of identity, but rather of resources and opportunities. In engaging with these narratives, I aim to offer a critical examination of the social meanings of culture and the rise and fall of its languages.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Martín Oyata was born and raised in Lima, Peru. He received a B.A. in Philosophy from the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. After graduating, he worked at the Peruvian Ministry of Education in Lima. In 2002, he arrived in the United States and began his study of literature at the Department of Romance Studies at Cornell University, where he received an M.A. in 2007. He currently lives in Burlington, Vermont, where he teaches Latin American literature at the University of Vermont.

In memory of my parents

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Many of the ideas that I employ in this work were first presented to me years ago, in my hometown, by the two people whose intellectual rigor and commitment I perhaps admire the most—Miguel Giusti and Rosemary Rizo-Patrón.

I must finally acknowledge my longtime friend José Falconi, who has served as an interlocutor in this project, as in so many others. Almost a decade ago now, he began relentlessly goading me to pursue doctoral studies in the United States. He somehow managed to persuade me, but I had never been quite sure I wanted to live my life on the northern end of the continent. That is, of course, until I met

Megan Sullivan, with whom I feel at home anywhere and few things—if any—are lost in translation.

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION: THE LANGUAGE OF CULTURE

The fundamental fact here is that we lay down rules, a technique, for a game, and that then, when we follow the rules, things do not turn out as we had assumed. That we are therefore as it were entangled in our own rules.

This entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand (i.e. get a clear view of).

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

Do we know who invented Andean culture? The answer seems obvious: it was the ancient inhabitants of the Andean region, scattered among the high mountains and coastal valleys of western South America. Archaeologists think this process must have begun some 15,000 years before our era, as suggested by the bone and stone arrowheads that the first groups of hunter-gatherers left in rock shelters such as Pikimachay and Lauricocha, located in present-day Peru. If the emphasis, however, is placed on the level of development of agricultural technologies, it would be more accurate to date the invention of Andean culture to the late pre-ceramic period. It was, then, about 4,000 years ago when the inhabitants of the central Andes domesticated all the plants and crops that were to accompany them during the coming centuries, giving sustenance to powerful empires such as Wari, Tiwanaku, and finally, Tahuantinsuyo. But we should pause here: Can cultures be invented?

This question, upon careful examination, seems strange, absurd even, rather than obvious. No single individual can be granted credit

for the invention of a culture. It is possible to invent artifacts and technologies—arrowheads, irrigation systems, farming terraces and stone fortresses—but cultures, insofar as they are social formations, are collective creations. If someone tried to convince us that cultures are “invented,” we would perhaps reply, with a look of disapproval, that cultures are “born” or “flourish”—that nobody owns them because they belong to all members of the group. But from this imaginary encounter, we would likely not emerge the winners. In fact, our genuine reaction of surprise with regard to the word “invention” says much about how we think about culture today. We imagine it to be continuous, solid, unique compared to others, transmitted from one generation to the next, the repository of identity, and the bastion of collective memory since time immemorial. It would be quite shocking were we to be told that—contrary to all appearances—this idea of culture as a natural fact is a relatively recent cultural phenomenon. But it is. It didn’t spring forth spontaneously. The history of this idea is closely related to that of a bundle of related concepts such as identity, tradition, memory and nation, which gained currency in nineteenth-century Europe with the rise of Romanticism. There are proper names behind it. There are philosophies and disciplines that impelled it. There are social causes to which it gave support and political programs for which it acted as a platform. These pages were missing from European history for a long time and are yet to be written in the case of other regions.

The topic of this dissertation is precisely the evolution of the idea of Andean culture in the intellectual history of Peru. I intend to

account for the process of its invention as an object of social concern and intellectual debate over the course of the twentieth century. Far from assuming that this idea has been around forever, I shall argue that, in order for these concerns to be articulated, the development of a language was necessary. It is a language that literature and anthropology helped to create and that found its key figure in a Peruvian writer and folklorist who committed suicide in 1969.

As we will see, the language of culture develops in the work of José María Arguedas (1911-1969), is challenged in that of Mario Vargas Llosa (1936), and is irreverently overcome in the so-called “brichero” literature of the turn of the century. Following this route, I will propose a reconsideration of the development of Indigenist literature, arguing that, despite all appearances, this literature takes a cultural turn beginning with *Yawar Fiesta* (1941) and not before.¹ In this novel, Arguedas crafts a poetic that encloses the Andean people in a hermetic space the touchstone of which is collective sensibility. In excluding the languages of race and class, he precipitated a then-unprecedented conflict between tradition and modernity—an epic battle that reaches fatalistic overtones in the rest of his oeuvre until eventually collapsing in his posthumous novel about migration, *The Fox From Up Above and the Fox From Down Below* (1971). The more sophisticated response to this essentialist view of culture, which by

¹ Although it has become customary to retain the Spanish term “Indigenismo” for this literary and artistic current, I will instead use the term “Indigenism” in order to draw attention to the political program that ran parallel to the aesthetic movement. In fact, Indigenism is currently a vigorous global trend that is in no way limited to Latin American countries but that arguably owes much to this antecedent. In using the English word and its derivations, my aim is to underscore the conceptual core of the various Indigenist endeavors as well as its connection to early elaborations.

definition overlooks any possibility of change, is Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Storyteller* (1987). It is a fable of identity that, à la Lévi-Strauss, finds in nomadism a metaphor for Rousseau's theory of the social contract and thus endeavors to solve Arguedas's predicaments using Arguedas's own language, albeit in an individualistic fashion. But the most significant shift in the language of culture—and perhaps the most radical, despite its modest literary pretensions—is to be found in the stories of “bricheros,” the *gringa* hunters from Cusco who impudently benefit from the stereotypes of Andean tradition and therefore redefine culture as a source not of identity, but rather of resources and opportunities. In this way, I aim to explain, from the perspective of the Peruvian experience, how literature has served to forge and to scrutinize the language of culture, first conceiving of it as a pristine essence and then, at the end of a journey of half a century, as an effective resource.

1.1 The Geography of Intellectual History

In order to address the issue, I have decided to intentionally avoid fixing in advance an analytical definition of a prescriptive nature. When the matter to be addressed is culture, definitions, rather than acting as beacons, can make us lose our way. In 1952, Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Klukhohn compiled almost three hundred ways of defining it. Since then, the list has swelled further with political and business cultures, elite and popular cultures, ethnocentric and hybrid cultures. At the beginning of the last century, Bertrand Russell argued that it is not essential, or even necessary, to know the meaning of a word to use

it properly. Some time later, Noam Chomsky verified in the laboratory that the ostensible difficulty of providing a satisfactory definition of “stair” does not prevent children from using it, with the naturalness of the case, to go up and down and get where they want. I rely, therefore, on the ordinary and dominant use of the word according to which culture, broadly speaking, is an entire way of life made manifest in a set of material objects and social practices. My purpose is to follow the trajectory of this idea within the Peruvian intellectual tradition, not to judge its epistemological validity.²

The real difficulty of this research is that, today, all roads seem to lead to the culture. Within academia and beyond its walls, the concept of culture as the paradigmatic form of membership has been consolidated in recent years. In light of this premise, social conflicts are now typically conceived of as struggles for affirming a way of life that provides the ultimate basis for personal identity. This belief—deeply embedded in the tradition of Romanticism—has recently led to a number of politics of difference or recognition and to many other kinds of transnational activism revolving around collective and cultural rights.³ But, regardless of its significance for the development

² With regard to the insufficiencies of this definition for the contemporary practice of professional anthropology (which the specialists have not overlooked), see Néstor García Canclini, *Diferentes, desiguales y desconectados. Mapas de la interculturalidad* (Barcelona: Gedisa, 2004).

³ The conceptual background of these demands has been discussed, and to some extent articulated, by philosophers such as Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer and Will Kymlicka. With regard to this matter, the best introduction is Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994). Another useful resource, also by Taylor, is *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). About Indigenism as a global movement, see Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003).

of new social movements, the rise of culture in social and intellectual history has also stimulated the anachronistic tendency of seeking in the past the validation for our current categories, thereby concealing their historicity. This makes it rather difficult for us to be cognizant of our own point of view. It is useful to keep in mind, to give an instructive example, that a weakness in some studies of colonial history has been the projection of the language of multiculturalism onto the controversies of the sixteenth century, despite the fact that “alterity in its modern philosophical sense was an impossibility in the theological world of sixteenth-century Spain.”⁴ Neither Bartolomé de las Casas nor Francisco de Vitoria could do justice to the “otherness” of the Indian in their discussions on the right to war and the theory of natural rights for the simple reason that this concept, with all its political implications, was not part of their vocabulary—hence the unfairness of measuring the contribution of these thinkers according to the standards of affirmative action.

A viable alternative to this tendency to anachronism is offered by language-oriented historiography. I will therefore depart from the premise that concepts weave a semantic field or “language game” that, while allowing us to recognize entities, state problems and perform actions, also produces its own entanglements and paradoxes. In this I follow historians such as J. G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, who, doubly inspired by John Austin’s ordinary language philosophy and T. S. Kuhn’s history of science, have contributed in the last decades to redefining the historical study of political thought, refusing to treat its

⁴ Rolena Adorno, *The Polemics of Possession in Spanish American Narrative* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), 5.

manifold manifestations as direct reflections of social reality or, alternatively, as (often malicious) rationalizations of the political interests of their authors.⁵ It would be erroneous, however, to assume that these historians have placed both ideas and texts in a transcendental, linguistic level, that is, one abstracted from experience. It is evident that languages are formed in a social context but, as Pocock notes, “the trick is to see in what ways language indicates the context in which it is formed and in what ways it does not; what signs it contains that point directly at the phenomena of social relations, what signs that point at them indirectly, and what signs that point away from the phenomena of social relations as historians may perceive them.”⁶

This commentary warns us against those matrices of interpretation that read everything in ideological terms, which treat texts as if they were instruments essentially (or unconsciously) designed to legitimize an order of domination or to challenge it, to channel social prejudice or to denounce it, to control minds or to speak truth to power.⁷ Not every document of culture deals with the

⁵ See J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language, and Time: Essays on Political Thought and History* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989); and J. G. A. Pocock, *Political Thought and History: Essays on Theory and Method* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009). From the point of view of Marxist historiography, Gareth Stedman Jones has developed a method of notable affinity (in this case for social history) in his *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History 1832-1932* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, “Texts as Events: Reflections on the History of Political Thought,” in *Political Thought and History*, 110.

⁷ As Jonathan Culler astutely perceives, the matrices of interpretation that currently dominate the academic scene, especially in the United States “relate the defense of the literary and the specificity thereof not to questions of the distinctiveness of literary language nor to the radical potential of disruptions of meanings but to the staging of agency on the one hand and to engagements with otherness on the other.” Jonathan Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 29. The problem—Culler notes—is the absence of a theory of literary

problem of power. Not every cultural artifact takes up the social concerns of the street or tries to answer them. Moreover, when this actually does occur, the diagnoses and solutions reached by the authors are only meaningful within a language or intellectual tradition that allows them to be enunciated. The language of Marxism speaks of class, class struggle and false consciousness. The language of psychoanalysis speaks of the unconscious, repression and the return of the repressed. The language of structuralism speaks of signs, signifiers and the signified. The language of anthropology speaks of races, ethnicities and cultures. All these languages address reality, but often—and this is a problem inherent to any language—what is at stake, rather than reality, is completing exercises that maintain the internal coherence of the chosen language and ensure its explanatory power. Often, these exercises become solipsistic and byzantine: they allow you to do *your* things better, but not better things.

Regarding the practice of history, the finding summarized above requires us to reconsider all those procedures of historical interpretation “whereby an ill-defined notion of the ‘historical context’ is constituted as an external, extra-discursive ground and assumed to solve all basic problems in interpretation, including those that may

exemplarity that allows for the successful overcoming of the danger of tautological interpretation. The situation of postcolonial studies serves him as an example: “One problem of postcolonial studies ... is the absence of good accounts of the literary norms against which postcolonial authors are said to be writing. Lacking descriptions of such norms, the discourse of critics becomes thematic, focusing on questions of identity and resistance to authority, rather than on artistic innovation; or else it takes theoretical arguments themselves as norms, so that the literary works are used to challenge Homi Bhabha’s account of hybridity or colonial mimicry or the appropriateness of Gayatri Spivak’s question, ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ for the case under discussion” (11). Included in Culler’s diagnosis are, by extension, literary studies of gender, race and ethnicity.

have been disclosed by one's own reading of a text.”⁸ With regard to the present work, acknowledging the mediation of language is a reminder that the problems of Andean culture cannot be properly understood without recourse to the European intellectual currents that, in successive waves, have battered the Peruvian shores for the last five centuries. I refer not only to the processes of asymmetrical cultural exchange—widely studied and documented by social history—that began with the arrival of Pizarro's troops in 1532. I speak also of the imaginary territory through which intellectual history circulates, a territory whose blurred boundaries do not necessarily reflect the geography of social practices that arise from everyday experience.⁹ When we take for granted that Andean culture is a local issue, we often neglect the fact that the language used to talk about it originated in other sources: widespread intellectual movements such as Marxism and psychoanalysis, but also academic trends aimed at an audience of specialists such as, to mention but two important cases, Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology and the Annales school of history. Despite the fact that people are not always able to give an account of their derivations, these specialized languages slip through the cracks of public spaces to penetrate deeply into common sense.

Where does the language of culture come from? Its history, which is in a way the history of Andean culture, begins in Europe with the Enlightenment and Romanticism. It is this intellectual climate that

⁸ Dominick LaCapra, *History and Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 105.

⁹ Furthermore, as LaCapra insists, some intellectual currents and cultural artifacts simply escape “[the] inclination to rely on a social definition of context as an explanatory matrix.” Ibid., 46.

gives rise to our current conception of culture as a social good that provides the foundation of personal identity and that, therefore, should be cherished and protected.

1.2 The New Mythology

The philosophical meaning of the Enlightenment is expressed in the concept of autonomy. Its historical legacy, in Kant's famous 1784 slogan: "*Sapere aude!* [Dare to be wise!] Have courage to make use of your *own* understanding!"¹⁰ As is well known, the Enlightenment movement wanted to rid the orbit of knowledge, once and for all, of the authority of tradition and the tutelage of memory, emancipating the individual from the oppression of the past and elevating him to the status of master of nature and, above all else, of himself. And, in a way, it accomplished its goals; under the influence of Enlightenment thought, many conceptions of social life drastically changed—conceptions that, until the eighteenth century (the so-called Age of Enlightenment), had organized European life. Societies, at least in the Western Hemisphere, began to think of themselves, and govern themselves, following the model of voluntary membership and the social contract between free individuals. This brand new political principle, on which the liberal doctrine rests even in its contemporary versions, was complemented by the ethical requirement to justify moral action through rational arguments, rendering the reference solely to customs and established practices, in short, to tradition,

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" [1784], in *Practical Philosophy*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17 (AK 8:35) (emphasis in original).

insufficient as a plausible justification for individual behavior. The ability to act without a guide—the Enlightenment philosophers claimed—was a sign of the maturity of humanity.

Nevertheless, even before Kant coined the definitive motto of the Enlightenment, the artistic and intellectual response to this project was already showing signs of having matured. The exponents of early romanticism—spearheaded by figures such as Hamann, Herder and Novalis—proposed recovering the concept of tradition, but they gave their work an orientation, which, curiously enough, was significantly indebted to the Enlightenment.

In 1774, ten years before Kant delivered to the press his pamphlet “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?,” Herder wrote: “Now we *speak about a hundred estates*, classes, times, and human types *at once*, only to say *nothing* about any one of them: our wisdom is so refined and incorporeal, so *abstract in spirit*, that it *dissipates* without any use. But then it was and always remained wisdom of the *citizen*, the history of a [concrete] human *object*, a fluid full of *nutrients*.”¹¹ Contrary to the Enlightenment philosophers, whose moral and political assumptions were based on the premise of an abstract individual, estranged from his community of origin, the Romantics felt that tradition and the past were the indispensable basis of any society. Moreover, whereas someone like Kant referred to society in the singular, the Romantics could only recognize a motley crowd of peoples. Hence the fascination, always local, that the Romantics felt

¹¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History* [1774], trans. Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004), 57 (emphasis in original).

for landscape, folklore, oral narration, sayings and proverbs, language—for all the concrete manifestations that speak to the wisdom or (to use the vocabulary of the time) the “genius” of the people. Their project consisted in preserving tradition, that of *their* people—in making of it something like a systematic knowledge.

Given this goal, it is rather curious that the Romantics made recourse to the Enlightenment ideal of autonomy. But, in reality, this choice was far from contradictory. It was, in any event, a strange and novel move that the Enlightenment exponents had not anticipated in their design of the game board. For, as well as empowering individuals to refuse to follow the precepts of tradition, the principle of self-determination also left open the option for individuals to *adhere* to tradition, consciously and voluntarily—for them to *choose* to be members of a community rather than the fictive subjects or anonymous parties of the social contract. It is for this reason that Romanticism is not simply the rejection of Enlightenment. Nor is it solely the seed of modern irrationalism, as Isaiah Berlin has said.¹² It is, in addition to those two things, the negative double of Enlightenment. Even more: it is an ingenious elaboration of tradition that, nevertheless, aims to maintain the aura of spontaneity. Hölderlin turned this set of aesthetic intuitions into a program with the following call: “...we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of ideas, it must become a mythology of *reason*. Until we make ideas aesthetic, that is, mythological, they are of no interest to

¹² See Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1993).

the *people*, and vice versa: until mythology is rational, it will be an embarrassment to philosophy.”¹³

Thus traditionalism, the *free* cult of tradition, is a phenomenon unknown until the rise of Romanticism in the European cultural scene. What had been known until then was just tradition. Hölderlin’s exhortation anticipated that the people would be the actor of the new century and that reason would embark on the creation of new mythologies. Tradition is no longer conceived in traditional terms because is institutionalized. During the nineteenth century, new social movements would capitalize upon this attitude of reverence toward the past, channeling it in the direction of nationalism. Nationalism, according to Ernest Gellner’s standard definition, is the political principle that advocates the congruence of political and national unity.¹⁴ A people’s awareness of being a cultural unit then becomes crucial to the cause of national expansion and unification.

But as this process progressed, it proved necessary to polish the rough diamond of culture. Language becomes one of the main criteria by which to define emerging nations, as well as a resource by which to forge them. The nineteenth century was, in Europe and its vicinity, a golden era for lexicographers, grammarians, philologists, and scholars of vernacular languages.¹⁵ Legions of philologists took to the task of developing grammars and lexicons that would allow for the standardization of national languages. But these, as Hobsbawm notes,

¹³ Friedrich Hölderlin, “Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism” [1796], in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 186-187 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 1.

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 71.

are “the opposite of what nationalist mythology supposes them to be, namely the primordial foundations of national culture and the matrices of the national mind. They are usually attempts to devise a standardized idiom out of a multiplicity of actually spoken idioms, which are thereafter downgraded to dialects, the main problem in their construction being usually which dialect to choose as the base of the standardized and homogenized language.”¹⁶ This concern for gleaning an essence in the wild forms of culture, separating the wheat from the chaff, was also applied in the construction of places of memory that would act as sources or reservoirs of national identity. Museums and archives are created.¹⁷ The idea of cultural patrimony appears in this period for the first time. The primary focus during the Old Regime had been mythical genealogy, and in view of this, liturgies, funerals and other ephemeral festivities were more important than the sacred objects with which patrimony would later come to concern itself. Neither the palaces of the nobility nor the great collections were treated with the reverence they command today.¹⁸ The inventory of national treasures and the integrity of culture are original contributions of the nineteenth century. This is the moment when, under the impetus of ad hoc institutions, tradition and custom begin

¹⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 54.

¹⁷ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 3-7.

¹⁸ “Il ne s’agissait pas là de ‘lieux culturels’ indispensable à la Couronne, moins encore à la nation ; ils subissaient les changements du goût et ne méritaient pas des sacrifices que la crise financière rendait exorbitants.” André Chastel, “La notion de patrimoine,” in Pierre Nora, ed., *Les Lieux de mémoire*, vol. II: *La Nation*, t. 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), 407.

to be thought of in non-traditional terms.¹⁹ But let me make clear that this impetus stemmed from institutions unknown to pre-modern agrarian societies. As Pocock notes: “These do not arise from the extrapolation of institutional continuities, but consist in ascribing a sacred or epic origin to the society conceived as a whole.”²⁰ Traditions begin to be invented.²¹

The Romantics believed that every collective people has its own way of being, thinking and feeling; that there is no single yardstick by which all individuals or all peoples can be measured; that the plenitude of the individual is reached by listening to the voice of community. The essential step in implementing these ideas was to discover and refine culture. This function, in a country such as Peru, fell during the twentieth century to anthropology.

¹⁹ Pocock, “Time, Institutions and Action: An Essay on Traditions and Their Understanding,” 241.

²⁰ Ibid., loc. cit.

²¹ E. J. Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1-14. Of course, as Anthony Giddens reminds us, all traditions are invented in a trivial sense. See Anthony Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society,” in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 93. Hobsbawm knows this well, for what he aims to highlight—with a measure of rhetorical stylization—is the problem of its legitimacy or “authenticity.” He seems inclined to think that any deliberate use of the past in a post-traditional society entails a perverse manipulation. Although we cannot enter in a full discussion here, it is worth emphasizing that this is one of the main contemporary concerns, as cultural identity, tradition, and memory are fertile fields for the cultivation of fundamentalism: “Reading the desires of the present into the past, or, in technical terms, anachronism, is the most common and convenient technique of creating a history satisfying the needs of what Benedict Anderson has called ‘imagined communities’ or collectives, which are by no means only national ones.” E. J. Hobsbawm, “Identity History Is Not Enough,” in *On History* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 273. Tzvetan Todorov poses the problem in much the same terms as Hobsbawm in his discussion of the cult of memory in contemporary Europe. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la Mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 2005).

1.3 *Some Assembly Required*

In retrospect, the two events that defined the intellectual climate of twentieth-century Peru were the discovery of the Andean world and the migration from the countryside to the city. For a long time, the “problem of the Indian”—as Mariátegui called it—was the great lacuna in the agenda of the white Creole intellectual elite: “In the mountains, the region principally inhabited by Indians, there remains—its guidelines little changed—the most barbaric and omnipotent feudalism.”²² The decade of the 1920s was crucial in filling this gap in the Peruvian intellectual imagination. According to Luis Alberto Sánchez, “there was in Peru an acute revival of all things Indian.”²³

But, was this phenomenon really new? Reviewing magazines from the previous decade, it becomes evident that a sizeable imaginary distance separated Lima and the rest of the country. On the occasion of Mother’s Day, a 1916 illustration from Clemente Palma’s magazine *Variedades* identifies in the Eskimo, Lapp, or Maya woman the archetype of the Indian mother, even though, as can be imagined, it was not necessary to travel so far in search of models. At the same time, however, the cause of the vindication of the Indian already had numerous antecedents. There was the Indigenist novel, whose tradition of social criticism dated back to Clorinda Matto de Turner’s *Aves sin nido* (*Birds Without a Nest*) (1889) or, even earlier, the stories

²² José Carlos Mariátegui, *7 ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* [1928] (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1968), 28. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

²³ Luis Alberto Sánchez, *Indianismo e indigenismo en la literatura peruana* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1981), 9.

by Juana Manuela Gorriti and Narciso Aréstegui.²⁴ Not to mention the activities of the Pro-Indigenous Association of Dora Mayer and Pedro Zulén, which began to take shape in 1909.²⁵ These antecedents of social critique had led to investigating the causes of the social and economic prostration of the Indian. But, by the twenties, this criticism developed into a direct effort to lobby the Peruvian State to recognize its social responsibilities. As a result of pressure from a range of social forces, the 1920 Constitution recognized ancient communal property—abolished by Bolívar—which was the territorial base of ethnic groups. Gradually, the awareness that the folds of that “rough and barbaric figure” (as poet César Moro described Peru) were themselves a reflection of profound economic, racial and cultural differences, whose origin dated back to the colonial era. This newfound understanding was woven throughout the intense political debates that followed during the twenties. The consciousness of the Andean became of vital importance among intellectuals. During this period, the provinces see the emergence of vanguard groups such as “Resurgimiento” (Cusco) and bulletins like *Orkopata* (Puno). González Prada’s voice presides over this era: “The real Peru is not formed by the groups of white Creoles and foreigners that inhabit the strip of land between the Pacific and the Andes; the nation is formed by crowds of Indians scattered on the east side of the mountains.”²⁶ Thus it was not about

²⁴ For the history of Peruvian Indigenism, see Efraín Kristal, *The Andes Viewed from the City: Literary and Political Discourse on the Indian in Peru, 1848-1930* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987).

²⁵ See Wilfredo Kapsoli, *El pensamiento de la Asociación Pro Indígena* (Cusco: Centro Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1980).

²⁶ Manuel González Prada, “Discurso en el Politeama” [1888], in *Páginas libres*, prologue and notes by Luis Alberto Sánchez (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1976).

continuing to assail the “brutalizing trinity of the Indian”—the judge, the landlord and the priest—but rather about linking the Indian problem with the project of the Peruvian nation. For Mariátegui, this alloy should be forged within the framework of a socialist project: “In these peoples, nationalism is revolutionary and, therefore, converges with socialism. In these peoples the idea of nation has not yet accomplished its trajectory nor has it exhausted its historic mission.”²⁷

But the local elites’ knowledge of the indigenous world was quite vague and lacked scientific support, so it can be argued that this period was characterized by a combination of genuine social concern with little actual knowledge of the Andean reality. This void was filled by cultural anthropology.²⁸ Its contribution has not been adequately recognized, perhaps because of the prejudice surrounding anthropology as a result of its origins.

As we know, anthropology emerged in the nineteenth century as the discipline charged with studying the “primitive.” Its early practitioners, Wallerstein reminds us, “worked on the premise that the groups they were studying did not enjoy modern technology, did not have writing systems of their own, and did not have religions that

²⁷ José Carlos Mariátegui, “Réplica a Luis Alberto Sánchez” [1927], in *La polémica del indigenismo*, prologue and notes by Luis Alberto Sánchez (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1976), 83.

²⁸ For the propagation of this discipline, see Manuel M. Marzal, *Historia de la antropología indigenista: México y Perú* (Barcelona: Anthropos/Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa, 1993). Also a useful source are the personal accounts of Pablo Macera, “Explicaciones,” in *Trabajos de historia*, vol. I (Lima: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1977), vii-lxxvi; Alberto Flores Galindo “La imagen y el espejo: la historiografía peruana 1910-1986,” *Márgenes* 2 (1988): 55-83; and Guillermo Rochabrún, “Un marxista académico ante el espejo,” in *Batallas por la teoría. En torno a Marx y el Perú* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 2007), 11-62.

extended beyond their own group.”²⁹ As a social science, anthropology had been allocated a very specific area, namely, that of non-Western peoples under colonial jurisdiction. This historical association with colonial powers explains the contemporary inclination to maintain that:

Anthropology is a way through which Western culture indirectly affixes its own cultural identity. This identity, which the anthropologist struggles to shed, is one that masters non-historical cultures through knowledge, by making them the object of its study. Anthropology translates into the language of the West the cultures of the others and in the process establishes its own form of self-knowledge through a kind of annihilation of the self.³⁰

But anthropology is more than a discourse about otherness oriented toward the justification of colonial powers. To measure the contributions of anthropology in terms of the forces that gave rise to it would constitute an unjust simplification. In terms of the Peruvian case, this image is quickly refuted when we think about John Murra’s

²⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2004), 7.

³⁰ Roberto González Echevarría, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 13. Based on this definition of anthropology as a “imperial” discursive formation, the author even says that: “When he killed himself in 1969, Arguedas was expressing not only a measure of his despair, but also perhaps of his guilt for having made use of anthropological knowledge to approach a part of himself, a process that was already a kind of partial suicide. Feeling, perhaps, that he had stilled through inscription one of the voices within him, he felt that the proper thing to do was to annihilate the Other. In Arguedas the anthropological mediation is not bypassed...by exposing its literariness, but by denouncing its violent, repressive nature, and by stressing the limitations inherent in the kind of knowledge that it can generate.” *Myth and Archive*, 161. For the author, what Arguedas’s suicide highlights is the incompatibility of maintaining a dual commitment to literature and anthropology—the impossibility of being, at the same time, subject and object of anthropological practice. This holds very well within a structuralist theory that, instead of measuring the real impact of a discipline within an intellectual tradition, relies on a priori speculation about “discourses.” The example reveals the hermeneutic excesses that find incentive in the Foucauldian equation between discourse and power.

research on the economic organization of Andean societies or the examination of Andean mythic cycles, which would experience an undeniable moment of boom in the 1960s.³¹

Much is achieved with the introduction of the term Andean. In the words of Alberto Flores Galindo, “It allows us to cast off the racist connotations implied by the term *Indian (indio)*. It conjures the image of a civilization and includes not just peasants but urban residents and mestizos as well. It encompasses the coast and the Andes, transcends contemporary national boundaries, and underscores connections among Peruvian, Bolivian, and Ecuadorian history.”³² Embedded in the new language of cultural identity, the term undeniably widens the social imaginary of the country.

One consequence of this language—that the average Peruvian learns to recognize from school—is the image of a very ancient country of Andean roots that has served as the cradle of great civilizations.³³ For the intellectuals interested in the fate of the country, however, that language had less comforting connotations. It essentially functioned as

³¹ The theory of vertical control of ecological tiers was enunciated by John V. Murra in his influential book *Formaciones económicas y políticas del mundo andino* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1975). With regard to Andean mythic cycles, see the excellent anthology *Ideología mesiánica del mundo andino*, ed. Juan M. Ossio (Lima: Ignacio Prado Pastor, 1973), which contains articles by John Earls, Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere and R. Tom Zuidema, among others.

³² Alberto Flores Galindo, *In Search of an Inca: Identity and Utopia in the Andes*, trans. Carlos Aguirre, Charles F. Walker, and Willie Hiatt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

³³ It is pertinent to note, however, that Peru’s ancient past is no more than a hundred years old; neither the heroes of the war of independence nor those of the War of the Pacific would have known what to say faced with the ruins of Machu Picchu that, as is well known, were discovered in 1913 by the American explorer Hiram Bingham.

a model to be built. The kit, so to speak,³⁴ contained the following parts: Andean culture, the Inca past, the rural peasant population, internal colonialism, modernization, and immigrations from the countryside to the city. Beginning with the introduction of culture as a problem, it became clear that the challenge was to bring all these pieces into a coherent and viable image of Peru. But some of the pieces could not be incorporated and remained in the bottom of the box. The picture of Peru that emerged from this exercise, however, was shared by virtually everyone: Peru is a country undergoing modernization that is essentially split, where the traditional is not identified with a past common to all of its citizens, but rather with a native culture, a great civilization whose descendants knew colonial rule and its historical consequences.

The fragility inherent in any proposed solution that could cope with this diagnosis cannot be overstated. In the twenties, Mariátegui wrote that “the indigenous question stems from our economy. It is rooted in the regime of land ownership.”³⁵ Then he added: “The assumption that the Indian problem is an ethnic problem is nourished by the oldest repertoire of imperialist ideas.”³⁶ Speaking the language of class, Mariátegui was unable to pose the problem of the currency (or obsolescence) of Andean culture in the face of the penetration of Western modernity. In fact, the hostility of Marxism toward these romantic idealizations is well known. Regarding the German

³⁴ There is no reason to refrain from using the term if, as proposed by Pocock, intellectual history can be understood as “a history of language games and their outcomes.” Pocock, “Texts as Events,” 111.

³⁵ Mariátegui, *7 ensayos*, 20.

³⁶ Ibid., 23.

peasantry, Ernst Bloch asserted that: “The peasants nonetheless retain a crooked remnant, feel themselves to be co-represented rather by manorial states than by workers in the suspect city.”³⁷ But, contrary to what one might expect, his comment did not stem from the usual bourgeois prejudices with regard to the countryside. It was based, in actuality, on a very perceptive analysis of the German peasants’ civic traditions and conceptions of authority. No assumptions of primitivism imbued it, as the following comment evinces: “The peasant is admittedly excellent at calculating, has given up his traditional costumes, furniture, much ancient style, and by no means merely under compulsion.”³⁸ Bloch distrusted the peasants because he thought their way of life delayed the development of class consciousness, leaving the stage set for fascism. Maintaining such a position was less viable in a country like Peru, where the peasants not only belonged to another race, but were also the “vanquished” of the conquest. This connection between the Andean peasant and the Inca subject, which until Mariátegui was merely an intuition, could only be properly stated with the advent of the language of culture. Mariátegui could not have uttered a comment like the one Pablo Macera made in the late 1970s: “I think it’s important to ideologically revive the vanquished of the sixteenth century, but even more important is to rescue—and not just ideologically—the vanquished of the twentieth century. Especially since the two vanquished are one.”³⁹

³⁷ Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 101.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁹ Pablo Macera, *Trabajos de historia*, vol. I (Lima: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1977), lvi.

Wolf Lepenies notes that Lessing's theater led Germany to unification, not because it gave priority to poetry over politics, but because, in his era, unification was not yet conceived as a political alternative.⁴⁰ It is this use of literature—to build languages that suggest directions to be followed—that Arguedas put into practice in Peru. It is his first novel, *Yawar Fiesta* (1941), that introduces the language of Andean culture into the realm of literature, transferring it from anthropology. It is with this novel, and not earlier, that Andean culture emerges as a problem for Peruvian literature.

Arguedas's literary itinerary consists of two stages. The first one is characterized by a "dense" conception of culture. In it, the membership of the individual to the community is understood less as the product of a contingency than as an ontological condition. The full expression of culture is a shared sensibility. This approach made a clear break with the Incaísmo of Valdelomar and Aguirre Morales, who expressed modernism's desire for exoticism, and the Indigenism of Matto de Turner and López Albújar, who conceived of the Indian problem as a matter of race and class.⁴¹ Arguedas offered a then-unknown view of the Andes, not primarily because his work was based on direct knowledge of the Quechua culture, but rather because he was able to construct a poetic for that culture. He refined a vocabulary to talk about Andean culture—one replete with violent avalanches and underground rivers that fall from the peaks to regenerate the lowlands.

⁴⁰ Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 15.

⁴¹ See Carlos Arroyo, *El incaísmo peruano. El caso de Augusto Aguirre Morales* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1995).

But he did something else as well: he hermetically sealed the space of Andean culture by means of sensibility.

Since the Romantics, the concept of sensibility has played a key role for the critics of modern individualism. Understood as a faculty prior to any rationalization, sensibility is the realm of what has been known forever. The sensible is the space of reflexes, not of reflection. It triggers immediate responses, evokes ancient experiences, and allows members of a community to recognize themselves and their companions in the flow of a shared experience that requires neither explanation nor explicit justification. The sensibility of the Romantics is, above all, a way of feeling, a skill acquired in collective life.

Arguedas agreed with this understanding. The enchantment of music and the sacred, the impossible etymology of Quechua voices, the delicate vibration of the *zumbayllu* in the hands of the child Ernesto in *Deep Rivers* (1958)—all these elements converge in his early work to make of culture an instinct. Herein lies the importance of music for Arguedas. In keeping with the Romantic mood, he realized that music is “[...] abstract, detached from life, a form of direct expression, non-mimetic, non-imitative, and at the furthest possible remove from any kind of objective description of anything.”⁴² But, in Arguedas’s hands, these resources take on a particular contour. With the advent of the language of culture, the question of the currency of Andean culture was put on the table, along with the debate between modernity and tradition. For obvious reasons, the Romantics did not ask this question. Colonialism, like the question of cultural difference,

⁴² Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, 130.

simply did not belong to the ambit of their reflections. Even in Peru, as I noted earlier, the cultural dimension of social conflicts was not fully recognized until the rise of anthropological studies in the 1960s, when the realization began to spread—at least among leftwing intellectuals—that it was necessary to recover the “vision of the vanquished.” Let’s recall, moreover, that the discourse on cultural identity, the politics of difference, and collective rights, which have become the sign of our time, only appeared on the global agenda thirty years ago.⁴³

Arguedas’s cultural turn breaks the classic molds of Indigenism. The struggle for land between landowners and peasants moves to the background. This new approach contrasts with that of a Ciro Alegría, who, when crafting his characters, did not consider relevant the fact that they dwelled in the mountains and share the same lifestyle. Conversely, the importance that Arguedas assigns to Andean culture as a matter of dispute, and as a primary source of conflict, creates unexpected alliances between classes and races, reorganizing the spectrum of Peruvian society around the polarity of the modern and the Andean. Hence his insinuation—paradoxically conservative—that, in order to protect Andean culture from Western modernization, the feudal regime of servitude of the highland hacienda must be

⁴³ As is well known, in the agenda of contemporary social movements, the recognition of various forms of otherness (especially the historically neglected) leads the list of objectives that was once headed by the elimination of economic inequality. The shift from Marx to Freud, as Richard Rorty astutely observes, has replaced the problem of selfishness with that of sadism. See Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 76. Anthony Giddens uses the term “life politics” to encompass these new political demands, whose focus of attention—reproduction, sexuality, culture and self—traditionally belonged to the private sphere. See chapter 7 in Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991), 209-231.

maintained. His novel *All Bloods* (1964) is arguably the culmination of this caste traditionalism. The novel's character Don Bruno Aragón Peralta, who carries with him an anachronistic colonial pistol and an insatiable craving for redemption, is the landlord faithful to the tradition who, allied with his Indian foreman, wants to put a stop to the interference of the modern world.⁴⁴ It is no surprise, then, that some readers, like the French sociologist Henri Favre, have seen in this new arrangement a step backward from the previous scenario: "while Clorinda Matto de Turner, in the name of progress, challenges the social archaisms of the highlands, Arguedas condemns coastal modernity because of its destructive effects on the poly-ethnic communities of the Peru's interior. This cultural conservatism is even more pronounced in his last two novels, in which the author simultaneously manifests a rejection and a misunderstanding of the changes that occur in society as a whole."⁴⁵

The other event, essentially new, that defined twentieth-century Peru was internal immigration. Peru's indigenous population traditionally subsisted via agricultural activities in rural areas, whereas the cities were the realm of the educated white minority. Ethnic difference was clearly correlated with this division of space. Around the 1920s, a process of modernization was unleashed in Peru. The promise of material prosperity that it offered pushed the rural

⁴⁴ All highland landowners were proficient in Quechua. In fact, the most eminent exponents of Quechua poetry of the last century were landowners like Andres Alencastre and Miguel Ángel Hurtado. The latter composed "Valicha," the most emblematic of all Peruvians huaynos.

⁴⁵ Henri Favre, *El movimiento indigenista en América Latina* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos / Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, 2007), 80.

population to undertake the long journey to the coastal cities. Migration from the countryside to the city, the peak of which was reached in the 1960s, thoroughly disrupted the country's physiognomy, leading to what would come to be known as a "popular overflow."⁴⁶ The highland immigrants penetrated and profoundly transformed the urban landscape. Lima, the capital city, was home to less than one million inhabitants circa 1950; it now has eight million, one-third of the country's population.

What is significant is that these two processes—the discovery of the Andean and the internal migrations—developed separately, creating parallel strands of artistic development and academic reflection. Interest in the Andean universe called for an emphasis on cultural continuity, thus demonstrating the validity of the bonds between the current inhabitants of the highlands and their pre-Hispanic ancestors. In contrast, migratory flows required society to think about the experience of sociocultural change. The distinctions between these simultaneous currents were likewise reflected in the realm of academia. While Andean anthropology stressed cultural difference as both the essential stakes of and motivation for social conflict, sociology suggested otherwise, demonstrating, from the perspective of the shantytown, that economic inequality was the source of collective unrest. What had emerged, in short, was an epistemological division whose extremes corresponded to the notions of permanence and change, structure and agency, culture and class, old and new. The ramifications of this split, rather than remaining in

⁴⁶ José Matos Mar, *Desborde popular y crisis del Estado. El nuevo rostro del Perú en la década de 1980* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1984).

realm of academic speculation, became central to any practical policy proposal put forth, as each of these distinct modalities underpinned radically different conceptions of social justice.

A testimony to the incompatibility of these perspectives is the collapse of culturalism in Arguedas's last novel. This breakdown occurs in the final period of the writer's life, as he is confronted by the process of immigration. It is here, in the Chimbote of *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* (1971), where he forges a poetic of the stranger that records the emergence of new forms of interaction and individuality. The element that activates the narrative is precisely the confluence of characters originating from different parts of the country and even from abroad. The previously hermetic space of sensibility is now opened up to grant access to the stranger. Maxwell, the Peace Corps volunteer working in Chimbote, can play, with ease and skill, Andean instruments that had once been reserved only for Indians. Fashion and eccentricity have a place as typically urban phenomena. Arguedas was able to see, or at least intuit, how his culturalism had finally become unsustainable in a land of strangers. At this stage of his itinerary, Arguedas's reflections on culture are oriented toward the experience of the new and, while recording the gradual erosion of the old structures of the pre-industrial agrarian societies, they simultaneously discern the possibilities of individualization in modern life. But the underlying problem remained. One could either maintain the strength of the Andean matrix or suppress it in favor of the new forms of interaction. Arguedas is unable to unite these two elements in a harmonious way. His new exploration,

which remains as inconclusive as the novel, seems to confirm that the task of coherently arranging all the pieces of the “kit” was not ultimately possible.

1.4 To Have Your Cake and Eat It Too

As has been implied in the preceding sections, a central task for twentieth-century Peruvian intellectuals was to address the dilemma of the “Indian problem.” In the previous century, historians like Sebastián Lorente had popularized the idea that the Indian peasant had been so morally degraded by the conquest that very little remained to connect him to the Inca past.⁴⁷ Although twentieth-century thinkers strove to restore that missing link by means of the notion of the Andean, in doing so, Indians were inadvertently turned, as Alberto Flores Galindo claims, into “people on the margins of history, static, inward looking, necessarily sheltered from modernity, immobile and passive, singular and abstract.”⁴⁸ Insofar as the Andean present was identified with the Inca past, the image of the contemporary peasantry was plunged into quietism. The effort to reaffirm the cultural ties of the Indian with his historical past ultimately led to an imaginary exclusion of the real Indian.⁴⁹ Arguedas

⁴⁷ See Gonzalo Portocarrero and Patricia Oliart, *El Perú desde la escuela* (Lima: Instituto de Apoyo Agrario, 1989).

⁴⁸ Flores Galindo, *In Search of an Inca*, 1.

⁴⁹ On this paradoxical result, see Cecilia Méndez, “República sin indios: la comunidad imaginada del Perú,” in *Tradición y modernidad en los Andes* (Cusco: Centro Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1992), 15-41; and, above all else, *Incas sí, indios no: Apuntes para el estudio del nacionalismo criollo en el Perú*, Documentos de Trabajo No. 56 (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1996). Néstor García Canclini analyzes a related case with regard to the Aztec past and the Mexican Museo Nacional de Antropología, in *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad* (Mexico City: Grijalbo/Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1990), chap. 4.

himself was unsure of what to do with this equation. While struggling to build a culturalist aesthetic, he lamented that some wanted the Indian “kept ‘pure’ as a consequence of poverty, isolation and servitude. They are shocked when someone says that loving the indigenous or Indian people should lead to policies oriented toward the transformation of their current status and to their becoming a producing agent, in the economy and the arts, on an equal footing with the modern man, in possession of all the instruments created by human genius.”⁵⁰ As a result (and rightly so), a Peruvian historian came to ask: “Is Tahuantinsuyo and the Inca heritage a cursed legacy, a straitjacket we should get rid of, or a blessing that brings us close to paradise?”⁵¹

This, in a way, is the problem that Arguedas bequeathed to the community of writers. How could it be resolved? With the publication of *The Storyteller* (1987), Mario Vargas Llosa fully enters into the discussion regarding the influence of past on the present, as part of a complex reflection on the prospects for modernity in Peru. This novel is rich in references and layers, but the first thing that catches the reader’s attention is its setting. Although Peru is a country in which the Indian problem has been historically located in the mountains, Vargas Llosa chooses to locate his novel in the jungle. The story revolves around a small nomadic tribe of the Peruvian Amazon and the enigmatic figure of a “storyteller” (an *hablador*, literally a “talker”) in

⁵⁰ José María Arguedas, “El libro ‘Canto de amor’ y el fanatismo indigenista,” *El Comercio, Suplemento Dominical*, June 17, 1956, p. 3, quoted in Alberto Flores Galindo, “Arguedas y la utopía andina,” in *Dos ensayos sobre José María Arguedas* (Lima: SUR Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 1992), 8, note 12.

⁵¹ José Luis Rénique, “Flores Galindo y Vargas Llosa: un debate ficticio sobre utopías reales” [1997], http://www.andes.missouri.edu/andes/Historia/JLR_Utopias.html.

whose wandering activity the identity of the group is based. That Vargas Llosa chooses an Amazonian tribe as the subject of his story seems to suggest that the purpose of the novel is to push the boundaries of the opposition between the civilized and the primitive, between the modern and the traditional. It appears as if the tribe acts as an emblem for all the traditional ways of life. Effective because of its exoticism, the tribe functions metonymically, providing a didactic contrast between the defects of tradition and the benefits of modernity. But to the contrary, it seems to me that the novel is far from positioning the Indian as an abstraction transferable to any reality. The apparent silence of the novel with regard to the highlands is explained by the fact that the Andes are the overloaded imaginary space from which the writer intends to distance himself. In this sense, *The Storyteller* is a decisive episode in the creation of a contentious image of Peru in which the Andean is positioned in contrast to the Amazonian. It is in the Amazon where Vargas Llosa's modernity lies. The tension of the novel lies precisely in its approach to the archaic as *arché*, origin, in an act of re-foundation, which bears a particular relevance in a country marked by historical fatalism. The writer tries to free himself from the ambit of Arguedas's predicaments, moving into a less problematic space, and finds in tribal life a paradigm of moral philosophy. The nomadic ethnic group at the center of the novel could be described as, paraphrasing Rousseau, having perhaps never existed and unlikely to ever exist. Nothing could be further from the literary stereotype of the noble savage, who only lives the undifferentiated, compact life of the community. Vargas Llosa's Machiguenga are,

rather, anarchic individualists; they are like the realization of that abstract model of society, pursued by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, in which power finds natural limits that reduce it to its minimum expression. In that space, defined by sensibility, in which Arguedas encloses the inhabitants of the Andes, Vargas Llosa sees an atavistic burden that stands in the way of the progress of modernity.

One of the strengths of the novel is precisely its approach to the possibility of sociocultural change. The protagonist of the novel is named Saul Zuratas, but everyone calls him “Mascarita”, a reference to the intense, red mole that obscures half of his face. Excited by his crucial contact with the tribe of the nomadic Machiguenga, the young man from Lima chooses to embrace a new life, becoming one of the repositories of the oral tradition of this itinerant community, one of the few guardians of their “tabûes, reflejos, apetitos y terrores ancestrales” [“taboos, reflections, desires, and ancestral fears”].⁵² On the surface, Mascarita erases his previous identity, breaks away from his peaceful life in Lima (divided between running a small family business and his study of anthropology), abandons his language and customs, and rejects the offer of a postgraduate scholarship in Bordeaux. In short, Mascarita chooses not to be “modern.” A closer reading shows us, however, that the novel’s proposal is more complex. Mascarita remains quite aware of his past. As a storyteller, he introduces variations in the Machiguenga repertoire of stories. It is through these stories that he amends the practice of sacrificing children born with physical deformities. Aware that this is the fate he would have faced had been

⁵² Mario Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1987), 234. Translated by Helen Lane as *The Storyteller* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 244.

born into the tribe, Mascarita uses his stigma to alter what, in his opinion, constitutes an unjust practice. A change occurs on both sides, but in each case a link with the past remains. Both Machiguengas and Mascarita face their pasts with new eyes.

In this way, Vargas Llosa fills a void noted by critic Mirko Lauer. The latter argues that, as a consequence of migration, a new urban populace emerges. It consists of the people from the provinces that have come from the mines and haciendas, possibly the children of miners and peasants who, years before, had excited the imagination of Indigenism. Of this experience of cultural adjustment, halfway between town and country, between departure and arrival, between Indigenist and urban narrative, there seems to be no literary record in Peru. For as much as migration is one of the most pervasive cultural experiences among the Peruvian population, literary texts, as Lauer claims, “have not shown interest in the internal movement of those changes, their causes, their features, their limits, their possibilities. Texts precede or follow them, but are not usually interested in the historical kitchen of their ruptures and developments.”⁵³ Such an absence, Lauer continues, “suggests a blockage in the national consciousness with regard to a phenomenon that has contributed, and will still contribute, so much to our present physiognomy, and evinces an exteriority of literature regarding the central areas of collective experience.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Mirko Lauer, *El sitio de la literatura. Escritores y política en el Perú del siglo veinte* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1989), 79.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

The Storyteller, while not exactly a novel about migration, does contain a reflection on change and the experience of learning. In thinking of tradition as a dense entity, the language of culture led to the overlooking of instances of learning or cultural change, which immediately arouses suspicions of cooptation. With regard to historians educated in the sixties and seventies, Juan Carlos Estenssoro notes that: "There were those who were truly concerned with studying the colonial situation, but could not avoid judging those Indians who managed to occupy a place in the new society or who received the influence of the West, accusing them of being acculturated, social climbers or, ultimately, of betraying their cause and selling out to the colonizer (which is, more than an anachronism, a deep and unjust misunderstanding). The only resistance that was implicitly valued was that of marginality or immobility."⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Juan Carlos Estenssoro, *Del paganismo a la santidad. La incorporación de los indios del Perú al catolicismo, 1532-1750*, trans. Gabriela Ramos (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú/Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2003), 20. This trend also exists among literary critics. Some assume that resistance is the only thing people can legitimately do when their allegedly peaceful relationship with their traditions and customs is altered. A representative example of this type of argument is contained in the following comment on the concept of transculturation: "The conditions of possibility of critical transculturation, to the very extent that they refer back to or ground themselves in the anthropological notion as their natural ground, are therefore aporetic, because the critical concept is only made possible by the invocation of a reason for transculturation that is itself beyond the reach of transculturation: transculturation is always already transculturated." Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 189. The purpose of the comment is to deny that transculturation (an instance of learning in which the oppressed appropriates the tools of the oppressor) is an effective response in the face of cultural domination, because the subaltern group's ability to maneuver would be essentially limited by the imposition of the hegemonic discourse. Insofar as transculturation emerges in a space distorted by coercion, it is itself evidence of domination. Let's note, however, that this objection presupposes the existence of ideal conditions of interaction (i.e. undistorted by power) that the author fails to identify. It is unlikely, moreover, that they can be identified in any social formation that currently exists. Edward Said himself recognized that: "No society known to human history has ever existed which has not been governed by power and authority, and...every society can be divided

Numerous efforts, in pursuit of the permanent, were oriented toward “build[ing] an exclusively indigenous history with a well-defined object against which the colonial reality was an exogenous and ephemeral element.”⁵⁶ Within this scheme, the only relationship that could be established with the forces of social transformation was one of resistance. Discourses then proliferated that, turning their backs on change, emphasized the calling of each person to persevere in his being. Modernity—a complex phenomenon if ever there was one—was reduced solely to the predatory action of advanced capitalism. Tradition, however, was granted an a priori positive value, which in turn prevented it from being treated as a genuine object of inquiry. The encounter between these two forces was necessarily a collision: “In order to account for these contrasts—which are blithely perceived as contradictions—people usually just see Tradition holding out against the ravages of Progress and the Contaminations of Civilization.”⁵⁷

It is possible that the language of anthropology contributed to this outcome, insofar as its conceptual frameworks were based on rigid conceptions of difference inherited from structuralism. Structuralism allowed cultures to be recognized as systems of signification, equipped with an internal logic, and created transcendental cultural schemes that distanced social research from some kind of naïve and ethnocentric functionalism. But these schemes, which allegedly conveyed essences, were accompanied by

into interlocking classes of rulers and ruled.” Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 168.

⁵⁶ Ibid., loc. cit.

⁵⁷ Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, trans. Deke Dusinberre (London: Routledge, 2002), 8.

some rather crude oppositions. Already Lévi-Strauss had argued that “between two cultures, between two living species as close as imaginable, there is always a differential gap and...this differential gap cannot be bridged.”⁵⁸ This dense conception of culture was also supplemented by assumptions of cultural and historical continuity, despite the fact that, as noted by Barrington Moore, “the assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation, obliterates the fact that both have to be recreated anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering.”⁵⁹ The emphasis on the codes of Andean culture made it so that the figure of the Indian only had relevance within the refuge of the community, obscuring the possibility of exceptions within popular culture itself.

That is also why a controversy emerged in Peru with regard to the encounter between tradition and modernity that, because of its emblematic nature, served as a sounding board for other regional discussions. The versions of social reality underlying the poles of the controversy became paradigms of the state of cultural traditions in Latin America and the countries on the periphery of the West. The debate can be summarized as follows: while Arguedas understands that indigenous cultures, besieged, then as now, by the advances of the modern western World, represent an essentially valuable heritage, Vargas Llosa sees them as merely an obstacle preventing the development and eventual prosperity of poor communities. Insisting on the preservation of cultural traditions, Vargas Llosa thinks, results

⁵⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *L'identité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1977), 322, quoted in Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind*, 4.

⁵⁹ Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the New World* (Boston: Beacon, 1966), 486.

in being enclosed in an “archaic utopia,” no less fanciful and unreal than the myths of the noble savage that populated the European imagination of the Enlightenment.⁶⁰ Refusing to recognize those traditions, Arguedas would say, means disregarding the wounds inflicted by the violence of Western civilization. It would mean forgetting, to recall the famous thesis of Walter Benjamin, that “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.”⁶¹

As I have said, the common ground of this controversy is a dense conception of culture, which, by definition, negates any possibility of change and precipitates the conflict between tradition and modernity in a way that is as artful as it is fatalistic. Vargas Llosa attempts to overcome this characterization, but his attempt is based on an individualistic conception that tends to render the past as dead weight.

Alasdair MacIntyre writes, “what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations.”⁶² More than immobile entities, suggests MacIntyre, traditions are spaces open to discussion. Rather than demanding the passive acceptance of its members, traditions leave room for criticism and disagreement. What he asks us to recognize is that, when traditions appear resistant to change, it is because their members have conceived of them thusly. In other words,

⁶⁰ See Mario Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica. José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996).

⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History” [1950], in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 256.

⁶² Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, vol. I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15.

the face of a tradition is the result of how it has been imagined and interpreted, as well as of the multiple versions of these images and interpretations. The density of a culture is not the work of an invisible hand, let alone of an ontological predisposition.

The capability of culture to be critical is what turn-of-the-century “brichero” literature highlights. “Brichero” is the name given to Cusco’s *gringa* hunter. These stories deal with characters—rogues, of sorts—that, shamelessly using the stereotypes of their ancestral culture, manage to seduce tourists. Luis Nieto Degregori, in his story “In Search of an Inca” (1994), recounts the story of a Spanish tourist named—quite significantly—Laura Cristóbal who travels to Cusco and succumbs to the charms of one of these characters.⁶³ The title of the story is a twist on the title of a celebrated historical text. In *In Search of an Inca: Identity and Utopia in the Andes* (1994), Alberto Flores Galindo argues that, over the course of five centuries, the element that constituted the identity of the Andean people was the messianic belief in the return of the Inca. The history of this belief begins in November 1532, when the Spanish capture Atahualpa, the last of the Inca rulers; its course is decided in April next year, when the monarch is garroted by his captors. This tragic episode, says the historian, was burnt into the Andean collective memory, triggering a mythification of the pre-conquest past, the echoes of which can still heard to date. The Indians were left with imagination and memory; the union of these modest resources matured into a set of mythical stories, including the so-called Inkarrí cycle, according to which “the Conquest figuratively

⁶³ Luis Nieto Degregori, “Buscando un Inca,” in *Señores destos reynos* (Lima: Peisa, 1994), 139-143.

chopped off the Inca's head and separated it from his body. When head and body are reunited, the period of disorder, confusion, and darkness that the Europeans initiated will end, and the Andean people, *runas*, will recover their history."⁶⁴ What is longed for is the memory of an order that colonial rule has embellished, rendering it just and benign: "A long pre-Columbian history was identified exclusively with the Inca empire, and a world with inequality and oppression was transformed into a homogeneous and just society. The Incas, converted from a dynasty into a singular, came to symbolize a time when society belonged to its previous and rightful owners."⁶⁵ This idealization of historical reality will find a place even among those who, according to Inca Garcilaso, submitted to the empire "más por el terror de sus armas que por el amor de su gobierno" ["more for the terror of its arms than for the love of its government"].⁶⁶ Nieto Degregori's character makes use of this idealization, but not because he actually believes it. In this story (and unlike in Flores Galindo's account), culture provides a supply of resources, not of identity.

Within a tradition that has tended to privilege historical fatalism, this shift is extremely significant. Whether the *bricheros'* is a legitimate use of culture is, of course, open to debate, but, just as in the case of *The Storyteller*, the important aspect of Nieto Degregori's story lies in its suggestive ethical reflections on the social significance of cultural traditions. Both works should be read as inquiries into the relevance and legitimacy of cultural change. These questions are

⁶⁴ Flores Galindo, *In Search of an Inca*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁶⁶ Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* [1609], vol. I, ed. Aurelio Miró Quesada (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1985), 210.

pertinent, as the perspectives opened by the rise of contemporary culture can be daunting. Hiding behind the banner of openness to difference, some governments elude their social responsibilities. For example: In Mexico, the health system breaks down and diseases that had been eradicated half a century ago come back. Under the auspices of the Mexican government, Indian healers (regrouped as indigenous doctors) work on equal terms with the association of practitioners of Western medicine. Moreover, as noted by Henri Favre, “some basic social needs, whose fulfillment has become impossible, may even be disqualified for not being in accordance with the norms of indigenous culture.”⁶⁷ Roger Bartra notes that, in many rural areas of southern Mexico, indigenous governments have been established, allegedly on the basis of the so-called “uses and customs.” In reality, however, these are no “more than traces of religious and political forms of the colonial era.”⁶⁸ Further away, in India, the ideologues of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu nationalist party, promoted the culturalist notion of ethnoscience in schools, but “their actions were motivated by a desire not so much to spread popular knowledge as to deploy a weapon in the eternal war against the Hindu nation’s ‘hereditary enemies’—the Muslims to the North and the Christians in the East.”⁶⁹

There is something potentially explosive in stressing the relationship between culture and identity. But it does not fall to us

⁶⁷ Favre, *El movimiento indigenista en América Latina*, 160.

⁶⁸ Roger Bartra, “La condición postmexicana,” in *Anatomía del mexicano* (Mexico: Planeta, 2002), 310.

⁶⁹ François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 296.

here to propose remedies. With respect to Peru, the language of culture demonstrated that the juxtapositions of race, class and culture chart a complex social cartography in which there are not precise conceptual boundaries between the peasant proletariat, the copper-skinned Indian and the Andean man. All these attributes converge in the same set of individuals. But what takes precedence? Is the Indian poor because he does not own the land he tills? Or is it because he speaks Quechua and chews coca leaves? If anything has been surprising in the story of this language, as we will see in the following chapters, it is the ease with which solutions turned against their proponents, whether they were trying to achieve adequate representation of the Indian or to envisage change in Peruvian society. The paths to be followed inevitably separated into the irreconcilable extremes of lifting the economically desperate population from poverty or restoring the dignity of historically humiliated identities. As Nieto Degregori's story suggests, perhaps we have gotten lost along the way in the labyrinth of our definitions. I noted at the beginning of this chapter that an excessive concern for the algebra of our languages sometimes leads us away from the reality we wish to understand. Something like that happened thirty years ago, when the slow, agonizing death of the notion of class was reaching its end. Less interested in understanding the new social dynamics that were appearing, many Marxist intellectuals turned to the task of constructing sophisticated theoretical dams. On the debates of that

time, Perry Anderson surmised: “All that can be said is that when the masses themselves speak, theoreticians will necessarily be silent.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (London: NLB/Verso, 1980), 106.

CHAPTER TWO:
THE ROUTES OF SENSIBILITY IN JOSÉ MARÍA ARGUEDAS

A common culture is not, at any level, an equal culture.

—Raymond Williams⁷¹

Many times critics make rash remarks. Alberto Escobar, who devoted years of his life to studying the work of José María Arguedas, once discovered that some colleagues believed (and published) that the sweet and evocative language of the Indian characters of Arguedas was a sociolinguistic variety of Andean Spanish. We can imagine the scholar's expression of surprise, because that "special Spanish language," as its creator called it, is strictly a literary invention. Nobody has ever spoken like that in the southern Andes of Peru. With his characteristic sobriety, Escobar then noted that an aesthetic choice like that of Arguedas "should not confuse us or lead us to the extreme of equating the artistic experience of a writer with the linguistic or sociolinguistic description of the oral language or languages of a society; nor should we equate the alternatives and obstacles that a writer confronts with viable or nonviable possibilities offered in society."⁷² But Escobar's comment (which should be read as a gentle reproach) does not really delve into the causes of this confusion. It is fitting, then, for us to follow up on this issue here, as we cannot help but ask: how is it that professional readers are

⁷¹ Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* [1958] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 317.

⁷² Alberto Escobar, *Arguedas o la utopía de la lengua* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1984), 67 (my translation). In what follows, all translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

unaware of the style of a prose writer as innovative as Arguedas, denying his pen any merit other than the ethnographic, drowning the originality of his voice in the anonymous echoes of the multitude? Also, is not the claim of offering a truthful account of a society's linguistic patterns using a work of fiction questionable? Would anyone dare to proclaim, upon reading Joyce, that *Dubliners* are a self-absorbed lot who think out loud all the time? Would we be willing to say, after seeing the famous painting of Picasso, that all guitarists of Spain are blue-skinned?

It is tempting to attribute this misjudgment to a covert form of condescension. After all, Arguedas always bore the onerous label of spokesman for the Andean world—an image to the spread of which, it should be noted, he himself contributed. There are other similar cases. Pascale Casanova has recently lamented that, at least in France, the complex work of Samuel Beckett was the target of a certain species of enthusiastic and devoted criticism, headed by Maurice Blanchot, that raised Beckett to the status of shaman of Being, but in doing so ultimately reduced him to “the passive, archaic function of inspired mediator, charged with ‘unveiling being’.”⁷³ A disservice was done to the Irish writer, Casanova argues, because the technical specificity of his project of literary abstraction was diluted in the murky waters of mysticism, blocking any possibility of an interpretation that was not resolved by way of metaphysics. Turning to another realm, that of the Argentine intellectual scene, authors like Norah Lange, Victoria Ocampo, and Alfonsina Storni had to grapple for decades with the

⁷³ Pascale Casanova, *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2006), 11.

dubious merit of writing spontaneously and without forethought. Almost no critic of that period—Beatriz Sarlo notes—recognized their technical mastery. The greatest compliment available to them was that their unawareness and lack of literary premeditation enthroned them as “vestal protectors of the fire of art,”⁷⁴ a label that, of course, would have been nothing less than offensive if attributed to a male writer. We should admit that something very similar has happened with Arguedas. His image as a genuine representative of the Andean community, reinforced by the pathos of his suicide, has placed him on a pedestal next to the one occupied Beckett. He may not be the messenger of Being, but he is that of the Quechua soul.

It seems to me, however, that the anecdote contains something more. It confirms the existence of a predisposition to read Arguedas as if his work were anything but literature. What motivates this inclination? I shall take this question as a starting point for a reflection on the contribution of Arguedas to the formation of a language of culture in Peru. In order to clarify the significance of this problem, I will divide my presentation into four parts. I will first refer to Arguedas’s invisibility as a problem of literary reception. In the second part, we will turn to the innovations that he introduced into the template of classic Indigenism with his first novel, *Yawar Fiesta* (1941). We will then see that, despite all appearances, Andean culture emerges as a literary problem in Peru with Arguedas, as he is the one that breaks away from the issues of race and class that had been the focus of classic Indigenism. He achieves this decisive turn by means of

⁷⁴ Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1988), 70.

a poetic of sensibility that makes of culture an autonomous space—a repository in which the identity of the group resides. For Arguedas, sensibility is primarily a collective faculty: to know how to feel is to be part of the life of the community. Sensibility creates and maintains a sense of collective belonging; it is the watchword of community. But this use of sensibility—which served him so well as a criterion by which to demarcate community identity—becomes unmanageable when Arguedas must confront the possibility of communication between individuals who have nothing in common. In the third part we will see precisely how this culturalism collapses in his posthumous novel about the migration, *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* (1971). I conclude this chapter with some critical remarks about the most visible repercussions of Arguedas's legacy.

2.1 *The Invisible Hand*

In order to explain the phenomenon of Arguedas's invisibility (i.e. the predisposition to read his work in non-fictional terms), it is necessary to consider the patterns of reception within the Peruvian literary milieu. In Peru, literature is not a practice that has been fully differentiated from the realm responsible for producing knowledge about social reality. For this reason, the public tends to bring to literature expectations of information that exceed the literary. In this section, we will first review the causes and implications of this bias in order to then show how Arguedas locates his project within this framework.

It should be noted first that the inclination to read fiction as a social document is a feature apparent in other Latin American countries as well. Carlos Altamirano has argued that Latin America contains a great literary tradition that, paradoxically, is not literary: that of subordinating literature to the art of politics.⁷⁵ For centuries, Latin American writers have participated vigorously in the political lives of their countries. They have held public office at a variety of levels and served as opinion leaders. Why have these functions fallen to writers? The sociology of culture can give us a clue as to the answer.

Pierre Bourdieu notes that social practices are not arranged at random, but occur within fields set by specific rules and protocols.⁷⁶ For example, the criteria that give cohesion to the field of politics differ substantially from those applied to fields such as trade, religion, or science. With respect to literature and the arts, these rules affect not only the production of cultural goods, but also their circulation and consumption, that is, the production of their value. A field is said to be autonomous when the rules of its operation are the subject solely of its own jurisdiction. For autonomy to exist, institutional support is necessary.⁷⁷ The division of labor and the insertion of writers into the

⁷⁵ Carlos Altamirano, *Para un programa de historia intelectual y otros ensayos* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno, 2005), 21.

⁷⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 29-73.

⁷⁷ Several authors have dealt with these processes of institutionalization. Jürgen Habermas analyzed the rise, and short life, of the public sphere in nineteenth-century Europe in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1991); Peter Bürger discusses the process of institutionalization of the aesthetic sphere during the same period in *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. M. Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Pierre Bourdieu does the same with respect to the consolidation of the literary field as an autonomous

market start the process of the institutionalization of literature in Europe during the nineteenth century. Gradually, institutions such as the state and the church cease to be the principal parties in the attribution of value and meaning to cultural property. Their authority, traditionally exercised through censorship or patronage, recedes as the century progresses. Of course, it is not the case that these institutions find their power diminished, but their participation in the artistic scene must now adhere to the terms set within a different institution, whose dynamic cannot be absorbed within the state or ecclesiastical norms. With this process set into motion, tolerance toward the interference of the state in artistic matters shrinks (actions are now taken against censorship) and the valuation of the work of a writer becomes a thing apart from his role in state policy (his performance as an officer or his exercise of any other professional activity is now deemed irrelevant for literary ends). Thanks to institutionalization, literature becomes a matter of increasingly exclusive concern to the circuit of writers, editors, critics, and readers—a social practice left to this group's own agreements and disputes. But autonomy is not limited to the conquest of legal rights. The crucial turn is that, *from within*, these agents succeed in consolidating an imaginary space for their practice. It is not, therefore, the empirical author that is at stake here, but rather the symbolic space of his activity—a space from which he can participate or intervene in other fields.

space in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

In the case of Latin America, the institutionalization of literature coincides with the fragmentation of the old republic of letters.⁷⁸ The writer in the tradition of Sarmiento and Bello—whose work blended literature and the art of government—gives way, as in Europe, to the writer who must make a living from his writing. But the writers do not stop participating in public life; rather, their interest in politics is now measured with the yardstick of literature. The fact that José Enrique Rodó, for example, involves himself in politics through his essays, and even through his seat in the Uruguayan Congress, does not make of him a *letrado* à la Sarmiento. His space of enunciation is autonomous because his warnings against *nordomanía* and Anglo-American utilitarianism are based on aesthetic principles, namely those of Modernismo.⁷⁹ Only insofar as they are now separate jurisdictions, can we begin to speak of interaction between literature and politics.

But was this separation solid enough? According to Mario Vargas Llosa, early-twentieth-century Latin American governments interfered with the progress of this process almost without trying. Compared with newspapers and universities—in whose affairs the

⁷⁸ Julio Ramos, *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina. Literatura y política en el siglo XIX* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989), 70.

⁷⁹ Ibid., loc. cit. As the subject is surrounded by some controversy, some clarifications are in order. It is wrong to assume that the concept of the autonomy of the literary field takes as a paradigm the aesthetics of “pure art” to which it implicitly attributes normative force. The reference to a lack or loss of autonomy does not suggest—in a prescriptive way—that a field has deviated from the ideal of aestheticism to become “politicized.” Aestheticism itself, as shown in the case of Rodó, has political content. What the concept of autonomy emphasizes is the existence of separate discursive spaces configured historically. Bourdieu puts it as follows: “To analyse the different fields...in the different configurations in which they may appear according to the era and to national traditions, treating each of them as a *particular* case in the true sense, that is, as a case which figures among other possible configurations, is to give the comparative method its full effectiveness.” Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, 183 (emphasis in original).

government often intervened—essays, poems, and novels typically caused little alarm among the agents of state censorship.

Underestimated by the bureaucracy, literary activity became an escape valve. Latin American writers found in their occupation an ideal space for the practice of criticism and social denunciation. And the public endowed literature with an authority that ended up eroding the principles that, in theory, supported its autonomy. But that privilege, continues Vargas Llosa, was ultimately quite costly. It made literature appear:

como una actividad bien intencionada y positiva, que describe las lacras de la realidad y prescribe los remedios, desbarata las mentiras oficiales y hace resplandecer la verdad. Ella tiene también una función prospectiva: reclama y pronostica el cambio social (la revolución), la nueva sociedad liberada de los demonios que delata y exorciza con palabras. La fantasía y el verbo están al servicio de un ideal cívico y los hechos de la literatura se hallan subordinados a la realidad objetiva como los libros de historia (o incluso más que ellos).

as a well-intentioned and positive activity, that describes the evils of reality and prescribe remedies, disrupts the official lies and allows the truth to shine. It also has a prospective function: it demands and predicts social change (revolution), the new society freed from the demons that it uncovers and exorcises with words. Fantasy and word are in the service of a civic ideal and the facts of literature are subordinated to objective reality just as with history books (or even more so).⁸⁰

This is the climate in which Indigenism finds a warm reception. In countries like Mexico, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru, the social function of literature is subordinated to the public's demands for information, either because the government frustrates the expectations of

⁸⁰ Mario Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica: José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 21.

objectivity placed upon the press and academia, or because there are certain issues that these institutions neglect.⁸¹ Public concerns are then transferred to the literary field and eventually come to monopolize its space of enunciation.

Thus in Peru, the popularity of Indigenist narrators such as Clorinda Matto de Turner and Enrique López Albújar derives mainly from readers' curiosity about the reality they depict. Their stories provided information about the world of the mine and the hacienda; they were the "chronicle of distant Arcadias and injustices."⁸² Arguedas continues this tradition, but he thinks of it in critical terms because he perceives in its style an urban perspective that distorts peasant reality. It is ironic that this distortion, this lack of realism, was caused in fact by a fidelity to the standards of literary realism. The Indigenists's Indians speak the Spanish that Indians speak in reality. But Arguedas thought it was "falso y horrendo presentar a los indios hablando en el castellano de los sirvientes quechuas aclimatados en la capital" ["false and hideous to present Indians speaking the Spanish of the Quechua servants acclimated to the capital"]⁸³ simply because Indians spoke Quechua. Thus Arguedas's search for form represented

⁸¹ According to Luis Enrique Tord, "el escaso interés que hubo por los indígenas hasta finales del siglo diecinueve encuentra su cabal expresión en el libro de Francisco García Calderón, *Le Pérou contemporain*. Editado en París en 1907 contribuyó, como afirma Jorge Basadre, a dar una idea optimista del futuro a la generación de peruanos de la postguerra. Allí observamos que de las 333 páginas de la obra, sólo tres contienen menciones al indio. Y las más de ellas negativas. Así, el autor los define como 'pueblo de niños envejecidos' que requiere protección." Luis Enrique Tord, *El indio en los ensayistas peruanos, 1848-1948* (Lima: Editoriales Unidas, 1978), 42.

⁸² Mirko Lauer, *El sitio de la literatura. Escritores y política en el Perú del siglo veinte* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1989), 78.

⁸³ José María Arguedas, "La novela y el problema de la expresión literaria en el Perú" [1950], in *Un mundo de monstruos y de fuego*, ed. Abelardo Oquendo (Lima: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1993), 215.

for him a problem of verisimilitude. Needless to say, the norms of Spanish current among the Quechua-speaking population were subject to prejudice by native speakers of Spanish from the coast. Thus the realism of a genuine Andean novel could not reproduce the socio-linguistic variations existing in the Andes. Those variants were discriminated against on the coast and, in a curious ideological turn, acted as cause to justify the disdain of the native within the white Creole imagination. Therein resided the limitations of Indigenist realism because, even when it entered into the realm of social critique, it ended up inciting the very discrimination that it aimed to combat. Faced with these difficulties, Arguedas's solution was to replace this "clumsy" Andean Spanish with a literary language that, overcoming the barrier of prejudice, provided a credible account of life in the Andes. "¡Pero los indios [Arguedas warns] no hablan en ese castellano ni con los de lengua española, ni mucho menos entre ellos! Es una ficción. Los indios hablan en quechua." ["But Indians do not speak in Spanish with Spanish speakers, let alone among themselves! It is fiction. Indians speak Quechua."]⁸⁴ The Spanish of his works is forged as a literary, fictitious language, in which, as one of his editors rightly pointed out, "the language of the ancient Peruvians has impressed a special syntactic sweetness."⁸⁵

But couldn't the Andean novel have been written in Quechua? It seems that Arguedas considered this possibility seriously for quite a

⁸⁴ Ibid., loc. cit.

⁸⁵ Luis Jaime Cisneros, "Prólogo," in José María Arguedas, *Yawar fiesta* (Lima: Juan Mejía Baca, 1958), 7.

long time.⁸⁶ The eminently oral nature of Quechua made it difficult, however, to use as an effective vehicle by which to engage in a literary project within the established scene. Who was going to read these texts? The coastal reader only reads in Spanish, and the Quechua-speaking peasant, if literate, does so in Spanish as well, as Quechua is not a standardized written language. Writing—as perceived by the Andean people—belongs to the restricted area of Spanish and white Creole culture. As if this were not enough, the very idea of using Quechua to seek recognition for Andean culture in official circles did not appear to be a viable alternative because of its lack of prestige as a literary language. The conditions of reception in the literary milieu persuaded Arguedas to write in Spanish. Oddly enough, “[the] desire for authenticity had to express itself in an alien language.”⁸⁷ But it was necessary for Arguedas to first find “los sutiles desordenamientos que har[ía]n del castellano el molde justo, el instrumento adecuado” [“the subtle disarrangements that would make of Spanish the proper mold, the appropriate instrument”].⁸⁸

This *sui generis* variant of realism made possible an unprecedented innovation in the Peruvian literary tradition, as it allowed names and attributes such as “Indian” and “indigenous” to be gradually replaced by the notion of “Andean.” The penetration of this category into the social imaginary has been so profound that it is now

⁸⁶ John Murra says that Arguedas stood firm with regard to his intention to write his work in Quechua until being dissuaded by the Mexican Indigenist Moisés Sáenz. See John V. Murra and Mercedes López-Baralt, eds., *Las cartas de Arguedas* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1996), 292-293.

⁸⁷ Roberto Schwarz, *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*, ed. John Gledson (London: Verso, 1992), 27.

⁸⁸ Arguedas, “La novela y el problema de la expresión literaria en el Perú,” 214.

difficult to imagine that, just four decades ago, references to Andean culture were unusual in non-specialized environments. The polemics of Indigenism in the 1920s did not include this term. José Carlos Mariategui himself writes about the “Indian problem” or “Indigenous problem” in his *Seven Essays on Peruvian Social Reality* of 1928. The idea of an Andean worldview would take several years to develop, and did so primarily as an anthropological category. In fact, it was the influence of American anthropology that, from the 1950s on, led to the discovery of the category of “Andean man” and to the gradual rethinking of historical research in Peru, whose virtually exclusive object of study had, for many years, been the coast.⁸⁹

It is therefore important to note that Arguedas helps to make Andean culture visible through his literary activity. His experimentalism uncovers the cultural side of social conflict in Peru. This piece of information allows us to complete our explanation of the writer’s invisibility. It has been noted that in certain circumstances, the literary attributes of a literature fade or recede into the background under the pressure of extraliterary factors. Prominent among these elements are ethnic conflict, cultural confrontation, or the fragility of a nation state. The constant in all these situations is the transfer of social and political tension to the literary field.⁹⁰ The shift

⁸⁹ “Until the late 1960s and early 1970s few scholars were involved in work that would attempt to integrate an analysis of the highlands to the political history of the coast. Instead, the coast seemed to belong to historians, while the sierra (with the partial exception of Cuzco) was inhabited by anthropologists and political scientists.” Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 324-325.

⁹⁰ Pascale Casanova maintains that, “The link with national struggle produces a dependence upon the new national public, and so an almost total absence of autonomy.” Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trad. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 191. Gilles Deleuze and Félix

occurs because the perception that literature offers the resources necessary to legitimize a cause (nationalism, the political emancipation of a colony, the legal vindication of a sector of the population) becomes more pronounced. Historical examples abound. Thought of as the most refined and authentic expressions of a language, literary texts played a leading role in the process of the standardization of European languages during the nineteenth century. But, in addition to serving to develop a standard language, the recourse to literature allowed some societies to accumulate prestige or symbolic capital. Even-Zohar and Shmeruk note that “the new (or renewed) literatures which started using these languages played a major role not only as a vehicle for elaborating linguistic standards, but also in propagating and winning

Guattari explain this phenomenon through the concept of “minor literature,” that is, a literature “which a minority constructs within a major language.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan; foreword by Réda Bensmaïa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16. According to these authors, the relative marginality of an emerging literary tradition is objectively expressed in the absence of conditions that facilitate its reception: indifference from the public, low prestige of the language used by its practitioners, unfamiliar names. Being so little what the audience takes for granted, and so scarce its literary capital, the writer of a marginal literature has to make a double effort to be understood. In the absence of criteria for judging individual strengths and weaknesses, “what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren’t in agreement.” (17) Robust literatures, on the other hand, have a paved path to the reader insofar as he already has the necessary resources to approach each text and recognize its individuality. Neither the work’s context nor its referents are unknown or exotic to him. The silhouette of the writer stands out easily from her surroundings. History and society can then act as background information, without monopolizing the reader’s attention. In Europe and the United States, the patterns of reception of local literature bring out exactly these optimal conditions for a writer’s career. Here the texts are freed from the burden of extra-literary factors. Readers and critics can turn to literature to reflect on eminently individual matters, overlooking any sociological or political consideration. In these privileged spaces, Fredric Jameson notes, “a radical split [occurs] between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power.” Fredric Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” in *The Jameson Reader*, ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000), 320.

acceptance for these languages in the first place.”⁹¹ That prestige was used to secure the hegemony of the European nation states during their phase of expansion and, on the flipside of the same coin, was sought by cultural minorities aspiring to political sovereignty. Even today, as Hobsbawm observes, the task is particularly difficult “in languages which have not been the major carriers of culture, but wish to become suitable vehicles for, say, higher education and modern techno-economic communication.”⁹²

In all of the cases described above, the exceptional authority conferred to literature eventually diminishes its autonomy. This phenomenon is manifested in the tendency to establish, or presuppose, a sort of direct correspondence between text and reality. From what has been seen until now, invisibility is, in some measure, the evidence of the success of Arguedas’s endeavor. His image of the Andean universe turned out to be so persuasive that, at least in the white Creole imagination, it managed to impose itself on a largely unknown reality and produced a vocabulary that suggested ways to access the world he loved that in fact did not exist. In the next section, we will examine what resources Arguedas used to shape that universe.

2.2 Sense and Sensibility

Since the time of the Romantics, the concept of sensibility has played a key role among the critics of modern individualism. In fact, if understood as a faculty prior to any rationalization, then sensibility is

⁹¹ Itamar Even-Zohar y Khone Shmeruk, “Authentic Language and Authentic Reported Speech: Hebrew vs. Yiddish,” *Poetics Today* 11, no. 1 (1990): 156.

⁹² E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56.

home to that which has been known forever. The sensible is the field of reflexes, not of reflection; it results in immediate responses, evokes old experiences, and allows the members of a community to recognize themselves and their own in the flow of shared experience that both is self-explanatory and requires no explicit justification. Thus understood, sensibility is fundamentally a way of feeling, a skill acquired within the community. Driven by this conviction, Walter Benjamin argued in the early twentieth century that the deterioration of sensibility was the most severe of the adverse effects of modernity. In order to stop it, Benjamin claimed, we had to somehow recover the patterns of transmission of experience in traditional societies—modes of interaction that the wind of progress had left in ruins in its wake. Hence the familiar image of the Angel of History who, thrown violently towards the future, can only see the ruins of the past as they gradually fade in the distance.⁹³ For Benjamin, sensory experience was not an individual matter, but rather collective knowledge and intersubjective experience: “Everyone knew precisely what experience was: older people had always passed it on to younger ones.”⁹⁴ It was for this

⁹³ “A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.” Walter Benjamin, “Thesis on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 257-258.

⁹⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty” [1933], in *Selected Writings, Vol. 2: 1927-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 731.

reason that he saw in the loneliness of modern man, lost in the anonymity of the city, concrete proof of the impoverishment of the experience of the world.

Is it possible to do something with the concept of sensibility in a country where the traditional not only is identified with the past, but also with a different culture, and where that culture, moreover, has experienced colonial oppression and its historical consequences? For obvious reasons, Benjamin did not address this question. The phenomenon of colonialism simply did not belong to the realm of his reflection, nor did the issue of cultural difference, which he likewise never tackled. In fact, the cultural dimension of social conflicts would not be recognized in Peru until the rise of anthropological studies in the 1960s, when the realization spread—at least among leftwing intellectuals—that it was necessary to think Peruvian society by means of the “vision of the vanquished.”⁹⁵ At a time when the only references to “the Andean” existed in the specialized realm of anthropology, Arguedas committed himself to the task of representing Andean culture as a singular entity, different from the generically “Indian” or “indigenous.” In this way Arguedas made a significant contribution to the renewal of the literary milieu in Peru because, as we have said, culture was a subject foreign to classical Indigenism.

Arguedas offered a vision of the Andes that was based on his direct knowledge of their culture and language.⁹⁶ It is important to

⁹⁵ We should likewise recall that the recourse with regard to cultural identity, the politics of difference and collective rights—that have become the sign of our times—appeared on the global agenda only thirty short years ago.

⁹⁶ See Carlos Arroyo, *El incaísmo peruano. El caso de Augusto Aguirre Morales* (Lima: Mosca Azul Editores, 1995).

recall that, in spite of his white skin, Arguedas was raised among the Indians with whom his stepmother sent him to sleep in the kitchen (“I was the product of my stepmother,” he would say.) He spent his days between two worlds. But his life was also closely related to the political and economic changes that shook Peruvian society beginning in the 1920s. As a result of the process of modernization, which had begun to take off during those years, he felt that the threat of imminent collapse loomed over the world of his childhood. The construction of major highways, the penetration of foreign capital, and the economic integration of a country that had historically been cut off from the rest of the world, exposed the small highland communities to change—places whose traditions and customs had, until that point, been largely protected by their geographic isolation.

Arguedas wanted to keep this world intact. With this objective in mind, he needed to achieve three objectives, which can be reconstructed as follows: First, to define a conceptual space for Andean culture that lay outside the categories of race and class. Second, to turn culture into a source of identity. Third, to construct a critique of the modern world.

Yawar Fiesta (1941), his first novel, gave him occasion to launch this project. The story is set in Puquio, the setting of his childhood. Every July 28th, the villagers celebrate the national holiday in Peru with a *turupukllay*, a native adaptation of the Spanish bullfight in which several Indians, armed with sticks of dynamite, fight the beast. This festival, the complete name of which is *Yawar Fiesta* (“Blood Fest”), attracts all the people of the region each year, but it seems that

this would be not so for long. A government circular prohibiting the bullfight scheduled for that year has arrived from Lima. This order triggers the conflict in the novel. The government wishes to eradicate the bullfight in part to protect the integrity of the Indians and in part to keep pace with the country's modernization. It is concerned with protecting the lives of the Indians, but also with "civilizing" them. Thus the prefect, in his capacity as representative of the government, gives the bad news to the most prominent residents of the village: "Pero yo creo que esta prohibición es en bien del país, porque da fin a una costumbre que era un salvajismo, según ustedes mismos me han informado, porque los toros ocasionan muertos y heridos" ["But I think this prohibition is for the good of the country, because it puts an end to a custom that was a savage survival, as you yourselves have informed me, because the bulls caused deaths and injuries"].⁹⁷ Don Julián Arangüena, the most powerful landowner in Puquio, demonstrates his surprise in strong language: "estos maricones están echando a perder el valor de la indiada; están aguando la sangre del pueblo" (126) ["these fairies are ruining the Indians' courage; they're watering down the people's blood" (98)]. Don Julián, who knows the Indians well, understands that they may get upset and fail to complete their tasks if they are not allowed to carry on with their celebration. But his outrage is not solely motivated by practical concerns, for he also admires the traditional values—manliness above all else—which the festivities bring out in the community.

⁹⁷ José María Arguedas, *Yawar Fiesta* (La Coruña: Ediciones del Viento, 2006), 55. Translated by Frances Horning Barracough as *Yawar Fiesta* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 36. From this point on, page references to this novel will appear parenthetically in the text.

This scene is complicated by the presence of a fourth group that, like the government, is based in Lima. Students from the Centro Unión Lucana—whose veins contain Indian blood but whose heads are full of modern ideas—resolve to support the government’s order and oppose the bullfight. They are young socialists, followers of Mariategui, who hope to someday eradicate the regime of servitude that prevails in the highlands: “¡Nunca más morirán indios en la plaza de Pichk’achuri para el placer de esos chanchos!” (97) [“Never again shall the Indians die in the Pichk’achuri square to give those pigs pleasure!” (72)]. Students want to “salvar a los indios de las supersticiones... [de] este miedo del indio por la tierra, por el cielo, hasta por las quebradas y los ríos” (151-2) [“save the Indians from superstition... [from] that awe the Indian has of the earth, of the sky, even of the valleys and the rivers” (120)]. Animism, they believe, keeps the Indians in the dark, ensuring that they readily submit to a regime of exploitation that the conquest began, the colonial era maintained and the republic was unable to eradicate. These young men feel they know what is best for their Indian brothers because they have “los ojos abiertos y la conciencia libre” (95) [“our eyes opened and our consciousness freed (70)”]. They can testify to this because they have personally witnessed the benefits of modernization. Escobar—a student who serves as the spokesman of the group throughout the novel—takes the road to Lima, built by the Indians in less than a month, as an example. Evoking his own experience, Escobar says that it was thanks to the road that he found “la forma de iluminar mi espíritu para servir la causa de ellos, de los ayllus, llegando a Lima, por el camino que ellos abrieron” (153) [“the

way to illumine my spirit to serve their cause, the *ayllus*' cause, by going to Lima on the road they built" (121)]. By means of his reference to the highway, Arguedas suggests that Indians are capable of constructing the path to their own redemption. Were it not for that road, the *lucaninos* could not have travelled to Lima to study and free their consciences. But, ironically, being saved means losing the ability to serve the *ayllus*.

In posing the issue in this way, Arguedas reveals a paradox: the students want to protect the Indians, but, in doing so, they run the risk of destroying an essential part of what it means to be indigenous. It is here that the great novelty of the novel lies. Indians do not fight against the material oppression; it is rather their identity as a group that they wish to protect at all costs. Insofar as the landlords are part of their world, the Indians do not perceive them as a threat. Escobar and his colleagues, in contrast, have a very different outlook, as they have been infected by modern ideas of the coast. It matters very little whether these ideas come from the highest levels of government or from trade unions and universities. In fact, the students, ironically, are put in charge of hiring a "real" Spanish bullfighter for the Independence Day celebration. Meanwhile, it is don Julián who provides the village with the bull for the festival. The animal itself appears as an ally of the Indians because he, like they, comes from the mountains. Thus, both the Indians and don Julián angrily refuse to let the animal die at the hands of a stranger: "Misitu es del monte. Nadie lo saca" (41). "Los comuneros están rabiosos por lo del torero. Dicen que sólo ellos tienen derecho a torear al Misitu. Que para eso lo han

traído" (165). ["Misitu's wild. Nobody can get him out of the woods." (23) "The *comuneros* are furious about the bullfighter. They say they're the only ones who have a right to fight Misitu; that's why they brought him down here" (131-2)]. In the denouement, when the Spanish bullfighter flees in terror after the first onslaught of Misitu, Indians bullfighters enter the arena and the audience erupts in shouts of joy. The novel literally closes in a hermetic space. Congregated in the ring of the plaza, the community turns its back on the highway and on the "cholos leídos" (149) ["lettered *cholos*" (118)] that challenge the traditional order.

As if this were not enough, Arguedas suggests that even the students shelter the latent instinct of their culture, however concealed it may be. In a memorable passage in the novel, the experience of the Andean suddenly emerges from the students' depths, standing between them and their progressive ideas. Meeting at the clubhouse, Escobar and his colleagues have just made the decision to hire the Spanish bullfighter. A photograph of Mariátegui, nailed to the front wall, presides over the meeting. As the meeting is winding down, there is a fleeting moment of intimacy between Escobar and photograph. All of a sudden, his diction changes and he starts to talk to the portrait with the deference that is reserved to landowners:

Cuando terminó la sesión, Escobar se levantó de su asiento y se dirigió junto al retrato de Mariátegui, empezó a hablarle, como si el cuadro fuera otro de los socios del "Centro Unión Lucanas".

—Te gustará werak'ocha lo que vamos a hacer. No has hablado por gusto, nosotros vamos a cumplir lo que has dicho. No tengas cuidado, tayta: nosotros no vamos a morir antes de haber visto la justicia que has pedido. Aquí está Rodríguez, comunero de Chacralla, aquí estamos los chalos Córdova,

Vargas, Martínez, Escobarcha; estamos en Lima; hemos venido a saber desde donde apoyan a los gamonales, a los terratenientes; hemos venido a medir su fuerza. Por el camino de los ayllus hemos llegado. ¡Si hubieras visto esa faena, tayta! Capaz hubieran sanado tus piernas y tu sangre. (98)

When the meeting was over, Escobar arose from his seat and, turning to Mariátegui's portrait, began to speak directly to him, as if the picture were one more member of the Lucanas Union Center.

"You'd like what we're going to do, *werak'ocha*. You haven't just spoken to us for the pleasure of it—we're going to put into practice what you have preached. Don't worry, *tayta*: we're not going to die before seeing the justice you have called for. Here's Rodríguez, a *comunero* from Chakralla; here we *cholos* are—Córdova, Vargas, Martínez, Escobarcha; we're in Lima; we've come to find out where the exploitative landowners' support comes from; we've come to test their strength. On the road the *ayllus* built we have come. If only you could have seen that community work project, *tayta*! Your legs and your blood might have gotten the better of you". (73)

Escobar leaves the reader perplexed. In a way, his monologue suggests that modernity will never manage to completely suppress the force of tradition. It is possible that, true to their most ingrained habits, the students are doing nothing more than replacing one authority figure with another. As if they never fully understood the message they preach, they continue to picture society according to the model of the hacienda. Another hypothesis, perhaps more interesting, is that Arguedas is questioning Marxism's ability to do justice to the claims that come from the field of culture. As we know, the notion of class excluded, from its very origins, forms of membership such as race, culture, and nation—a move that is quite understandable if one recalls that, already in the nineteenth century, socialism and

nationalism were competing political programs.⁹⁸ It is possible then, that the scenario proposed by Arguedas is transferring these questions to the socialism of his time.

In any case, Escobar's monologue makes two things clear with regard to the topic of culture: The first is that, for Arguedas, culture is a compact entity the elements of which cannot be isolated from the whole. The second is that identity is an inescapable backdrop that casts its shadow over the members of the community, for as much as they decide to distance themselves from it. Cultural identity is not the fruit of contingency; it is an ontological condition. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the bond that unites the members of the community in *Yawar Fiesta* is characterized as a necessary and immediate relationship by means of common essence—as an indissoluble bond of solidarity. Arguedas's characters can only be expected to identify with the good that is common to them and that, precisely because it is common to them in an ontological sense, at the same time constitutes their very identity.

It is impossible to overstate the novelty of the culturalist approach to the Andean world. Classic Indigenism did not recognize the existence of any special link uniting all Andean characters just because they lived in the highlands and shared, to some extent, the same lifestyle. Other considerations were more significant, such as race and class. To clarify this difference, it is useful to compare *Yawar*

⁹⁸ "The well-known international Marxist debates on the 'national question' are not merely about the appeal of nationalist slogans to workers who ought to listen only to the call of internationalism and class. They were also, and perhaps more immediately, about how to treat working-class parties which simultaneously supported nationalist and socialist demands." Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, 124.

Fiesta with an interesting story of Enrique López Albújar entitled “El hombre de la bandera” (1924) [“The Man of the Flag”]. It is the story of a “cholo leído” who, with the best of intentions and a flag in his hands, embarks upon the difficult task of indoctrinating a group of Indian villagers. The first pages of the story introduce us to a certain Aparicio Pomares, who returns to his home in the central highlands after having spent a season at the front during the war with Chile (1879-1883). The war is not over yet but, having being defeated in the decisive battles, the only option left for the Peruvians is to resist the occupation. Pomares wants the support of the Indians to organize the resistance in that region of the Andes. But he encounters a serious problem: that they do not know what Peru is. They are aware of what is happening in their communities (Obas, Pacha, Chavinillo, and Chupan) and obviously do not need to be told what a *misti* (white man or light skinned mestizo) is. But it is very difficult for them to understand that they are essentially related to the white masters or to those strangers, no less white, who live on the other side of the Andes. They do not conceive of themselves as part of that abstract entity called “Peru,” of which Pomares speaks with such passion. Nor do they understand the reason for the hostility between *mistis* from Peru and *mistis* from Chile, being that both sides are made up of *mistis*. To make them understand, and win them to his cause, the newcomer begins to narrate to the Indians the chronicle of the lootings, fires, and other atrocities with which the Chilean soldiers are punishing *their* Peruvians compatriots:

—¿Y por qué chilenos hacen esas cosas con *piruanos*? —interrogó el cabecilla de los Obas—. ¿No son los mismos *mistis*?

—No, esos son otros hombres. Son *mistis* de otras tierras, en las que no mandan los peruanos. Su tierra se llama Chile.

—¿Y por qué pelean con los *piruanos*? —volvió a interrogar el de Obas.

—Porque les ha entrado codicia por nuestras riquezas, porque saben que el Perú es muy rico y ellos muy pobres. Son unos piojos hambrientos.

El auditorio volvió a estallar en carcajadas. Ahora se explicaban por qué eran tan ladrones aquellos hombres: tenían hambre. Pero el de Obas, a quien la frase *nuestras riquezas* no le sonaba bien, pidió una explicación.

—¿Por qué has dicho, Pomares, *nuestras riquezas*? ¿Nuestras riquezas son, acaso, la de los *mistis*? ¿Y qué riquezas tenemos nosotros? Nosotros sólo tenemos carneros, vacas, terrenitos y papas y trigo para comer. ¿Valdrán todas estas cosas tanto para que esos hombres vengan de tan lejos a querénnoslas quitar?⁹⁹

“And why do Chileans do those things to *piruanos*?,” the leader of the Obas asked. “Are they not the same *mistis*?”

“No, those are other men. They are *mistis* from other lands, where the Peruvians do not rule. Their land is called Chile.”

“And why do they fight with the *piruanos*?” the one from Obas asked again.

“Because they are covetous of our wealth, because they know that Peru is very rich and they are very poor. They are hungry lice.”

The audience burst into laughter again. Now it was clear to them why those men were such thieves: they were hungry. But the one from Obas, to whom the phrase *our wealth* did not sound right, asked for an explanation.

“Why did you say, Pomares, *our wealth*? Are our riches perhaps those of the *mistis*? And what wealth do we have? We only have sheep, cattle, little pieces of land and potatoes and wheat to eat. Is that these things are so valuable that these men would come from so far to want to take them from us?”

⁹⁹ Enrique López Albújar, “El hombre de la bandera,” *Cuentos andinos* [1924], 3rd ed. (Lima: Juan Mejía Baca, 1970), 66.

Pomares's efforts are finally crowned with success. But what I want to emphasize here is not the conclusion of this satire on the expansion of the national ideology of the Creole elite in Peru. What is important, for the purpose of my comment, is that the contrast clearly outlines three aspects with regard to which Arguedas definitely breaks away from classic Indigenism. The first difference is that López Albújar's Indians interact among themselves on the basis of strictly traditional criteria such as geographic contiguity, and they organize their understanding of society in terms of race and class. That's why they find it inexplicable that, having both things in common, Peruvians and Chileans are fighting a war. Arguedas, however, reorganizes the entire social spectrum according to the polarity of the Creole modern and the Andean traditional, creating unexpected alliances between classes and races. The key lies in his treatment of culture as a source of identity. He ends up suggesting—in a paradoxically conservative fashion—that, in order to protect Andean culture from Western modernization, it is necessary to maintain the regime of servitude of the highland hacienda. The Don Bruno Aragon Peralta of *All Bloods* (1964), who carries with him his rusty colonial pistol as well as his purest hopes of redemption, is the culmination of this caste traditionalism. Allied with his Indian foreman, Demetrio Rendón Willka, Don Bruno confronts the modernizing initiatives of his brother Fermín in what appears to be a battle for the Indian soul. It comes as no surprise then that the sociologist Henri Favre perceives in the work of Arguedas a frank reversal of the contributions of his predecessors: “while Clorinda Matto de Turner, in the name of progress, challenges the social archaisms of

the highlands, Arguedas condemns coastal modernity for its destructive effects on the poly-ethnic communities of Peru's interior. This cultural conservatism is even more pronounced in his last two novels, in which the author simultaneously manifests a rejection and a misunderstanding of the changes taking place in society as a whole."¹⁰⁰

The second aspect that the comparison with Lopez Albújar suggests is the function of language as a vehicle for ideas. The Indians of "El hombre de la bandera" are able to use language to exchange opinions and viewpoints. They speak, and eventually change, their minds. Nothing remains of this capacity for dialogue in the poetics of Arguedas. Whenever members of the Andean culture meet foreign elements, song and dance take the place of conversation. Song and dance are indeed the resources that Arguedas typically chooses to resolve the crux of his arguments, leaving aside conventional naturalistic solutions. The Indians announce the advent of Yawar Fiesta with the deafening sound of their horns and a *danzante de tijeras* [scissor dancer] heads the procession to the bullring. In fact, it has been observed more than once that the main element of cohesion in the narrative of Arguedas is the ability to "know how to sing in Quechua."¹⁰¹ Isaiah Berlin notes that, for the Romantics, music is "a form of direct expression, non-mimetic, non-imitative, and at the

¹⁰⁰ Henri Favre, *El movimiento indigenista en América Latina* (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos / Centro de Estudios Mexicanos y Centroamericanos, 2007), 80.

¹⁰¹ See Ángel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1982); and Martin Lienhard, *Cultura popular andina y forma novelesca. Zorros y danzantes en la última novela de Arguedas* (Lima: Tarea / Latinoamericana Editores, 1981).

furthest possible remove from any kind of objective description of anything.”¹⁰² Arguedas, ultimately, share this belief. It is for this reason that the most persuasive aspect of his work is the description of rivers, trees, and birds, not of individuals. Noting the erratic behavior that often distinguishes Arguedas’s characters, an Argentine critic rightly pointed out that, “they are not represented, but rather arise from a stylistic impulse.”¹⁰³ But it’s not just that, without notice or apparent reason, the characters start to dance and sing *in Quechua*. Are they reaffirming themselves in their language while celebrating a victory over the authorities? Beyond this relatively explicit claim, what is important is that they sing and dance. The sensuality of the word has primacy over its communicative function.¹⁰⁴ No one can enter or leave the community because the sensibility that walls it in is not, as a matter of principle, communicable. Whoever aspires to enter will be an intruder; whoever wishes to leave, an outcast. This explains, following the thread of a suggestive comment by José Carlos Ballón, “the irritation that ‘escapees’ or ‘the acculturated’ (‘enlightened mestizos’) cause Arguedas, since—as the heretics and traitors to the religious

¹⁰² Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 130.

¹⁰³ Noé Jitrik, “Arguedas: reflexiones y aproximaciones,” *Revista Iberoamericana* 49 (Jan-Mar 1983): 92.

¹⁰⁴ Mario Vargas Llosa observes: “El lenguaje inventado de los indios de *Yawar fiesta*, de sintaxis desgarrada, intercalado de quechuismos, de palabras castellanas que la escritura fonética desfigura, no expresa a un individuo, siempre a una muchedumbre, la que, a la hora de comunicarse, lo hace con voz plural, como un coro.” Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica*, 133. On the importance of culture for the formation of community, see Estelle Tarica, *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). “In this view of Quechua, words and word sounds acquire a communicative life of their own, as if independent of the people who utter them; language constitutes community. Those who live ‘in’ this community, meanwhile, can experience apparently limitless communication with one another, for it is a place where words ‘name and explain,’ as he says.” (101)

communities—they destroy both the ceremonial harmony and sacred aura of these collective sensibilities.”¹⁰⁵ In making of Andean culture a unique way to experience the world, Arguedas creates a communitarian being that emerges as a moral and political substance.

My third and last point refers to the possibility of learning. We said that the patriot Pomares eventually persuades the inhabitants of his village to join the resistance against the Chilean invaders. Leaving aside the question of whether the villagers make a decision that is in their best interest, what I would like to stress is that the Indians of López Albújar’s story are able to incorporate a concept as foreign as that of nation into their mental schemes. It is again effective to pose a contrast with Arguedas, for whom learning is possible only within the narrow circle of family and community. “The Agony of Rasu Ñiti” (1962) provides a good example of this attitude. The story recounts the last day in the life of the scissor dancer Pedro Huancayre, known as “Rasu Ñiti.” Legendary for his exploits, the *dansak’* owes his fame to the spirit that inhabits him:

El genio de un *dansak’* depende de quién vive en él: el “espíritu” de una montaña (Wamani); de un precipicio cuyo silencio es transparente; de una cueva de la que salen toros de oro y “condenados” en andas de fuego. O la cascada de un río que se precipita de todo lo alto de la cordillera; o quizás sólo un pájaro, o un insecto volador que conoce el sentido de los abismos, árboles, hormigas y el secreto de lo nocturno; alguno de esos pájaros “malditos” o “extraños”, el *hakakllo*, el *chusek’* o el San Jorge, negro insecto de alas rojas que devora tarántulas.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ José Carlos Ballón, “Entre la utopía indigenista y la utopía modernista,” *Quéhacer* 160 (May-Jun 2006): 55.

¹⁰⁶ José María Arguedas, “La agonía de Rasu Ñiti,” in *Relatos completos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1983), 136.

The genius of a dansak' depends on who lives in him: the "spirit" of a mountain (Wamani); of a precipice whose silence is transparent; of a cave from which golden bulls and the "condemned" on platforms of fire. Or the cascade of a river that falls from the heights of the Andes; or maybe just a bird or a flying insect that knows the meaning of the abysses, trees, ants, and the secret of the night; any of those "cursed" or "strange" birds, the hakakllo, the chusek' or the San Jorge—red-winged black insect that eats tarantulas.

Within the father "Rasu Ñiti," Wamani is alive. The day of his death, the dansak' receives at his home the procession of musicians that will accompany him in his last dance—an act for which he comes dressed in the traditional clothing of mirrors and badges. The wife tells the daughters that Wamani is "sitting on the father's head" (135). Atok' sayku, Rasu Ñiti's disciple, arrives at the house with the procession. The ceremony begins and, as the teacher agonized while performing his final choreography, the disciple gradually feels imbued with the spirit of Wamani. The death of Rasu Ñiti is described then as a birth: "Era él, el padre 'Rasu Ñiti', renacido, con tendones de bestia tierna y el fuego del Wamani, su corriente de siglos aleteando" (141) ["It was him, the father 'Rasu Niti,' reborn, with tendons of tender beast and Wamani's fire, flapping its stream of centuries"]. When everyone is on their way out, one of the musicians announces to the family that the father's body will be buried the next day. The youngest daughter does not consider this necessary. Pointing the finger at Atok' sayku, the daughter exclaims: "No muerto. ¡Ajajayllas!...No muerto. ¡Él mismo! ¡Bailando!" (141) ["Not dead. Ajajayllas!...Not dead. Himself! Dancing!"] From this moment on, Atok' sayku will take the place of Rasu Ñiti in the family, marrying his daughter. The story takes on the relationship

of master and disciple, not in terms of how it affects individuals, but in relation to the institution of scissor dancing. That what is essential is not the individuals, but rather the maintenance of the institution, is confirmed by the phrase that closes the story with this hermetic invocation of the principle of identity: “Wamani is Wamani” (141). The important thing is not that the learner learns, but that the transmission of knowledge of the community is ensured. But the transmission of knowledge, after all, does not seem to depend on the willingness of the dancers. It depends on a supernatural force of nature (or, as M. H. Abrams would have it, a form of “natural supernaturalism”) that settles upon them. The dancers are not defined as individuals; they are members of the community. The community, in turn, is one with nature. Seen this way, it is no wonder that people are vehicles of culture and receptacles of nature.

We began this section recalling that notable heir of Romanticism that was Walter Benjamin. He thought that modernity had triggered a crisis of experience. He was very uneasy about the disappearance of traditional means of transmission that, within agrarian societies, had previously ensured the passing down of experience from one generation to another. It troubled him to see that artisanal forms of communication such as storytelling were fading under the advance of impersonal technologies like the novel.¹⁰⁷ Benjamin’s approach shows a pronounced traditionalist bias that separates communication from

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin develops this idea in several articles, written from 1928 on, about narration and the novel, but his most persuasive and elegant version does not appear until 1936, when he publishes his influential essay about the Russian poet Nicolai Leskov, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 83-109.

learning. For him, the only communication that really counted was that of the experience accumulated over the continued existence of the community, leading him to rule out the communication of individual experiences (by definition contrary to tradition). Unhappy with the apparent loss of sense of the world, Benjamin had developed an image of tradition of an extraordinarily solidity. We can say that Arguedas subjected all his work to a conception that was in tune with the concerns of Benjamin. His poetics presents, as we have seen, a romantic vein that is all but formed with *Yawar Fiesta*: the sublime power of the landscape; the music of harps, trumpets and violins that accompanies the Indians' celebrations; the songs and dances that take the place of communication and discourse. All these elements are blended into a poetics of collective sensibility that naturalizes culture. As elaborated with the findings of anthropology, the substance of community determines the possibilities for learning and communication of its members. For this reason, there are no interlocutors in Arguedas's world. It should come as no surprise then that this inner retreat becomes difficult to maintain when what must be addressed, as we shall see, is the possibility of communication between people who have nothing in common.

2.3 Strangers

Far from taking Andean cultural identity for granted, Arguedas has to scrutinize it in his posthumous novel *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* (1971). In fact, the culturalist foundations of his previous works are shaken by a series of

unexpected twists that the writer discovered in his route to this novel's realization. *The Fox...* is a complex and even chaotic work, characterized by a profusion of voices and narrative levels. One of these elements is the mythical tale of two foxes that regularly meet to chat. These enigmatic characters have been conversing since ancient times, an era before the conquest, and even before the Inca hegemony. One descends from the Andes, the other ascends from the coastal valleys. Laughing and singing, they exchange stories of their own worlds along with festive observations about the events narrated by “el individuo que pretendió quitarse la vida y escribe este libro” (50). [“The individual who tried to take his own life and is writing this book” (54)] In this second narrative level—that of the novel, properly speaking—the protagonists of the story are the inhabitants of a small fishing cove located north of Lima. Or rather of what used to be a fishing cove until it became, virtually overnight, the country's largest economic magnet. Chimbote, as the town is called, is at the heart of the fishmeal industry that, during its heyday in the 1960s, turned Peru into the largest exporter of the product in the world. Chimbote attracted immigrants from all over the country by the thousands and tens of thousands.¹⁰⁸ Waves of peasants and miners, strangers who had undertaken the long journey from the highlands to the coast in search of work, arrived every day at the port. Faced with this situation, Arguedas admitted to being unable to understand. This is clear from

¹⁰⁸ Some statistics can provide the reader with an idea of the magnitude of this displacement: if in 1940 the small port town was home to 4,000 people, in 1970 its population well exceeded 150,000 inhabitants. See Alberto Flores Galindo, “Arguedas y la utopía andina,” in *Dos ensayos sobre José María Arguedas* (Lima: SUR Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 1992), 26, note 24.

the four diaries and two letters which constitute the third level of the novel.

In the second diary Arguedas declares, “Pero ahora no puedo empalmar el capítulo III de la nueva novela porque me enardece pero no entiendo a fondo lo que está pasando en Chimbote y en el mundo”¹⁰⁹. [“But now I cannot fit in chapter III of the new novel because although I’m eager to do it, I do not have a profound understanding of what’s happening in Chimbote and in the world.”¹¹⁰] It is startling the frankness with which Arguedas declares himself unable to write and understand the world that he aimed to narrate. Chimbote defies his comprehension. Why? In essence, the problem threatens his ethnographic work. Shortly before writing the novel, Arguedas devoted himself to the collection of post-Hispanic Quechua myths of millenaristic nature. In those years he had stressed the importance that the peasants of the southern Andes attributed to the myth of Inkarrí, the Inca king who “will make the Last Judgment” and “re-impose the old order.”¹¹¹ Given Arguedas’s lack of the funds

¹⁰⁹ José María Arguedas, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*, ed. Eve-Marie Fell, Colección Archivos (Paris: ALLCA XX, 1991), 79.

¹¹⁰ José María Arguedas, *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*, trans. Frances Horning Barraclough (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 83.

¹¹¹ José María Arguedas, *Las comunidades de España y del Perú* (Lima: Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1968), 340. About the Inkarrí myth, cf. as well his articles “Puquio, una cultura en proceso de cambio,” *Revista del Museo Nacional* 25 (1956): 184-232; and “Mitos quechuas poshispánicos,” *Amaru* 3 (July-Sept 1967): 14-18. Both have been reprinted in the anthology *Formación de una cultura nacional indoamericana*, ed. Ángel Rama (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1975), 34-79 and 173-182, respectively. Over the course of the following decade, the investigation of Andean millenarism reached its peak. With respect to this, see the anthology edited by Juan M. Ossio, *Ideología mesiánica del mundo andino* (Lima: Ignacio Prado Pastor, 1973), which gathers essays by Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, Luis Millones, Alejandro Ortiz Rescaniere, Juan M. Ossio, Franklin Pease, and R. Tom Zuidema, among others. For a more recent take on the question, see Manuel M. Marzal, ed., *Enciclopedia Iberoamericana de Religiones*, vol. 4: *Religiones Andinas* (Madrid: Trotta, 2005).

needed to travel to the provinces, access oral sources, and collect myths from remote locations, Chimbote initially presented him with a unique opportunity to meet people from all over the country in one place. At only 420 kilometers from Lima, the port was indeed the best destination for regular visits that would not affect his responsibilities in the capital.¹¹² According to his friend John Murra, “Arguedas wanted to know the variations of the Adaneva myth that circulated in different parts of the department, but such field work was not feasible with the limited funds of the University. He then decides to take advantage of the fact that, in the port of Chimbote, there were members of all of the communities of the Santa valley. Among the Ancashino immigrants from the forty shantytowns of Chimbote, one was likely to find many varieties of the original myth.”¹¹³ It can be argued then that the novel was originally conceived in relation to myth. The title of the novel reveals this intention. The “Foxes” refer to so-called Huarochiri Manuscript, a Quechua story recorded in the sixteenth century by the extirpator of idolatries Francisco de Ávila and translated by Arguedas himself.¹¹⁴

The writer, however, was confronted with a reality far more fluid and uncertain. The mythical components of the story, embodied in the figure of the foxes, suggest that the novel had originally intended to argue for the continuity of the Andean even outside the highlands.

¹¹² John V. Murra, “José María Arguedas: Dos imágenes,” in Murra and López-Baralt, *Las cartas de Arguedas*, 277.

¹¹³ Murra, “José María Arguedas: Dos imágenes,” 277.

¹¹⁴ *Dioses y hombres de Huarochirí*, trans. José María Arguedas, 2nd. ed. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1975); *The Huarochiri Manuscript: A Testament of Ancient and Colonial Andean Religion*, trans. Frank Solomon and George L. Urioste, annotations and introductory essay by Frank Solomon, transcription by George L. Urioste (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

But, as Arguedas says in the May 20 entry of the third diary: “Estos ‘Zorros’ se han puesto fuera de mi alcance: corren mucho o están muy lejos. Quizá apunté un blanco demasiado largo o, de repente, alcanzo a los ‘Zorros’ y ya no los suelto más” (179) [“These *Foxes* have gotten out of range; either they run a lot or else they’re far away. Maybe the target I aimed at was a long way off or perhaps I’ll suddenly catch up with the *Foxes* and never let go of them again” (189)]. He loses sight of the myth on the horizon because the scene that the migration recreated could not be reduced to the impassive transfer of Andean identities nor to the formation of highland enclaves on the coast. It was, rather, a space of transit and redefinition.

The heyday of industrial fishing in Chimbote did not only represent a moment of economic expansion to Peru. It was, as we now know, a period of free effervescence with regard to the gestation of new social dynamics. To start, the provincial clubs, that in Lima acted as links to the communities of immigrants’ origin (as the Centro Unión Lucanas did), were conspicuously absent in Chimbote. In a letter addressed to Murra, Arguedas summarizes his findings:

He logrado formular algunas hipótesis. No hay en Chimbote clubes provinciales (que es una característica importante de la migración a Lima, La Paz, el Cuzco, Arequipa). La organización es barriadas (luego no organizados según el punto de procedencia, sino el de la actuación inmediata). A pesar del activo intercambio social y comercial, costeños y serranos permanecen todavía como estratos diferenciados; los serranos tienden a acriollarse y lo hacen sin las grandes dificultades que hay en Lima, porque el medio social es mucho más accesible.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Murra, “José María Arguedas: Dos imágenes,” 278.

I managed to form some hypotheses. There are no provincial clubs in Chimbote (which is an important feature of the migration to Lima, La Paz, Cuzco, Arequipa). The organization is slums (therefore not organized according to place of origin, but of immediate action.) Despite the lively social and commercial exchanges, people from the coast and the highlands still remain as distinct strata; the highlanders tend to ‘creolize’ and do so without the great difficulties that there are in Lima, because the social environment is much more accessible.

The massive displacement of people impels a discussion of the viability of the institutions of the traditional Andean community in the context of accelerated modernization. And at the same time, it urges a consideration of the possibility that Andean culture would eventually be extinguished or transformed at the hands of the social actors themselves. Confronted with this issue, Arguedas seemed to go off in pursuit of a sign of continuity. The human flood was causing a real overflow on the shores of the Pacific—a “popular overflow” to use the familiar expression José Matos Mar introduced in the eighties.¹¹⁶ In the 1960s, this process of the gestation of new urban social types was at its nascent phase, in a “boiling” stage, as Arguedas calls it in his “Last diary?”. “¡Cuántos *Hervores* han quedado enterrados!” (243) [“How many ‘Boilings’ have been buried!” (256)]. The exclamation anticipates that the project will be cut short. For, if the novel was intended to provide a response to “what is happening in Chimbote and the world,” Arguedas’s suicide in November of 1969 left this question unanswered. The novel of migration, the novel of the encounter

¹¹⁶ See José Matos Mar, *Desborde popular y crisis del Estado. El nuevo rostro del Perú en la década de 1980* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1984); Aníbal Quijano, “Lo cholo y el conflicto cultural en el Perú” [1964], in *Dominación y cultura* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1980).

between the highlands and the coast, the traditional and the modern, remained unfinished.

In the spring of 1967, Arguedas writes a letter to Murra in which he already expresses his debts and doubts with respect to anthropology:

Los antropólogos demostraron que efectivamente se podía hablar de una cultura quechua. En mi conferencia de la Facultad de Arquitectura quedó demostrado que existe una religión, un arte y una lengua propias de los campesinos quechuas. Pero las vías de comunicación modernas se abrieron hacia la costa sin que se hubiera hecho una reforma de la tierra ni de la educación y cuando los grupos que dominan al país tradicionalmente están más fuertes que nunca. Ellos han resuelto convertir a los quechuas y aymaras en carne de fábrica y en domésticos. Los planes de desarrollo de la integración del aborígen constituyen instrumentos encaminados a desarraigar definitivamente al indio de sus tradiciones propias. Los hijos de los emigrados ya no hablan quechua; en la sierra están tratando de romper las comunidades; antropólogos famosos...predican con terminología "científica" que la cultura quechua no existe....Los quechuas y los aymaras seguirán, pues, condenados a ocupar el último lugar en la escala social. Pero no les matarán toda el alma. Los sirvientes influyen. Ayer nomás conté en una tienda de venta de discos de Chosica ¡dos mil seiscientos cuarenta títulos de música serrana!¹¹⁷

Anthropologists have shown that indeed one could speak of a Quechua culture. In my lecture at the Faculty of Architecture, I demonstrated that there exists a religion, an art and a language of Quechua peasants. But modern communication routes were opened to the coast without land or education reform having been enacted, and when the groups that traditionally rule the country are stronger than ever. They have decided to convert the Quechua and Aymara people into factory meat and domestic servants. The development plans for the integration of the Aborigines constitute instruments designed to definitively eradicate their Indian traditions. The children of immigrants no

¹¹⁷ Letter to Murra, November 3, 1967, in Murra and López-Baralt, *Las cartas de Arguedas*, 162.

longer speak Quechua; in the highlands, communities are being broken; famous anthropologists...preach with “scientific” terminology that Quechua culture does not exist....The Quechua and Aymara people will therefore remain condemned to occupy last place on the social scale. But their soul will not be killed. The servants influence. Just yesterday I counted at a record shop in Chosica two thousand six hundred and forty titles of highlands music!

Arguedas is reluctant to accept the collapse of his world.

Chimbote’s precarious reality was not intelligible to him because it represented an anomaly. Here, in this world full of factories and brothels, lay only the rubble of tradition that the devastating wind of progress was leaving in its track and that Arguedas was trying unsuccessfully to reunite through his writing, with his “relato desigual y lisiado” [“maimed and uneven story”] (251; 263). Many readers have interpreted Arguedas’s *Foxes* in this way, placing the emphasis on the personal drama of a work that culminates with the tragic suicide of its author. From this perspective, Arguedas fears that the definitive collapse of Andean culture is taking place in a new environment marked by anomie and proletarianization. Unable to find a satisfactory solution, he leaves the story on hold. His suicide then makes sense as an expression of personal defeat that nevertheless leaves open the possibility of a time of change and revolution.¹¹⁸ But reading of the

¹¹⁸ I refer, for example, to the interpretation of de Martin Lienhard, broadly disseminated since the end of the seventies: “*El zorro* manifiesta esa voz colectiva, pero ella no acaba en él. Fuera de la novela, y fuera de toda literatura, ella empieza a hacerse escuchar en la esfera decisiva, la de la lucha política. La continuación de *El zorro* no podrá ser literaria, sino política: la hará el lector colectivo que crece poco a poco, a lo largo de la novela, para convertirse al final, algo míticamente, en actor de la historia.” Lienhard, *Cultura popular andina y forma novelesca*, 171. Although I cannot go into detail here, I would like to say a word about the mythology surrounding Arguedas’s suicide. I find the notion of paratext useful as a way to approach the subject. Introduced by Genette, “paratext” is a term that alludes to all of those elements that accompany a text with a view to directing its reception: “More

novel in these terms neglects the role that the experience of learning—new to his work—fulfills in every section of this narrative. The problem of change is at the heart of the novel. But, as I have said, this dimension of the story has typically been overlooked in favor of readings in which the currency of myth becomes the decisive stage of the novel's interpretation. The premise that the foxes occupy the dominant level of the narrative—that the two have been telling the story since the time, “Two thousand five hundred years ago [when they] met on Latausaco Mountain in Huarochiri” (53)—is taken to be

than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold.” It is “a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that...is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it.” Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2. I make recourse to this idea to point out that Arguedas may have been using certain accompaniments to the text—in this case, the diaries and the letters—to orient the reception of his work in the direction of collective representativity. The “Last diary?” closes with what is, quite possibly, the most often-cited declaration of the novel: “Quizá conmigo empieza a cerrarse un ciclo y a abrirse otro en el Perú y lo que él representa: se cierra el de la calandria consoladora, del azote, del arrieraje, del odio impotente, de los fúnebres ‘almazamientos’, del temor a Dios y del predominio de ese Dios y sus protegidos, sus fabricantes; se abre el de la luz y de la fuerza liberadora invencible del hombre de Vietnam, el de la calandria de fuego, el del dios liberador, Aquel que se reintegra....Despidan en mí a un tiempo del Perú cuyas raíces estarán siempre chupando jugo de la tierra para alimentar a los que viven en nuestra patria, en la que cualquier hombre no engrilletado y embrutecido por el egoísmo puede vivir, feliz, todas las patrias.” (245-246) It seems to me that Arguedas creates a threshold that, in encouraging relations of transference with the text, induces the reader to identify the cause of his suicide with the impossibility of solving the puzzle of the Peruvian nation and with the promise of a new era. I understand that it seems in bad taste to suggest that Arguedas was posing, but the presumption of posing do not in fact trivialize the veracity of his suffering. As Genette rightly observes: “many letters and many journal pages are written with clear foreknowledge of their publication to come, and undoubtedly this prescience *does not affect* the writing of these letters and journals in a way that undermines their private—indeed, intimate—character” (371; emphasis in original). Rather I find to be in bad taste all of those interpretations that, sheltered in textualism, capitalize upon the deeply touching sensation of agony that is woven throughout the diaries and speculate on the meaning of Arguedas's suicide without any empirical basis.

natural.¹¹⁹ Understood thusly, Arguedas's last novel represents a chronicle of the effort by immigrants to prevent the decomposition of the Andean in the wilderness of the city. But what complicates this approach is that, when the novel is read in this manner, a veil of ignorance is draped over tradition, relegating it—as well as its bearers—to a state of undisturbed quietude. It is then as if the Andean immigrants of *The Foxes* maintained an uncritical relationship with themselves, condemned to persevere in their own being under the assumption that people exist as a function of cultural traditions. This was certainly the case in Arguedas's previous novels, but it seems to me that he was able to grasp, perhaps despite himself, the challenges presented by the new environment.

We should first note that the land upon which the characters tread is as unknown to the powerful as it is to the oppressed, to whites as to the Indians, to coastal people as to highlanders. Unlike in previous novels, Arguedas's heroes do not play on their home field. As noted by Guillermo Nugent, "In this novel, power, and the resulting dispute for it, do not arise from the possession of the land or from a

¹¹⁹ As argued by Sara Castro-Klarén, all interpretation of the novel oriented toward myth should seriously consider the nature of the *Manuscrito de Huarochirí*. In general, the mythic readings of the novel propose that the foxes are the story's true narrators. In doing so, they suggest that, in the text, the past acts as the level of interpretation of the present (and even the future) and that Arguedas refuses to touch the problem of change. But one should remember that the story of the *Manuscrito de Huarochirí* is characterized not by quietism, but rather by a chain of metamorphoses. See Sara Castro-Klarén, "Like a pig, when he's thinkin': Arguedas on Affect and on Becoming an Animal," in Arguedas, *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*, 307-323.

conflict of jurisdictions.”¹²⁰ Everyone is a stranger in the no man’s land that is Chimbote.

My second remark departs from this fact: sensibility is now made accessible to the stranger. To put it another way, Arguedas moves away from Benjamin and toward Simmel. These two theorists were contemporaries. Like Benjamin, Simmel writes from the experience of the street. His gaze oriented to the department store windows and street lights, he is curious about the characters that, full speed ahead, make their way in the teeming urban landscape, the employees and the masses, all those figures of everyday experience that, as momentary images (the expression is his), illuminate the processes of social transformation in Europe. But unlike Benjamin, Simmel understood that traditional societies contain repressive elements and emphasized the role that the stranger had played as an agent of social upheaval and change: “The stranger is an element of the group itself, not unlike the poor and sundry “inner enemies”—an element whose membership within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it.”¹²¹ Something that Simmel did share with Benjamin was a distrust of the rational calculation that inundated the modern world. Faced with this tendency, Simmel noted a number of processes that he included in the concept of sociability, which is the playful or artistic form of society, but also the “being-together-just-for-the-sake-of-it.” That is, those forms of social

¹²⁰ Guillermo Nugent, *El conflicto de las sensibilidades: Propuesta para una interpretación y crítica del siglo XX peruano* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de Las Casas - Rimac, 1991), 135.

¹²¹ Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 144.

interaction outside of the constraints of calculation and the avarice of money and power. This concept was interesting to him because it allowed for the distinction of the hierarchical forms of subordination from the symmetrical forms among equals that arise from the ideal of free association of individuals.¹²² For Simmel, the modern world was not just the debris of community; it could also be a work in progress.

In my view, *The Foxes* presents an interesting combination of the phenomena that Simmel addresses, which, for lack of better term, might be called “the sociability of the stranger.” I also find it significant that this discovery occurs within the realm of Arguedas’s interest in music. As we saw earlier, Arguedas found in music and dance the sensible substrate of Andean memory and converted them into articulating joints that restored the harmony threatened by the disintegration of the community. The key was to make Andean culture into a collective sensibility. Arguedas discovers that there were no provincial clubs in Chimbote, but he also realizes that music remained an important reference. The city arenas where the immigrants gathered to sing, play music, and dance on the margins of the official culture provided Arguedas with the key.¹²³

In *The Foxes*, everything is still resolved in the (non discursive) realm of sensibility. Apparently, discursive communication never proved sufficiently attractive for Arguedas. But the recourse of

¹²² “Where a connection, begun on the sociable level—and not necessarily a superficial or conventional one—finally comes to center about personal values, it loses the essential quality of sociability and becomes an association determined by a content—not unlike a business or religious relation, for which contact, exchange, and speech are but instruments for ulterior ends, while for sociability they are the whole meaning and content of the social processes.” Georg Simmel, “Sociability,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, 131.

¹²³ Ballón, “Entre la utopía indigenista y la utopía modernista,” 57.

sensibility, curiously, ensures that communication is possible despite the multiplicity of voices. Everyone understands each other in Chimbote despite the fact that they speak different languages. It is, as I said, a space of strangers. The stranger, to recall Simmel, cannot approach, with the same immediateness, the ways of life that community members take for granted. The stranger's learning is always more difficult, painful even, than that of those living in peace with their surroundings. At the same time, as Richard Sennett has noted, the foreigner "holds up a mirror to the society into which he or she enters."¹²⁴

How is sensibility related to the stranger? In a story as scattered as *The Foxes*, many of these links appear only as insights and flashes. We will consider for a moment the characters of Maxwell and Crispín Antolín. The latter is an immigrant from the central highlands who travels the markets and docks with his guitar. Blind and very young, he is perhaps the clearest exponent of Arguedas's poetic of music insofar as he cannot see. His contact with the world is strictly auditory.

Crispín Antolín, Arguedas writes, "oía la luz de la isla, el zumbir de la tráquea humana de donde sale el hablar de cada quien, tal como es la vida. Así, su guitarra templaba la corriente que va de los médanos y pantanos encrespados, de barriadas al mar pestilente, de la ecosonda a la caldera, de la cruz de Moncada al obispo gringo, del cementerio al polvo de la carretera" (78) ["...heard the light of the island, the humming of the human trachea where each person's

¹²⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 13.

speech comes out, hearing life the way it was. Thus, his guitar was attuned to the current flowing from the huge dunes and troubled waters of the shantytown marshes to the foul-smelling sea, from the radar to the fish-meal boiler, from Moncada's cross to the gringo bishop, from the graveyard to the dust of the highway" (82)]. The music of Crispín Antolín's can be heard everywhere. It traverses deserts and slums, it spreads over the industrial areas of the city and even finds its way into the foul-smelling sea and the organs of speech. It is significant that, in the list, the cemetery and the highway share a position: the ancestral nostalgia-laden space, where the symbolic memory of the community lies, shares a place with the route that the immigrants use to arrive at Chimbote. The cemetery separates the living from the dead, but also humanizes the earth.¹²⁵ The highway separates, but also unites. One perceives here a breakdown of Arguedas's original logic. In fact, his natural choice would have been to oppose the highway to the cemetery, as he had opposed the highway to the bullring in *Yawar Fiesta*. The zone of transit is now intimately tied to the ground of memory. But this unlikely connection is achieved through music. The text suggests that music—the element that had served to hermetically seal community—now serves to reconcile opposites.

Moreover, the performer of the music can now be a stranger. Maxwell, the Peace Corps volunteer based in Chimbote, knows how to play the *charango*, a lute-like instrument traditionally made from the shell of an armadillo. He even took his instrument to the United States

¹²⁵ Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), xi.

to play there “melodías del altiplano y de las quebradas de Huamanga” (223) [“melodies from the high plateau as well as from the valleys of Huamanga” (236)]. What is significant is that Maxwell is aware of his origin; he is not aiming to ‘go native’ when he plays his music. He admits, “No las interpreto como los nativos, pero ya en muchos de esos cantos yo me vivo, yo me hago. El vendedor ambulante de pescado y su mujer que son de la sierra norte sonreían. ‘Extraño tono, bonito’, dijeron.” (223) [“I don’t interpret them the way natives do, but now in much of that singing I come alive; I make myself. The fish peddler and his wife, who were from the northern Andes, used to smile. ‘Strange tone, pretty,’ they said” (236)] Maxwell takes the liberty of interpreting the music in the double sense of performing as well as translating; in this way he comes alive, makes himself. And if this were not enough, the highlanders do not respond by rejecting his version. They appreciate his unique style; they find it strange *and* pretty.

At the end of the second chapter, Maxwell and Crispín Antolín—like two extremes of sensibility that have not yet met—have plans to play together that night (78). We are not told what comes of that meeting, which the novel fails to record. We can only speculate that it would have been something like how Zygmunt Bauman describes the meeting of strangers:

Strangers meet in a fashion that befits strangers; a meeting of strangers is unlike the meetings of kin, friends, or acquaintances—it is, by comparison, a *mis*-meeting. In the meeting of strangers there is no picking up at the point where the last encounter stopped, no filling in on the interim trials and tribulations or joys and delights, no shared recollections: nothing to fall back on and to go by in the course of the present encounter. The meeting of strangers is *an event without a past*.

More often than not, it is also *an event without a future* (it is expected to be, hoped to be, free of a future), a story most certainly ‘*not* to be continued’, a one-off chance, to be consummated in full while it lasts and on the spot, without delay and without putting the unfinished business off to another occasion. Like the spider whose entire world is enclosed in the web it spins out of its own abdomen, the sole support which strangers-in-meeting may count on must be woven from the thin and loose yarn of their looks, words and gestures.¹²⁶

In *The Foxes*, Arguedas manages to intuit the value of new forms of association and sociability that emerge in the hotbed of migration. He imagined them as instances in which the characters are able to escape the logic of calculation and interest through a significant expansion of sensibility. Arguedas embarks upon a route that leads from a dense conception of culture to the “being-together-just-for-the-sake-of-it.” The inability to understand acquires the connotation of wanting to learn how to create new traditions. Perhaps it is no accident that the Fox from Up Above says to his partner: “Así es. Seguimos viendo y aprendiendo” (23) [“That’s the way it is. We go on seeing and learning...” (26)]. Sensibility is no longer the hermetic code that confirms one’s membership to the community—the instance that decides who’s in and who’s out—as it now becomes accessible to the outsider. Shifting his focus toward this effective possibility of learning, Arguedas leaves behind the impenetrable culturalism of his previous work and enters into a reflection on the experience of change in Peruvian literature.

¹²⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2000), 95 (emphasis in original).

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how Arguedas was able to take advantage of his lack of literary capital. Using ideas distilled by anthropology, Arguedas constructed, through his literary project, a notion of the Andean that assigned to culture a fully differentiated conceptual space with regard to the categories of race and class. For him, anthropology was not a discourse of alterity oriented toward the justification of the colonial powers. Rather, it was a theory that allowed him to render culture the most important of the social goods and to place it at the heart of social conflicts. The Andes of Arguedas are thus a half of Peru that remains closed, protected from the spread of civilization. This effect of closure is based on an aesthetic of sensuousness that makes reference to a people's collective soul. In positioning itself in the sphere of sensibility, Arguedas's narrative gained immensely in aesthetic verisimilitude. At this stage, his work was subject to a conception of the Andean understood as a sensibility delineated by its dances and songs. But with this he lost the dialogic capacity of conceptual discourse, which thereby resulted in overlooking the importance (and even the possibility) of change and learning. Hence, in his early work, any attempt to free individual sensitivities results in the loss of both the ethical purity and the aesthetic harmony of the collective subject. But sensibility suddenly opens to the stranger when, in his last novel, Arguedas moves his fiction to Chimbote. Upon crossing over the highlands, sensibility widens. In the *Foxes*, culture loses solidity. The result of this encounter is the suggestion of a poetic of the stranger that emerges as

an attempt to comprehend the extraordinary migratory movement to the coast.

Upon his death, Arguedas's successors will inherit his problems. Under the influence of his first phase, which inaugurates a discourse of cultural identity in Peru, some proposed the challenge of writing a history of Peru that could do justice to the Andean perspective. A historian like Alberto Flores Galindo will maintain that the element that constituted the identity of the Andean peoples over the course of a period of five centuries was the messianic belief in the return of the Inca, and will speculate as to what would have happened if the nation had been constituted with an indigenous leadership at its center.¹²⁷ Others questioned the monistic conceptions of the Peruvian nation. Arguedian culturalism nevertheless reinforced in a way the Peruvian inclination to explain the present by reference to the past. Not for nothing has it been noted that, in Peru, it is customary to attribute to history an almost prophetic value.¹²⁸ Arguedas fits in well with an intellectual tradition in which phenomena such as the proverbial inability of the elites, political violence, or the relative tolerance of society towards authoritarianism are usually treated as inertia, sediments collected in some corner of the collective memory.¹²⁹ The

¹²⁷ Alberto Flores Galindo, *Obras completas*, vol. III: *Buscando un Inca: Identidad y utopía en los Andes* [1987] (Lima: SUR Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 2005), 17.

¹²⁸ Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), 220-223.

¹²⁹ Magdalena Chocano notes that, "un rasgo crucial del pensamiento histórico peruano: su profundo descontento con 'lo acontecido'. La inconformidad surgida al lanzar una mirada a la historia del país, lleva a proyectar hacia el pasado el examen de las posibilidades factuales. La gravedad con que la historiografía peruana — explícita o implícitamente — ha asumido considerar 'lo que hubiera sido si...', ha configurado una sutil retórica de la ucronía. Ucronía significa pensar la historia como pudo haber sido y no fue. Es un esfuerzo paradójico por 'transformar' en el pasado los hechos que se consideran 'causas' de la actual infelicidad." Magdalena

second stage in the development of his poetic was only hinted at in a contradictory novel that can certainly be read as an extension of the route upon which he embarked in Puquio. It is at this final stage when—the fortress of sensibility having been transformed into a labyrinth—Arguedas envisions that tradition can be read as a source of meaning for the present.

In the next chapter, we will examine an interesting project that, contrary to that of Arguedas, aims to restore the place of the individual, replacing sensibility with discourse. It is a project in which, moreover, the narrative functions no longer as a guarantor of the transmission of experience, but rather as an agent of social change.

Chocano, "Ucronía y frustración en la conciencia histórica peruana," *Márgenes* 1 (1987): 45-46.

CHAPTER THREE:
NOWHERE MAN: MARIO VARGAS LLOSA IN SEARCH OF THE
ARCHAIC

To be a savage meant to live in freedom.

—Alberto Flores Galindo¹³⁰

Rarely do we remember the *other* noble savage. Sure, we recall the one who fueled the utopias of modernity—that uncouth yet gentle creature that had lived in harmony with nature until the European colonizer felt the uncontrollable urge to educate him. This noble savage is one of the most paradoxical fantasies that has emerged from the European imagination: the natural goodness that is attributed to him expresses nostalgia for a state of grace that existed before civilization, but it is his wild side that—sooner rather than later—ends up exasperating the nostalgic civilized man. This ambivalence, as we know, allowed the myth of the noble savage to live side by side with the reality of the subjugation and oppression of colonized peoples. The *other* noble savage, however, does not seem so indomitable. He is equally good, but above all else he is reasonable. In the mid-eighteenth century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that reason was a faculty inherent to humankind. By virtue of this, individuals could make pacts and enter into agreements that would lead to an orderly political life. As opposed to the man envisioned by Hobbes—defined by war and the fear of death—Rousseau’s individual, in his natural state, was a

¹³⁰ Alberto Flores Galindo, *Buscando un Inca. Identidad y utopía en los Andes* (1986), *Obras Completas III (I)* (Lima: SUR Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 2005), 104. All translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise noted.

creature whose reason had naturally equipped him to ally with others and realize the transition to the civil state. It is worth remembering, then, that there is an illustrated side to the myth in which the noble savage is the protagonist of a philosophical and legal fiction—social contract theory—that conceives of society as the result of the voluntary association of free and reasonable individuals. I find it useful to unearth this liberal vein, which, as I have said, was buried by the more well-known and spectacular side of the myth, because of its suggestion that the evocation of primitivism was not always tinged with condescension.

It is precisely of condescension and paternalism that Mario Vargas Llosa's short novel from the mid-eighties has been accused. I refer to *The Storyteller* (1987), a work that, between references to Benjamin and Lévi-Strauss, fully enters into the discussion of the prospects for survival of traditional societies faced with the advance of Western modernity. The narration revolves around a small nomadic tribe in the Peruvian Amazon and the enigmatic figure of a storyteller (*hablador*) in whose wandering activity the identity of the group lies. That Vargas Llosa places an Amazonian tribe at the heart of *The Storyteller* seems to suggest that the novel is intended to push to the limits the opposition between civilization and primitivism. The tribe—under this hypothesis—acts as an emblem of all traditional ways of life. Effective insofar as it is exotic, the tribe serves as a part-for-whole metonymy of the archaic and thus facilitates the demarcation of a stark, didactic contrast between the burdens of tradition and the benefits of modernity. In actuality, however, *The Storyteller* does

exactly the opposite of what it might appear to do at first glance. In this chapter, I will argue that Vargas Llosa discovers in the life of the tribe a paradigm of moral philosophy that allows him to bring to light the individualistic anthropology of the social contract (and, in doing so, to unearth the liberal vein of the metaphor of the noble savage) in order to build a powerful argument against the assumptions of cultural continuity that govern and inform the anthropology of Indigenism. I will argue that the novel is actually far from understanding the Indigenous as an abstraction, transferable to any reality. Moreover, one of its main strengths may well lie precisely in its confronting the reader with a concrete plurality of voices that question the validity of abstractions such as “Indian” or “Tradition.” In this way, Vargas Llosa gets rid of a series of assumptions, originating with Romanticism, that have crystallized into a dense conception of culture, and replace it with plasticity and the desire for change that arises from the realm of fiction. But he achieves all this—it is important to note—at the high cost of engaging in the pursuit of modern subjects without a past.

My comments will be divided into four parts. The first is dedicated to recalling the general plot of the novel and to showing its connection with the problem of modernity and tradition in the context of Peruvian history. The second part will allow us to clarify what is, in my opinion, the first key to the book. Peru being a country in which the conflict between modernity and tradition has historically been located in the highlands, the reader familiar with the country’s social cartography will be struck at the choice of the Amazon jungle for the

setting of the story. The novel's virtual silence with regard to the highlands, I will maintain, can be explained by the fact that the Andes are the imaginary space from which the writer intends to distance himself. The Amazon then serves as a contrast to the Andes. Moreover, it enables the author to enter into a tacit polemic with the Indigenist tradition, which made of the Andes its traditional bastion. This will lead us, in the third part, to clarify the scope of this debate, which, as is customary with Vargas Llosa, has as its backdrop a theory of fiction and literary creation. Here we will clarify the novel's other key feature, namely its radical departure from the paradigm of literary documentalism, a move that is accomplished by the intricate weaving of the story and the positioning of the lie at the heart of fiction. I will refer, then, to the problem of the "false machiguenga," which has resulted in so much controversy among critics. Finally, in the conclusion, I will attempt an assessment of this proposal with regard to the language of culture.

3.1 *Modern and Archaic*

In *The Storyteller*, everything is in motion. The book comprises eight chapters, narrated in first person. The first and last are set in Florence, where the narrator has traveled with the express purpose of forgetting, for a while, his "malhadado país" ["unfortunate country"]. We are not told the name of this character, but his personal details match those of Vargas Llosa himself. He is an implied narrator, a secondary protagonist of that which he narrates. Between the opening and conclusion, there are six chapters in which two voices alternate:

that of the narrator and of the storyteller mentioned in the title. The central enigma proposed by the novel is the identity of the storyteller. As one can easily imagine, the novel is rich in layers and suggestions. The links between the two stories, rather than communicating vessels, at times resemble mirrors oriented into a vertiginous *mise en abîme*. But the story is presented with the skill necessary such that reader, in the end, has no doubt as to what the novelist wants to impart to her.

Who is the storyteller? As insinuated by the counterpoint of voices, it is the narrator's childhood friend, Saul Zuratas, an anthropology student whom everyone called "Mascarita" (which could be translated as something like "Maskface") because of the intense, red mole that hid half of his face. In the 1950s, Saúl becomes fascinated with the nomadic Machiguenga tribe of the Peruvian Amazon jungle. As a result, Saúl cuts all ties with his peaceful life in Lima (divided between the small family business and his studies), rejects the offer of a graduate fellowship in Bordeaux, and leaves behind his language and customs. In place of all this, he becomes a Machiguenga storyteller, that is, a repository of the Machiguenga oral tradition, one of the few custodians of "its taboos, images, ancestral desires, and terrors."¹³¹ In this sense, the novel can be read not only as a fable of identity, but also as a parable about the dilemmas of modernity in the peripheral countries. In fact, the novel's approach seems to exclude, from the outset, any intermediate solution; one is either nomadic Machiguenga or "modern." The depth of this confrontation seems to be

¹³¹ Mario Vargas Llosa, *El hablador* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1987), 234. Quoted from *The Storyteller*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989), 244. From this point on, page references to this novel will appear parenthetically in the text.

confirmed by Mascarita's face, whose colors, those of the Peruvian flag, divide it into two halves. This dilemmatic structure reappears throughout the novel. In an early dialogue, the novel's anonymous narrator asks Saúl:

¿Qué proponía, a fin de cuentas? ¿Que, para no alterar los modos de vida y las creencias de unas tribus que vivían, muchas de ellas, en la Edad de Piedra, se abstuviera el resto del Perú de explotar la Amazonia? ¿Deberían dieciséis millones de peruanos renunciar a los recursos naturales de tres cuartas partes de su territorio para que los sesenta u ochenta mil indígenas amazónicos siguieran flechándose tranquilamente entre ellos, reduciendo cabezas y adorando al boa constrictor? ¿Debíamos ignorar las posibilidades agrícolas, ganaderas y comerciales de la región para que los etnólogos del mundo se deleitaran estudiando en vivo el potlach, las relaciones de parentesco, los ritos de la pubertad, del matrimonio, de la muerte, que aquellas curiosidades humanas venían practicando, casi sin evolución, desde hacía cientos de años? No, Mascarita, el país tenía que desarrollarse. ¿No había dicho Marx que el progreso vendría chorreando sangre? Por triste que fuera, había que aceptarlo. No teníamos alternativa. Si el precio del desarrollo y la industrialización, para los dieciséis millones de peruanos, era que esos pocos millares de calatos tuvieran que cortarse el pelo, lavarse los tatuajes y volverse mestizos —o, para usar la más odiada palabra del etnólogo: aculturarse—, pues, qué remedio. (23-24)

What did he suggest, when all was said and done? That, in order not to change the way of life and the beliefs of a handful of tribes still living, many of them, in the Stone Age, the rest of Peru abstain from developing the Amazon region? Should sixteen million Peruvians renounce the natural resources of three-quarters of their national territory so that seventy or eighty thousand Indians could quietly go on shooting at each other with bows and arrows, shrinking heads and worshipping boa constrictors? Should we forgo the agricultural, cattle-raising, and commercial potential of the region so that the world's ethnologists could enjoy studying at first hand kinship ties, potlatches, the rites of puberty, marriage, and death that these human oddities had been practicing, virtually unchanged, for hundreds of years? No, Mascarita, the country had to move

forward. Hadn't Marx said that progress would come dripping blood? Sad though it was, it had to be accepted. We had no alternative. If the price to be paid for development and industrialization for the sixteen million Peruvians meant that those few thousand naked Indians would have to cut their hair, wash off their tattoos, and become mestizos—or, to use the ethnologists' most detested word, become acculturated—well, there was no way round it. (21-22)

The narrator, confronting his friend Saúl with the urgent needs of the country, argues—based on a utilitarian reasoning—that a responsible state policy should favor the economic welfare of the majority of the population over the maintenance and promotion of traditional practices. If modernity promises economic prosperity, then indigenous life can only lead to poverty and backwardness. It is apparent that herein lies one of the novel's major conflicts.

I would like to point out, however, that, rather than dismissing upfront any possibility of reconciliation between tradition and modernity, *The Storyteller* delineates a subtle link between the two extremes. It implies a complex solution that addresses the history and socio-cultural composition of a country like Peru, whose indigenous population, distributed primarily among the Andean and Amazon regions, comprises a large number of ethnic groups with distinct languages and customs. It is important to consider the story's specificity; a significant part of the action takes place in a small nomadic community of the Peruvian Amazon. If we depart from a generic idea of the Indigenous, then this detail may seem merely circumstantial. The Machiguenga tribe will then be understood as just another instance of that generic category—another metonymy of the archaic. But our approach will differ substantially if we realize that,

behind the category of the Indigenous—behind its smooth, compact appearance—lies a variety of cultures and conflicts.

Let me clarify this point by recalling that, in Peru, the conflict between tradition and modernity has historically been located in the Andes. As a rapid review of the canon of Indigenist literature suffices to show, the Andes have been the critical site of this conflict. Why, then, does Vargas Llosa write about an Amazonian tribe rather than an Andean community? It is quite possible, as has previously been suggested, that during the period of the novel's composition, between 1985 to 1987, the political climate in Peru, chafed by the alarming escalation of the Shining Path's actions and the subsequent declaration of emergency zones in the Andes, induced the writer to prudently choose an alternative setting and thereby descend from the Andes to the Amazon basin.¹³²

It seems possible, however, that this neglecting of the Andes is not accidental. Vargas Llosa has written essays in which, in opposition to the essential ambiguity of the novel as a genre, he has expressed his opinions much more emphatically. By making recourse to these texts, I want to show that, although *The Storyteller* deals with the conflict between modernity and tradition in a country of extremes, the solution that the novel elaborates should be considered in conjunction with the significance that both the Andes and the jungle have in the author's thought.

¹³² Doris Sommer, *Proceed with Caution, When Engaged by Minority Writing in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 245.

3.2 *In the Beginning Was the Jungle*

The fascination that the jungle holds for Vargas Llosa has a long history. The author himself acknowledges that the number of times that he has evoked his first trip there is perhaps countless. It is worth citing these comments at length, many of which come from his memoir *A Fish in the Water* (1993). Among the aspects that first captivated him, he tells us, was “discovering the awesome power of the still untamed landscape of Amazonia, and its adventure-filled, primitive, fierce world, with a freedom unknown in urban Peru.”¹³³ To this he adds, with no attempt to disguise his emotion, that this journey

[...] desplegó ante mis ojos un mundo en el que, como en las grandes novelas, la vida podía ser una aventura sin fronteras, donde las audacias más inconcebibles tenían cabida, donde vivir significaba casi siempre riesgo, cambio permanente. [...] Ello volvería una y mil veces a mi cabeza en los años siguientes y sería una inagotable fuente de inspiración para escribir. (472)

[...] unfolded before my eyes a world in which, as in the great novels, life could be an adventure with no frontiers, where there was room for most unconceivable feats of daring, where living almost always meant risk, boldness, permanent change. [...] It would come back to my mind a thousand and one times in years to come and would be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for my writing. (465-466)

The excitement, the joy with which Vargas Llosa communicates the discovery of a sense of freedom and vastness hitherto unknown to him is palpable. He shares this trait with his alter ego of *The Storyteller*. The fictional writer of the novel expresses a similar enthusiasm while, in the course of his futile search for his friend Saúl, talking with the

¹³³ Mario Vargas Llosa, *El pez en el agua. Memorias* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1993), 472. Quoted from Mario Vargas Llosa, *A Fish in the Water: A Memoir*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1994), 465.

Schneils, the pair of American missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics that work with the tribe: the Machiguenga storytellers had been “for twenty-three years, a great stimulus for my own work, a source of inspiration and an example I would have liked to emulate” (174).

Whether in the realm of fiction or reality, the jungle invariably awakens within the writer a feeling of sympathy that stems from an alliance of freedom and writing. For this reason, the narrator identifies his craft with the itinerant work of the tribe’s storytellers, “as they wandered through the forest, collecting and repeating stories, fables, gossip, tales they’d invented, from one little Machiguenga island to another,” (173-174) holding together that fragile and dispersed community.

This description contrasts notably with Vargas Llosa’s allusions to the Andes, which more often than not are referenced in an unfavorable manner. Vargas Llosa’s rejects the Andes thusly because the essential freedom that he claims to have discovered in the jungle does not, according to him, represent an ethical good that is constitutive of the patrimony of Andean civilization. Thus, in an essay as controversial as “The Birth of Peru” (1985), Vargas Llosa explains the defeat of twenty million Inca subjects at the hands of a few hundred hungry Spaniards as a matter of a lack of individual freedom. According to him, the events of Cajamarca—King Atahualpa’s capture in 1532—demonstrate that “the vertical and totalitarian structure of the Tahuantinsuyo was without doubt more harmful to its survival

than all the conquistadores' firearms and iron weapons."¹³⁴ The Quechua people could not have even conceived of their ruler's capture, and due to their atavistic "metaphysical docility" and lack of individuality, they would have simply let the Spaniards defeat them. Likewise, Vargas Llosa maintains that the vigorous pace of the Tahuantinsuyo's expansion, which took place in the space of just a century, was based on the dissolution of "individual life into a series of tasks and gregarious duties carefully programmed and supervised by the gigantic network of administrators whom the Inca sent to the furthest borders."¹³⁵ A double-edged sword, the science of the Quechua victories would have contained the seeds of the empire's own destruction.

But Vargas Llosa's distrust of the Andean becomes even more apparent when the time comes to discuss the indisputable merit of the Inca state, namely its capacity, "to eradicate hunger in that immense region. [...] to distribute all that was produced in such a way that all its subjects had enough to eat."¹³⁶ This aspect of Vargas Llosa's thought becomes significant as we turn to consider *The Storyteller*, as it allows us to clarify the author's understanding of modernity. If we assume that "modernity" means "modernization"—understood, in turn,

¹³⁴ Mario Vargas Llosa, "Novels Disguised as History: The Chronicles of the Birth of Peru," in *A Writer's Reality*, ed. Myron I. Lichtblau (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 29. This is a translation of "El nacimiento del Perú," *Contra viento y marea, III (1964-1988)* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990), 365-378. The translation includes an assessment of *The Storyteller* by Vargas Llosa, which could not be part of the original article, from 1985.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 30-31. The Spanish original reads more colorfully: "[El sistema inca] disolvía la vida individual en tareas y obligaciones gregarias cuidadosamente programadas y vigiladas por la casi infinita telaraña de administradores que el Cusco hacía llegar hasta los confines más apartados." (372)

¹³⁶ Ibid., 30.

as a process that pushes a community towards urban growth, industrialization, material progress, and economic development—then the novel does nothing but reiterate the well-known oppositions between city and country, reason and myth, future and past, civilization and barbarism. Following this route, the conclusion that *The Storyteller* is a fable about how deeply irreconcilable both worlds are becomes virtually inevitable. But we ought to emphasize that, for Vargas Llosa, modernity is not necessarily synonymous with modernization, as is evidenced by the following passage from the introduction to *La verdad de las mentiras* (1990):

cuando un Estado, en su afán de controlarlo y decidirlo todo, arrebató a los seres humanos el derecho de inventar y de creer las mentiras que a ellos les plazcan, se apropia de ese derecho y lo ejerce como un monopolio a través de sus historiadores y censores —como los Incas por medio de sus Amautas— un gran centro neurálgico de la vida social queda abolido. Y hombres y mujeres padecen una mutilación que empobrece su existencia *aun cuando sus necesidades básicas se hallen satisfechas*.

When a State, in its zeal to control and decide everything, robs human beings of the right to invent and believe the lies that please them, appropriating this right, and exercising a monopoly through its historians and censors—as the Incas did by means of their Amautas—a great neuralgic center of social life is abolished. And men and women suffer a mutilation that impoverishes their existence *even if their basic needs are met*.¹³⁷

Regardless of the historical accuracy of these judgments,¹³⁸ it is noteworthy that Vargas Llosa's understanding of freedom stresses the

¹³⁷ Mario Vargas Llosa, *La verdad de las mentiras* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1990), 18-19; my emphasis.

¹³⁸ See the pertinent objection by Alberto Flores Galindo, "Los caballos de los conquistadores, otra vez (El otro sendero)," in *Tiempo de plagas* (Lima: El Caballo Rojo, 1988). "Para Vargas Llosa [...], el triunfo de Pizarro en Cajamarca fue una expresión del triunfo de lo individual sobre lo colectivo. Si un puñado de

ability to separate the realms of fact and fiction. Its debt is to classical liberalism: whereas political organization must be ruled by the separation of powers, individual life must be governed by the separation of public and private. Fiction, for Vargas Llosa, belongs in the private domain. And the fundamental characteristic of this domain is “that vital dissatisfaction that the lies of literature simultaneously instigate and appease, [and without which] there is never real progress” (19).¹³⁹ Progress, therefore, is not reducible to material welfare. If achieved at the cost of denying certain essential guarantees, prosperity—the author believes—degenerates into populism and authoritarianism.¹⁴⁰

conquistadores derrota a un ejército es porque los indios que los conforman carecían de cualquier iniciativa, mientras que los españoles eran hombres libres. Dejemos de lado la ignorancia acerca de hechos puntuales, como la organización de la hueste conquistadora, cantidad de efectivos, colaboración de indígenas, disparidad en las armas, etcétera. Interesa sólo indicar que tras el elogio a la iniciativa individual subyace una defensa de la conquista” (204).

¹³⁹ Vargas Llosa expands this idea in his book-length essay *The Temptation of the Impossible: Victor Hugo and Les Misérables*, trans. John King (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007): “it is possible that novels can also make us feel dissatisfied with what exists, and give us an appetite for unreality that can influence our lives in many different ways and affect the wider world” (10). Victor Hugo serves here both as an example and a model for a fertile life in that it combines public and private, politics and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity, but on the condition that each one should go its own way: “the extraordinary thing is that Victor Hugo did in his life almost as many things as his imagination and his words would conjure up, because he had one of the richest and most adventurous lives of his day. He always embraced everything fully and had an amazing knack of being at the center of important historical events, as a participant or as a privileged witness” (3).

¹⁴⁰ A pioneer of this idea was Víctor Andrés Belaunde, senior diplomat and intellectual of the conservative *Novecentista* generation: “El sentimiento de libertad personal pudo no haber existido en el estado de civilización que ellos [los incas] alcanzaron. Por esta razón se sometieron voluntariamente al gobierno de los *caciques* o jefes, y posteriormente al de los funcionarios de los Incas.” “Comunismo incaico y bolchevismo,” in *Obras completas*, Vol. 1 (Lima: Edición de la Comisión Nacional del Centenario, 1987), 198. It is interesting to note that Lévi-Strauss himself had a similar opinion: “In Peru and in various regions of North America, traces of the first occupants have already been brought to light: tribes ignorant of agriculture were followed by communities who lived in villages and cultivated gardens, although maize and pottery were as yet unknown. These in turn were followed by populations who carved stone and worked precious metals in a freer and more inspired style than

Hence the ostensible discomfort—sometimes outright hostility—with which Vargas Llosa refers to Andean communities, for, in his view, they are *historically* closed social structures. Closed is the society, he argues, inspired by Popper,¹⁴¹ in which “particular truths that are always inconsistent with a coherent and conclusive official truth” (17) are banned. Again using the example of Inca political organization, the writer maintains that the exercise of censorship was the official activity of the scholars of the empire. These *amautas* would have applied their wisdom “to this trick: turning fiction into history” (17). Assisted by these experts, “the Incas were able to use their past, transforming it into literature, in order to immobilize the present, the highest ideal of every dictatorship” (17). Upon piecing together all these associations, a remarkably clear logic emerges. Historical analogy serves the purpose of forging a connection between the Inca Empire and authoritarian regimes.

But the *amautas* play an additional role in Vargas Llosa’s account: they are the remote origin of Indigenism, insofar as these ancient sages anticipated contemporary Indigenists in their conflation of fiction and reality, their conversion of the realm of subjectivity into

anything which came later. The Incas of Peru and the Aztecs of Mexico, whom we had been inclined to consider as representing the peak and epitome of American history, were as far removed from these vital sources as the French Empire style is from Egypt and Rome, from which it borrowed so heavily: all three are instances of totalitarian art, striving for a kind of hugeness in the harsh and the stark, and expressive of a State anxious to assert its power by concentrating its resources on something other than its own refinement, that is, on war or government.” Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* [1955], trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin, 1992), 254.

¹⁴¹ See Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), chapter 10.

the realm of objectivity.¹⁴² Just like the amautas, the Indigenists constructed an idyllic image of the Inca past, one of a just and benevolent empire that had managed to banish hunger and eradicate need. It is this account that Vargas Llosa calls the “archaic utopia.” According to him, this image is “a refined elaboration by Renaissance intellectuals like Garcilaso de la Vega and by writers, lawyers and missionaries like Bartolomé de Las Casas, who, in their eagerness to condemn the abuses of the conquest or to challenge the right of Spain over the natives of America, drew an idyllic version of pre-Hispanic societies.”¹⁴³ Vargas Llosa maintains that this idealization of the pre-Hispanic past—consolidated at the cost of smoothing over the history of conflicts prior to the Conquest—is what encouraged the various currents of Peruvian Indigenism from the mid-nineteenth century on.

In Vargas Llosa’s memoir, this discrepancy with Indigenism takes on a personal resonance. Referring to the tradition of regionalist novels that were a mandatory part of his university studies, he writes:

Desde esa época odio la palabra “telúrica”, blandida por muchos escritores y críticos de la época [circa 1955-1958] como máxima virtud literaria y obligación de todo escritor peruano. Ser *telúrico* quería decir escribir una literatura con raíces en las entrañas de la tierra, en el paisaje natural y costumbrista y preferentemente andino, y denunciar el gamonalismo y feudalismo de la sierra, la selva o la costa, con truculentas anécdotas de “mistis” (blancos) que estupraban campesinas, autoridades borrachas que robaban y curas fanáticos y corrompidos que predicaban la resignación a los indios. Quienes escribían y promovían esta literatura “telúrica” no se daban cuenta de que ella, en contra de sus intenciones, era lo más conformista y convencional del mundo, la repetición de una serie de tópicos, hecha de manera

¹⁴² Mario Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica. José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 20.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 292-293.

mecánica, en la que un lenguaje folklórico, relamido y caricatural, y la dejadez con que estaban construidas las historias, desnaturalizaba totalmente el testimonio histórico-crítico con que pretendían justificarse. Ilegibles como textos literarios, eran también unos falaces documentos sociales, en verdad una adulteración pintoresca, banal y complaciente de una compleja realidad.

Ever since those days I have abhorred the word “telluric,” flaunted by many writers and critics of the time as the greatest literary virtue and the obligatory theme of every Peruvian writer. To be telluric meant to write a literature with roots in the bowels of the earth, in local landscape and local customs, preferably Andean ones, and to denounce the bossism and feudalism of the highlands, the jungle, or the coast, with cruel episodes involving *mistis* (whites in positions of power) who raped peasant girls, drunken authorities who stole, and fanatical, corrupt priests who preached resignation to the Indians. Those who wrote and promoted telluric literature failed to realize that, despite their intentions, it was the most conformist and conventional literature in the world, the repetition of a series of clichés, put together mechanically, in which a folkloristic language, affected and caricatural, and the carelessness with which the narratives were constructed completely corrupted the historico-critical testimony meant to justify them. Unreadable as literature, they were also false social documents, in truth a picturesque, banal, and complaisant adulteration of a complex reality. (345-346; 340-341)

By associating a handful of images and concepts in accordance with procedures that range from analogy to metonymy, Vargas Llosa produces a general evocation of the Andes that reunites the totalitarian order of the Incas, Indigenism’s “archaic utopia,” and the claims of verisimilitude claims made by social literature.

This conflation explains a recurring pattern of his fiction, namely the representation of the Andean as a barren, ossified area, controlled by millenarian burdens and irrational forces. Let’s briefly consider the following examples. In *Captain Pantoja and the Special*

Service (1973), the delirious efficiency of Pantoja as chief of the *visitadoras* service in the jungle is finally stopped when he is assigned to a remote garrison in the icy heights of Puno, where, “instead of the Amazon River, he’ll have Lake Titicaca.”¹⁴⁴ *Who Killed Palomino Molero?* (1986) follows the arduous investigation of Lieutenant Silva and his deputy, Sargent Lituma, who, in the end, having clarified the circumstances of the murder of the soldier Molero in the Air Base of Piura (on the northern coast of Peru), will be assigned to “a little station as imaginary as those stories,”¹⁴⁵ in the highlands of Junin. The continuation of that story, *Death in the Andes* (1993), is set in Naccos, a fictional town in Junin, where the violence and chaos unleashed by the Shining Path are explained as nothing less than a reenactment of the fierce practices of the ancient Huancas and Chancas, as “a resurrection of all that buried violence.”¹⁴⁶ As these few examples demonstrate, the alliance between freedom and literature—which Vargas Llosa immediately associates with the Amazon—vanishes as soon as the matter to be considered is transported to the Andes. And if that were not enough, the highlands become the place where law enforcement officials serve their symbolic sentences because of the diligent carrying out of their duties. The Andes frustrate any individual attempt to be productive.

¹⁴⁴ Mario Vargas Llosa, *Pantaleón y las visitadoras* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1973), 209. Quoted from *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service*, trans. Gregory Kolovakos and Ronald Christ (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 243.

¹⁴⁵ Mario Vargas Llosa, *¿Quién mató a Palomino Molero?* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1986), 150. Quoted from *Who Killed Palomino Molero?*, trans. Alfred Mac Adam (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1987), 150. “Puestecito medio fantasma” is the expression used in the original.

¹⁴⁶ Mario Vargas Llosa, *Lituma en los Andes* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1993), 178; *Death in the Andes*, trans. Edith Grossman (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), 153.

The pattern outlined above is worth considering because it allows us to see that *The Storyteller* is a response to Indigenism, one that stems from the idea of the sovereignty of fiction and is connected to the principles of a radical liberalism. Backwardness and poverty pose dilemmas, as illustrated in the early dialogue between the narrator and Saúl Zuratas, but the fulfillment of basic needs is not a sufficient condition for good governance, nor is modernization enough to achieve modernity. What the “modern”, as envisaged by Vargas Llosa, ultimately means is the emancipatory dimension of modernity as a democratizing political project. Vargas Llosa does not choose the jungle for the purpose of emphasizing, to the extreme of the picturesque, the “primitive” quality of the indigenous, but rather because, confronted with the subject of Indigenism, he needs to invoke a more primitive and archaic reality, insofar as this reality is more primordial.

The narrator makes an off-hand comment, in a short but telling passage near the beginning of the novel, that the Machiguenga tribe is part of the Arawak family (27). It is known that members of this Amazonian ethnic group were the ones who, having moved from the Marañón basin to the western slopes of the Andes, in what is now the Ancash Department, forged the Chavin culture (900-200 BC), traditionally considered the cradle of Andean civilization.¹⁴⁷ The choice of a Machiguenga community as the social space of the novel thus

¹⁴⁷ This is the so-called theory of the autochthonous origin of civilization in the Andes, which most Peruvians accept as true. See Julio C. Tello, *Chavín: cultura matriz de la civilización andina* (Lima: Imprenta de la Universidad de San Marcos, 1960); and Luis Guillermo Lumbreras, *Chavín de Huántar en el nacimiento de la civilización andina* (Lima: Instituto Andino de Estudios Arqueológicos, 1989).

makes a significant reference to the original nucleus of Andean culture. By means of this choice, the author recovers a space of representation to which he grants priority over the Andean. He is searching for something more primordial than the Andes. What he says is clear: in the beginning was the forest; liberty came first.

It is here that Vargas Llosa seems to pay homage to the legendary journey of initiation made by Claude Lévi-Strauss to the jungle of Brazil. In the 1930s, the young Lévi-Strauss thought he had discovered, in the heart of Brazil, the ethnographic confirmation of the theory of the social contract. In the dense vegetation of Mato Grosso, the father of structural anthropology had left the Caduveo and the Bororo, and even further the Mbaya and the Guana, whose lengthy and elaborate ritual ceremonies—according to what he tells us in *Tristes Tropiques*—revealed the existence of strong hierarchical structures. The Nambikwara of the backlands of Cuiabá, in contrast, had managed to live on the very borders of the human species. In total, they numbered no more than two thousand individuals. Dispersed in small groups, they lived in one of the most inhospitable regions of the planet, relentlessly pursued by drought and floods. The chiefs had no privileges other than to walk at the head of the group and his authority was ultimately very weak. Political power was not hereditary. In the eyes of Lévi-Strauss, the Nambikwara was a society so elemental, so austere, so hostile to any form of institutional life, that all he could find in it, as he said, were “individual human beings.”¹⁴⁸ Nothing could be further from the literary stereotype of the

¹⁴⁸ Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, 317.

noble savage who knows only the undifferentiated and compact life of the community. So while Europe yielded to the collectivist outbursts of nationalism, thus preparing themselves to launch the Second World War, the Nambikwara who the anthropologist met during his first fieldwork had made of consent the origin and the limit of power.¹⁴⁹ In this regard, they appeared to be the realization of that abstract model of society, pursued by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, in which power has natural limits that reduce it to its minimum expression. With appropriate reservations, the existence of the Nambikwara seemed to provide evidence favorable to the argument of the social contract, insofar as it showed that “cultural attitudes and features such as the ‘contract’ and ‘consent’ are not secondary creations,...they are the basic material of social life.”¹⁵⁰ Lévi-Strauss is still here following the footsteps of Rousseau. Moreover, if he ventured to explore the bushes of Cuiabá—he declares—it was because the laws of the Caduveo and Bororo had seemed too wise to him. His desire, like Rousseau’s, was to capture that state that “no longer exists, has perhaps never existed, and probably will never exist and of which it is nevertheless essential to form a correct notion in order rightly to judge our present state.”¹⁵¹

Vargas Llosa also intends to capture this state in *The Storyteller*, but he is aware that this cannot be achieved by means of a true representation of reality, as that aspiration would draw him perilously close to the very aesthetic that he hopes to overcome. His task is not

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 314.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 315.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 316.

anthropological, but rather literary. It does not have pretensions of producing a credible document of Amazon reality; rather, his aim is to show how literature ends up falsifying reality when it aims to be anthropologically accurate.

3.3 *Telling Lies to Tell the Truth*

The discussion about the validity of exoticism as a means of representation is not alien to *The Storyteller*. The character of the narrator asks himself:

¿Por qué había sido incapaz, en el curso de todos aquellos años, de escribir mi relato sobre los habladores? [...] Todos mis intentos culminaban siempre en un estilo que me parecía tan obviamente fraudulento, tan poco persuasivo como aquellos en los que, en el siglo dieciocho, cuando se puso de moda en Europa el “buen salvaje”, hacían hablar a sus personajes exóticos los filósofos y novelistas de la Ilustración.

Why, in the course of all those years, had I been unable to write my story about storytellers? [...] All my attempts led each time to the impasse of a style that struck me as glaringly false, as implausible as the various ways in which philosophers and novelists of the Enlightenment had put words into the mouths of their exotic characters in the eighteenth century, when the theme of the “noble savage” was fashionable in Europe. (152; 157-158)

This passage tells us two things. The first, quite obviously, is that *The Storyteller* is the realization of the literary project to which the novel itself alludes. Much less clear, however, is the second suggestion, namely, that the author has finally completed his story about the storytellers without succumbing to a “fraudulent” style. How does he do it? Of the eight chapters comprising the book, chapters three, five and seven look like ethnographic transcriptions. They are—we come to

know at the end of the book—the narrations of Mascarita, the storyteller, in his adoptive community. Through them we learn of the confrontation between the two deities, Tasurinchi and Kientibakori, who created the Machiguenga world by blowing, and of the customs of a people whose men are all named, at some point, after the beneficent god—Tasurinchi. Just as they do not have proper names [“Their names were always temporary, related to a passing phenomenon and subject to change: the one who arrives, or the one who leaves, the husband of the woman who just died, or the one who is climbing out of his canoe, the one just born, or the one who shot the arrow”, 83], they also live transient lives, believing that, if they stop their walking, the sun will fall from the sky.

The narrative voice changes dramatically in these tracts, in an attempt to adapt to Spanish the alleged inflections of Machiguenga grammar:

Después, los hombres de la tierra echaron a andar, derecho hacia el sol que caía. Antes, permanecían quietos ellos también. El sol, su ojo del cielo, estaba fijo. Desvelado, siempre abierto, mirándonos, entibiaba el mundo. Su luz, aunque fuertísima, Tasurinchi la podía resistir. No había daño, no había viento, no había lluvia. Las mujeres parían niños puros. Si Tasurinchi quería comer, hundía la mano en el río y sacaba, coleteando, un sábalo; o, disparando la flecha sin apuntar, daba unos pasos por el monte y pronto se tropezaba con una pavita, una perdiz o un trompetero flechados. Nunca faltaba qué comer. No había guerra. [...] ¿Por qué, pues, si eran tan puros, echaron a andar los hombres de la tierra? Porque, un día, el sol empezó a caerse. Para que no se cayera más, para ayudarlo a levantarse. Es lo que dice Tasurinchi. (38-39)

After, the men of earth started walking, straight toward the sun that was falling. Before, they too stayed in the same place without moving. The sun, their eye of the sky, was fixed. Wide

awake, always open, looking at us, warming the world. Its light was very strong, but Tasurinchi could withstand it. There was no evil, there was no wind, there was no rain. The women bore pure children. If Tasurinchi wanted to eat, he dipped his hand into the river and brought out a shad flicking its tail; or he loosed an arrow without aiming, took a few steps into the jungle, and soon came across a little wild turkey, a partridge, or a trumpet-bird brought down by his arrow. There was never any lack of food. There was no war. [...] Then why, if they were so pure, did the men of earth begin walking? Because one day the sun started falling. They walked so that it wouldn't fall any farther, to help it to rise. So Tasurinchi says. (37-38)

Some readers have been offended by the malicious simulation of the indigenous voice that they find in this adaptation. According to Antonio Cornejo Polar, *The Storyteller* can be read as a parody of Indigenism and especially of Arguedas's writing.¹⁵² Doris Sommer in turn argues that, "The style of the evocation [...] is a cause for concern in a novel that seems to respect culturally specific languages, because the indigenous speech is familiar from Quechua-inflected Spanish, with its trailing gerunds (*diciendo, hablando*) at the end of sentences, for example. The Andean sounds are so improbable in the jungle that the effect is to suggest the writer's indifference towards Indians."¹⁵³ If this is so, in what exactly does this alleged overcoming of the fraudulent and exotic style of the Indianist literary tradition, "when the theme of the 'noble savage' was fashionable in Europe," consist? Why does the narrator suggest that he has finally been able to write his story about the storytellers when, in fact, he seems to have failed?

¹⁵² Miguel Gutiérrez, *Los Andes en la novela peruana actual* (Lima: Editorial San Marcos, 1999), 25.

¹⁵³ Sommer, *Proceed with Caution*, 239.

One way to address this problem is to note that the voice of the storyteller is actually Zuratas's, the former *limeño* who had embarked upon the unlikely route that leads from the modern to the traditional and chose to be a nomad. So neither the representation of the indigenous, nor the prerogative to "make him talk," are licenses being taken by the author, because the alleged Indian whom Vargas Llosa "makes speak" is actually—or at least was—Western. The strategy eludes, successfully, the well-known question posed by Gayatri Spivak: "Can the subaltern speak?" It does so by anticipating the answer: "The subaltern is the name of a place which is so displaced that to make it speak would be like the arrival of Godot on a bus."¹⁵⁴ Well, no bus arrives here. But the solution, thanks to its radicality, leave us perhaps worse off than we were before; it suggests that, since it is impossible to imitate the elementary voice of the Machiguenga, it is better not to let him speak at all.¹⁵⁵ Here a paradox emerges: the denial of recognition seems to be the only stance that is morally and epistemologically consistent from the perspective of Western modernity, with which the narrator is identified. This seems to be the necessary consequence of the assumption of a radical incommensurability: the only way to bridge difference is to assume, as a matter of principle, that difference is inherently insurmountable. The highest form of recognition then takes the form of non-recognition.

¹⁵⁴ Gayatri Spivak, interviewed by Howard Winant, "On the Politics of the Subaltern," *Socialist Review* 90, no. 3 (1990): 91, quoted in John Beverley, *Against Literature* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 15.

¹⁵⁵ Gustavo Faverón, "Comunidades inimaginables: Benedict Anderson, Mario Vargas Llosa, la novela y América Latina," *Lexis* 26 (2002): 459.

Is there any possibility of overcoming this impasse? It seems to me that Vargas Llosa offers a very suggestive solution to the problems that the treatment of the narrative voice and literary representation have recently projected onto literary criticism. The answer is simple: it is a matter of denying speech to a *non-existing* other. Efraín Kristal reveals in his well-documented and exhaustive study of Vargas Llosa's corpus that the Machiguengas from the Marañón basin are, and always have been, a sedentary community:

Vargas Llosa's Machiguenga are a nomadic people who live in scattered communities in the amazon jungle. According to the anthropological literature the Machiguenga are a stationary people. In myths and legends wayfaring seems to be a taboo. [...] But in the novel the taboo has been *inverted*, because the Machiguenga believe the sun will disappear and the life will come to an end if they cease their nomadic existence.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, the full record indicates that the figure of the storyteller, who travels through the jungle, gathering people into little circles and spreading jokes and stories, does not, in reality, exist. The storyteller is Vargas Llosa's invention.¹⁵⁷ Based on this evidence—the evidence of Vargas Llosa's twofold invention—Kristal rules out the possibility that *The Storyteller* is an Indigenist story, as a result of its lack of documentary pretensions. We could, nevertheless, go a bit further, because the novel arguably carries its rejection of any form of documentalism to the extreme of anti-Indigenism.

In a sense, it is as if, having charted the whole territory of Indigenist narrative, Vargas Llosa subverts every inch of the genre.

¹⁵⁶ Efraín Kristal, *Temptation of the Word: The Novels of Mario Vargas Llosa* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 167; my emphasis.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 165.

According to William Rowe, “Indigenism has limitations similar to those of regionalism...separating the Indian from his own culture and then attaching a perspective that will seem to explain his conduct. As a recipient of values that are projected onto him from the outside, the Indian is merely a static character that reflects the views of outsiders. Any active engagement with the world in which culture and conscience harmonize is denied to him.”¹⁵⁸ Vargas Llosa is also of the opinion that Indigenism merely transplants, from a Western urban consciousness, yet assumed to be rural and indigenous, “the views of outsiders.” Indigenism adopts an illegitimate representation that, according to the author, should be avoided at all costs. And this is how, faced with the problem of the autonomy of the subjects of representation, the author avoids the imputation of “Orientalist” colonization by reinventing an “other” instead of appropriating his voice. The strategy thus has a didactic or propaedeutic character, and runs as follows: First, it counts on the reader to project onto the text the expectation of a true representation. Then, by disappointing this expectation, the text directs the reader’s attention to the Indigenist paradigm of documental verisimilitude. Chastened, the reader finally discovers that the truth of fiction is a lie.

No less didactic is the activity that Mascarita carries out in his adoptive community. In fact, once he has assumed his role as a storyteller, Mascarita, not satisfied with acting as a repository of an

¹⁵⁸ William Rowe, “Mito, lenguaje e ideología como estructuras literarias,” in *Recopilación de textos sobre José María Arguedas* (La Habana: Centro de Investigaciones Literarias Casa de las Américas, 1976), 258. See also Efraín Kristal, *Una visión urbana de los Andes. Génesis y desarrollo del indigenismo en el Perú: 1848-1930* (Lima: Instituto de Apoyo Agrario, 1991).

existing, allegedly achieved knowledge, promotes changes and innovations. Although fiction had never been his forte, “With the exception of Kafka, and *The Metamorphosis* in particular, which he had read countless times and virtually knew by heart,” (17) his limited literary knowledge is enough to allow Mascarita to adapt the story of Gregor Samsa into the story of Gregor-Tasurinchi. Through it, Mascarita will correct the cruel but perhaps necessary “perfectionism” practiced by the tribes of the Arawak family: the death by drowning all deformed children in order to prevent their suffering in an untamed environment (25). Mascarita is evidently moved. When he lived in Lima, he would touch the huge mole on his face as he joked with his friend, the narrator: “I wouldn’t have passed the test, pal. They’d have liquidated me. [...] They say the Spartans did the same thing, right? That little monsters, Gregor Samsas, were hurled down from the top of Mount Taygetus, right?” (25) Now among the Machiguengas, Mascarita modifies the community’s repertory of stories, subverts the traditional role of the word, and inserts fiction—the source of change and desire according to Vargas Llosa—into the hinges of myth.

For, if myth is a product of collective experience, Mascarita introduces into circulation something that is personal invention. Of course, all this seems to go against what we understand to be constitutive of oral narration—it being an artisanal form of communication that ensures the transmission of experience from generation to generation. The most popular theorization with regard to this question is Walter Benjamin’s storyteller. According to a well-known idea by Benjamin, the art of storytelling comes to an end with

the advent of modernity.¹⁵⁹ It comes to an end not because the stories worth telling disappear, nor because the impulse or the need to tell them is exhausted, but rather because that which is narrated definitively loses its grounding in the life experience. In the modern world, thinks Benjamin, experience is in crisis. It becomes fragmentary and fleeting. It no longer enjoys the fluidity and continuity that, long ago, within traditional societies, guaranteed that it was transmitted and bequeathed to the young. People—Benjamin laments—have lost the habit of gathering around a fire to listen a good story: “Who still meets people who really know how to tell a story?”¹⁶⁰ The modern individual lives in the city; the experience of modernity is marked by loneliness and anonymity. It is for this reason that the figure of the novelist, who performs the role of the storyteller in modern societies, is a solitary artist who acts confined to the margins of the page. He is no longer the neighbor or traveler who, ready to tell a story, communicates to his comrades a total experience that brings together all the senses and sensations: voice and speech, but also hand and gesture.¹⁶¹ The novel refers to the book, which is read alone and in silence, while storytelling refers to oral tradition and to the knowledge the elders transmit aloud and in person. The novel is an inquiry—an individual quest for meaning—whereas narration presupposes the

¹⁵⁹ Benjamin develops this idea in various articles beginning in 1928 about narration and the novel, but his most persuasive and evocative version did not appear until 1936, when he publishes his influential essay about the Russian poet Nikolai Leskov. See Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 83-109.

¹⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty” [1933], in *Selected Writings, Vol. 2: 1927-1934*, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 731.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 108.

existence of meaning and does not need to look for it. It does not seek anything because everything is there, in the past of the community.¹⁶² The novelist asks questions; the storyteller gives advice. For that reason, with undisguised dismay, Benjamin concludes:

We have witnessed the evolution of the “short story,” which has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings.¹⁶³

The storyteller, for Benjamin, stands for the guarantee of the unity of the group because he is responsible for transmitting experience within the community. The interesting thing is that, for Vargas Llosa, that role belongs not to the storyteller, but rather to the novelist. The guarantee of the group’s unity lies not the relatively passive transmission of knowledge, but in the disruption of continuity.¹⁶⁴

Scattered within the confines of the jungle, the Machiguengas of *The Storyteller* are a community not because of their immediate proximity, but because of their imaginary contiguity. What sustains

¹⁶² “What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. In the midst of life’s fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of living.” Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 87.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁶⁴ Jack Goody has questioned the anthropological validity of Benjamin’s approach in his “From Oral to Written: An Anthropological Breakthrough in Storytelling,” in Franco Moretti, ed., *The Novel*, Vol. I: *History, Geography, and Culture*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3-36.

their community is not the repetition of stories, but the possibility of changing them: “those tales, lies, fictions, gossip, and jokes that make a community of that people of scattered beings, keeping alive among them the feeling of oneness, of constituting something fraternal and solid.” (244) Their link is strong despite the fact that they live in “an individualism bordering on anarchy. Not one Machiguenga village existed. They did not have caciques and did not appear to acknowledge any authority other than that of each father in his own family” (80-81; 82). Vargas Llosa’s description of the nomadic Machiguengas is extremely telling. They only accept an authority reduced to its minimum expression, all of them are fierce individualists, and yet they participate in “something fraternal and compact.” They look a lot like Lévi-Strauss’s Nambikwara. The features attributed to the fictitious tribe, upon careful examination, are hardly representative of what would be expected from a traditional community. In fact, they better correspond to the modern idea of civil society.¹⁶⁵ In my view, by shifting to this form of social organization, which is not a reality to be documented but a fiction that creates “a gulf between what we are and what we would like to be,”¹⁶⁶ Vargas Llosa goes back to an origin, the evidence for which is neither historical nor ethnological, but rather

¹⁶⁵ In *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), Benedict Anderson invites us to read *The Storyteller* as a “nationalist” novel. It is arguable, however, whether or not the novel contains any formal analogy with the Peruvian nation. Anderson assumes that this is so, but provides no evidence. Moreover, his reading is full of inaccuracies. For example, Anderson writes: “Don Salomón [Saúl Zuratas’s father] then converted to Catholicism for the sake of his family, but was ‘never accepted’” (337). Exactly the opposite happens in the novel, for it is Saul’s Peruvian mother who converts to Judaism, but is never accepted by the Jewish community in Lima.

¹⁶⁶ Vargas Llosa, *La verdad de las mentiras*, 19.

resides nowhere. It is in the Amazon where Vargas Llosa's modernity resides.

3.4 Conclusion

Read in the context of Vargas Llosa's literary corpus, *The Storyteller* is the culmination of an ambitious interrogation into the role of fiction in modern societies. This literary disquisition confronts the writer with a technical problem that does not have an easy solution: How can one challenge the postulates of literary documentalism? How can one write a work of fiction that is an answer, both comprehensive and consistent, to Indigenist fictions? And finally, how can one address reality by refuting the aesthetic of literature as a social document without falling into another form of social document? Given that he cannot draw on the strategies and assumptions popularized by Indigenism—this is the premise—Vargas Llosa must find a way to play the game by different rules. The board, thus configured, leaves little room for maneuvering. Despite the restrictions, Vargas Llosa manages to stay true to his aesthetic and ideological commitments, since *The Storyteller* circumvents “a vision of literature [which the author considers spurious] as a mimetic report of what there is—morally uplifting, historically truthful, sociologically accurate, politically revolutionary.”¹⁶⁷ Faithful to a strict dualism, the novel postulates a strange, almost secret identity between (a version of) the indigenous and (a version of) the modern.

¹⁶⁷ Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica*, 21.

There are four crucial insights in the novel. First, *The Storyteller* echoes the criticisms made by contemporary researchers with regard to the assumption of cohesion and cultural continuity, which, it had been thought, were inherent to traditional societies. Serge Gruzinski, for example, notes that, “by understating the historic and prehistoric changes experienced by Amazonian populations, by minimizing their capacity for innovation and spread, by ignoring the federations that unite tribes into larger units, and by overlooking the impact of widespread movements that have animated the forest, anthropologists have sustained the image of societies frozen in their traditions.”¹⁶⁸ Managing to carry the metaphor of nomadism to its limits, Vargas Llosa suggests that quiescence and immobility are not valid categories for understanding so-called traditional societies.

This leads to the second success of the novel: it does not only deal with questioning the scientific relevance of this dense conception of culture, but also with recognizing that the cult of tradition—projected onto the present as romantic idealization—hides the potentially repressive side of culture. This cult does not permit us to see that, as Georg Simmel once remarked, in a society thus imagined, “[...] the individual member has only a very slight area for the development of his own qualities and for free activity for which he himself is responsible.”¹⁶⁹ Mascarita brings this insufficiency to the fore insofar as he helps modify the practices of the Machiguengas.

¹⁶⁸ Serge Gruzinski, *The Mestizo Mind: The Intellectual Dynamics of Colonization and Globalization*, trans. Deke Dusinberre (London: Routledge, 2002), 11.

¹⁶⁹ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life” [1903], in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 332.

Through fiction, he introduces into their world an ethical category that had not been previously considered: cruelty. The Machiguenga sacrificed children born deformed for reasons not altogether clear from the text. If we explain the custom in functional terms, we would say that this is a practical consideration, considering the aggressiveness of the environment, a solution aimed at ensuring the survival of the fittest. From a religious point of view, it could just as easily be an act whose symbolism resides in ensuring the purity of the group. It could be, finally, an act of compassion. In any case, Mascarita invites Machiguengas to consider the cruelty of this practice. Moreover, he demonstrates to them, in practical terms, that it is not impossible for a deformed child to manage to survive. Interestingly, in this way, Mascarita is able to use his stigma creatively, allowing him to discover his true face: his mole serves to show the Machiguengas that he survived.

Of course, one may ask whether Mascarita has the right to interfere with what, we presume, is a millenniums-old practice.¹⁷⁰ This leads us to discuss the book's third important insight, namely, the ethics of intercultural contact. There has been a heated debate on this issue, because colonialism has historically been the impetus behind the transformation of traditional lifestyles. For many countries in the

¹⁷⁰ It is important to note, nevertheless, that this is, in the strictest sense, a presumption. Commenting on the case of the !Kung San of the Kalahari desert, Anthony Giddens observes: "Anthropologists have virtually always seen oral cultures as highly traditional, but in the nature of the case have no way of confirming that the 'traditional practices' they observe have existed over even several generations; no one knows, for instance, for how long the !Kung practice of insulting the meat might have been in place." Anthony Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 63.

periphery of the West, the change was achieved—by blood and fire—through colonial imposition or mechanisms of ideological manipulation. They have not been symmetrical or peaceful exchanges. In the case of literary studies, this concern has been reflected in the attention given of late to the use of the narrative voice or, more precisely, the identity of the subject of enunciation. When it comes to traditional cultures, the premise is that, within the text, there lies both an authentic voice and another one that misrepresents or represses the former. The critic then tries to determine if the text usurps the subaltern voice, in order to determine if the text is intended to justify or perform some form of colonization. But we should recognize that following this route does not, in the end, get us very far, at least not if the point is to provoke an ethical discussion. For many, especially the members of the old Marxist left, ethics is nothing more than ideology—an arbitrary body of beliefs that camouflages and supports a particular order of domination. Hence references to ethics are often seen, among these groups, as “as perforce a turn away from politics and socioeconomic criticism”¹⁷¹. The curious thing is that the colonial problem is, precisely, ethical in nature: it departs from the assumption that it is not legitimate to interfere with the customs of other groups through violence. Returning to Mascarita’s case, it is not relevant, then, to try to determine the validity of his intervention using as sole evidence his western origin. (If we do so, the answer is foretold.) The question is whether it is a good thing. That, of course, is something that cannot be established in abstract terms. It seems significant to

¹⁷¹ Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 110.

me that the novel locates this issue in the field of deliberation.

Mascarita tells the Machiguengas:

Esta mancha color del maíz morado siempre la tuve. No se rían, les estoy diciendo la verdad. Nací con ella. De veras, no hay motivo para la risa. Ya sé que no me creen. Ya sé lo que estarán pensando. “Si hubieras nacido así, Tasurinchi, tus madres te hubieran echado al río, pues. Si estás aquí andando, naciste puro. Sólo después, alguien o algo te volvería como eres.” ¿Es eso lo que piensan? (200)

I’ve always had this stain the color of dark purple maize. Don’t laugh. I’m telling you the truth. I was born with it. It’s true; you needn’t laugh. I know what you’re thinking. ‘If you’d been born that way, Tasurinchi, your mothers would have thrown you into the river. If you’re here, walking, you were born pure. It was only later that something or someone made you the way you are.’ Is that what you’re thinking? (208)

The Machiguengas are incredulous and they express their surprise to the storyteller. He proceeds to tell his story, but the novel does not tell us what the Machiguengas decide to do after hearing Mascarita’s tale. That, suggests the novel, is something that is up to them.

The fourth point to which I would like to refer is the relevance of such a discussion in a country like Peru, where an intellectual tradition characterized by a dense conception of culture has dominated. Arguedas, as we saw in the previous chapter, enclosed the Andean people in a poetic of sensibility in order to protect the Andean culture from the progress of Western modernity. His was not an anthropology of individuals, but of bearers of culture. No room was left for deliberation—only for an emotional reaction that was instinctive and collective. Amongst Arguedas’s most noted inheritors was Alberto Flores Galindo, perhaps the most influential Peruvian historian of the

second half of the twentieth century. He opened the first essay of his celebrated book *In Search of an Inca* (1986) with this sentence: “The Andes are the site of an ancient civilization.”¹⁷² The implication of Flores Galindo’s remark is that Peru is an ancient country, a nation whose past somehow still animates the present. This belief, which Flores Galindo milked to the last drop in his research on Andean millenarism, was not always part of Peruvian common knowledge. Its spread—at first academic and then massive—dates back to the sixties. It was during those years that the project of studying the country’s history from a viewpoint other than that of the white Creole elite took shape, especially among Marxist historians. Gradually, the attention that had been given to the illustrious gallery of Creole heroes and precursors gave way to the study of indigenous and peasant rebellions that the Creole nationalist approach had ignored. Sooner rather than later, it became evident that the image of the nation forged by traditional historiography essentially reflected the interests of the elites. But Marxism was not the only factor that contributed to this reform of the historiography. If materialist analysis highlighted the relevance of class in order to explain historical processes—so that the independence war, for example, was reinterpreted as a reorganization within the ruling class, or as a transition from overseas colonialism to internal colonialism¹⁷³—anthropology made possible the emergence of the category of “the Andean,” which opened up a space for the different cultural manifestations of the peoples of the highlands. After

¹⁷² Flores Galindo, *Buscando un Inca*, 19.

¹⁷³ See Heraclio Bonilla and Karen Spalding, “La independencia en el Perú: las palabras y los hechos,” in Heraclio Bonilla, ed., *La independencia en el Perú* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1972).

historians perceived the need to incorporate evidence to complement archival work (sometimes to correct its biases and sometimes to fill its gaps), they began to include in their research the study of oral sources as well as the contributions of anthropology. Furnished with new resources and tools, historians could then postulate a fundamental continuity between past and present, the significance of which Pablo Macera summarized as follows: “it is very important to ideologically resuscitate the vanquished of the sixteenth century, but even more important is to rescue—and not only ideologically—the vanquished of the twentieth century. Especially because the two vanquished are one.”¹⁷⁴ For Macera, an intellectual commitment to Peruvian history meant recognizing the *identity* of the exploited over the past five centuries. The time was due to recognize that the two vanquished (the sixteenth-century’s and the twentieth century’s, the remote Inca subject and the equally distant Andean peasant) were one, for the burden of exploitation had merged the two in one.

However one of the most controversial, and perhaps the most vulnerable, aspects of this approach is its tendency to determinism. That is, its inclination to take for granted an almost perennial Andean identity, allegedly deposited in the sources of myth and collective memory. It is an expansion of the perspective of the *longue durée* to the point of leaving no room for individual agency, an expansion that seems to cancel, in advance, any alternative vision of the future.

Vargas Llosa seems to me to understand the shortcomings of such a conception. What is inexplicable, and inconsequential, is that it

¹⁷⁴ Pablo Macera, *Trabajos de historia*, vol. I (Lima: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1977), lvi.

makes of the Andean a culture ontologically incapable of changing. Even if Vargas Llosa's claim about the "metaphysical docility" of the Andean peoples—which, in his account, was inherited from the Incan empire—were true, why should this atavism be intractable? Why need it persist until the end of time? It is somewhat paradoxical that, in rejecting the Andean, Vargas Llosa maintains premises quite similar to those who reserved for it a more positive assessment. Vargas Llosa, like Flores Galindo, identifies the Andean present with the Inca past, but the difference is that, where Flores Galindo sees the possibility of a present revolutionized through the intercession of the past (knowing full well the authoritarian potential of this discourse), Vargas Llosa sees an atavistic burden that prevents the country from reaching the goals of modernity. It is as if he penalized a reality for the image that others had built of it. The pertinent thing to do, in the case of Vargas Llosa, would be to face the task of rebuilding the Andean, so as to overcome the limitations and shortcomings of a paradigm that had ended up carving a static image of Andean. But instead he takes a detour, walking off in search of modern subjects without a past.

CHAPTER FOUR:
EPILOGUE: RESORTING TO CULTURE

To leave! To remain! To return! To depart! The whole social
mechanism fits in these words.

—César Vallejo¹⁷⁵

No one has a spontaneous relationship with his or her culture. That it seems to be the case is, in fact, the result of a hard and patient work of reflection supported by the existence of a suitable language. This has been the fundamental argument of the previous chapters. I set out to analyze the emergence of culture as a topic of discussion and concern in Peruvian literature. I started from the premise that culture, rather than an ontological reality, is a language. In other words: a vocabulary whose semantics permits the invocation of certain entities and the development of certain beliefs. Supported by this premise, we have seen that culture, as a language, has a relatively short history, which does not date back more than two hundred years. That history, the first signs of which appeared during the Enlightenment and the meaning of which emerges with Romanticism, results in the contemporary certainty that culture and personal identity are closely related. In Europe, literature and the arts made envisioning this relationship possible, but disciplines such as history and philology also played a role. In the case of Peru, that link would have not come to light without the contributions of anthropology.

¹⁷⁵ “¡Alejarse! ¡Quedarse! ¡Volver! ¡Partir! Toda la mecánica social cabe en estas palabras.” César Vallejo, “Algo te identifica” (1937).

Before proceeding with this account, it is necessary to pose a question. Is culture the sustenance of personal identity? From what we've seen so far, the answer would be: yes and no. It is, without a doubt, insofar as, for many people in the world, it constitutes a certainty according to which they conduct their lives. That tradition and collectivity influence the way of being of its members—and that those members, therefore, would do well in recognizing and adequately valuing this influence—is a belief that has achieved an exceptional status in the common sense of our time. There are powerful reasons that come in support of this conviction. People are born and grow within a community. Language is a cultural skill. The frame of reference from which people understand reality likewise originates in a tradition. All these facts are indisputable.

But it cannot be argued that culture is the sustenance of personal identity if by this one means that people instinctively think of themselves as members of a culture. The relationship between identity and culture is not “natural.” People did not always think that the language they spoke and the customs they had were constituent elements of their identity. Before this belief could take hold, many things had to happen. First, the belief that people themselves are empowered to think about their fate and that they are free to act according to their own convictions had to be established. This was the revolutionary contribution of the Enlightenment. The goal of the Enlightenment philosophers was to get people to stop acting, as we would say, by inertia. They wanted people to be capable of pausing for a moment to reflect (literally, to make a double flexion: to bend over to

look at themselves). They intuited that people could gain control over their lives if, through an introspective turn, they inspected the contents of their beliefs and the motivation for their actions. It is at this point that the concern for personal identity and the imperative to be authentic arises in modern societies. But something quite curious happened next. With the impetus of Romanticism, this emerging sense of self—spread by the Enlightenment as an ideal to challenge tradition—transcended the boundaries of the individual and spread to the collectivity. Then there were those who decided that, just as they could choose to refuse to follow tradition, they could choose to obey it voluntarily and consciously. Thus, cultural identity represents a late development of the concept of self-determination. Originally applied to individuals, the sovereignty of the will extended its reach into the community and from there to the plurality of communities.

This reflective component changed the naïve relationship that people had previously maintained with their communities of origin. Culture began to be rationalized; traditions, to be invented. So it has been said, rightly, that modern societies are “post-traditional,” because within them traditions are no longer followed as custom, but rather become matters of a molding that is more or less self conscious. In a traditional order, individual choices are already prescribed by a number of precedents set by previous generations. In a post-traditional order, the *new* often appears to the people under the form of precedents set by the elders. The new therefore retains the authority

of tradition; it looks “traditional” but is ultimately an elaboration that reifies and refunctionalizes custom.¹⁷⁶

I do not make these clarifications to invalidate, on a historical basis, the belief that there is a link between culture and personal identity. To say that this link is arbitrary and spurious simply because it did not arise from the community spontaneously would be a grotesque error. Worse yet, it would accommodate the populist myth that culture is necessarily the work of collective actors. What I want to emphasize, rather, is that, in being aware of the language of culture and its history, we can better understand some of the most interesting processes and tenacious paradoxes that have marked modern intellectual history.

In this sense, the case of José María Arguedas is extraordinary. As we have had occasion to see, Arguedas turned the attention of Peruvian literature to Andean culture, refining a poetic of sensibility that enabled him to challenge and revitalize the tradition of Indigenism. Dissatisfied with the white Creole representation of the Indian, Arguedas made of Andean culture a unique way to experience being in the world that—modeled on the aesthetics of Romanticism and the contributions of anthropology—enabled him to place the highland communities in a space closed off from the profane and protected from the advances of the modern world. In his fiction, the Andes are a half of Peru that remains closed. Moreover, Arguedas characterizes the link that unites the members of the Andean

¹⁷⁶ See Anthony Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society,” in Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 56-109.

community as a necessary and immediate relationship through shared sensibility—an indissoluble bond of solidarity. This common essence is manifested in the supernatural power of a landscape, laden with ancestral longing, and in rites such as singing and dancing that allude to the experience of a world in unison. Mario Vargas Llosa astutely observed that, in the Arguedas's narrative, collective subjects (Indians, villagers, *mistis*, *mestizos*) are grouped by their aesthetic sensibilities, thus "making music is a magical operation by means of which the soul of material life is apprehended and communicated."¹⁷⁷ Arguedas's narrative also contains a series of powerful allusions to the persistence of Quechua historical memory that—taken up and systematized by his heirs in the fields of history and social sciences—crystallized in a language that we continue to employ even today. This language allowed for Indians to begin to be thought of in connection with their history, put on the table the question of the currency of the Andean, and showed that material prosperity can be detrimental to cultural traditions. At the same time, however, it could suggest that Indians live tied to their past, that the only way to preserve the integrity of a culture is to maintain archaic relations of domination, and that the only life that the Indians have at their disposal is the life of the community.

Arguedas, I think, was fully aware of the tensions inherent to this culturalist project and acknowledged its limitations. His truncated last novel suggested the new directions that a poetic of sensibility could take in a coastal town like Chimbote, shaken by the contingent

¹⁷⁷ Mario Vargas Llosa, *La utopía arcaica. José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996), 101.

of highland migrants who gradually reshaped the physiognomy of the Peruvian coast and ultimately, of the whole country. Alberto Flores Galindo described very well the impression that *The Fox from Up and the Fox from Down Below* (1971) leaves on the reader: “Chimbote is a huge pot into which all sorts of things have been thrown. One of those soups that fishermen prepare, and it’s boiling and nobody knows exactly what’s going to emerge, or what flavor it will have.”¹⁷⁸ In this final stage of his life, Arguedas expands in a way the reach of Andean sensibility, eventually opening it up to strangers. Sensibility then becomes an individual matter. Faced with the new processes of individuation and sociability, Arguedas perceives that change, the result of choice, is a phenomenon worthy of consideration. Identity itself ceases to function as a rigid designator. The eccentric character of Mad Moncada, for example, likes to dress up: sometimes he is a barefoot fisherman; other times he is “trajeado de elegante” [“dressed as an elegant man”].¹⁷⁹ In Chimbote, people can play at having different identities, but this unusual capacity already presupposes that people are not yoked to an ethics governed by the ideal of authenticity. This has led Guillermo Nugent to remark that, in the new scene proposed by Arguedas, “from compulsive sources of identity and segregation in the past..., traditions become resources of communication in the current struggle by poor citizens.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Alberto Flores Galindo, “Arguedas y la utopía andina,” in *Dos ensayos sobre José María Arguedas* (Lima: SUR Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 1992), 28.

¹⁷⁹ José María Arguedas, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* [1971], ed. Eve-Marie Fell, Colección Archivos (Paris: ALLCA XX, 1991), 168.

¹⁸⁰ Guillermo Nugent, *El conflicto de las sensibilidades. Propuesta para una interpretación y crítica del siglo XX peruano* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de Las Casas - Rimac, 1991), 113 (translation mine).

There is, nevertheless, an aspect that Arguedas's narrative always eludes. I am referring to the capacity to exchange reasons. Let's remember that, in Arguedas's fiction, learning commonly appears as subordinated to the transmission of inherited experience. His characters do not in general use language to learn new things or question the validity of their practices. The Indians of his stories are people who, carried away by the state of trance induced by song and dance, lack individual features. They are a choir. They speak for a community in whose dense network they are immersed. In Arguedas's narratives, each social group is defined by a self-sufficient and closed language that possesses a vocabulary and a sonority of local characteristics. Some seem to speak a perfectly pure Castilian Spanish while others a mestizo Spanish with words of an apparent Quechua origin, Spanish renderings of quechuaisms or vice versa. But there are no interlocutors. The expressive function of language overshadows the communicative function. Since they only exist as sensibilities, opinions and viewpoints are meant to converge or collide. By definition, dialogue is excluded. In inserting discourse into the field of sensibility, Arguedas gains evocative power, but loses the dialogic capacity for conceptual discourse.

Vargas Llosa interrogates this problem in his novel *The Storyteller* (1987). To do so, he uses a sophisticated narrative procedure whereby the practice of storytelling—taken as an emblematic practice of traditional societies—becomes a means of learning. For a romantic imagination (like Arguedas's), the unity of the group lies in oral narration, understood as the vehicle for ensuring the

transmission of collective experience. A community is defined, according to this classical approach, by the currency of all the stories that have accompanied the group since its origins. Vargas Llosa, as we saw, modifies this relationship inasmuch as he puts fiction into circulation as a factor of group cohesion. In his tale of the Machiguenga tribe, the community is not united by the maintaining of what is already known, but rather by the emergence of the new. The storyteller of the novel unites his community not by recounting myths or legends, but by telling fiction. The desire for change is the element—plastic and unpredictable—that creates community; literature is valid not because it portrays a society, but because it adds something to it. Vargas Llosa redefines thusly the relationship between the individual and the community. He gives us, then, a picture of tradition that is very close to a suggestive comment made by Alasdair MacIntyre: “[...] what constitutes a tradition is a conflict of interpretations of that tradition, a conflict which itself has a history susceptible of rival interpretations.”¹⁸¹ More than immobile entities, MacIntyre suggests, traditions are spaces open to discussion. Rather than requiring the passive acceptance of its members, traditions leave room for criticism and disagreement. What MacIntyre asks us to recognize is that, when traditions look resistant to change, it is because they are so conceived. Put another way: the face of a tradition is the result of how people imagine and interpret it, as well as of the multiple versions of those images and interpretations.

¹⁸¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Vol. I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15.

For Arguedas, Andean culture was resistant to change. He committed himself to the task of cultivating this image in a time in which, as we have seen, reflection on Andean culture was still nascent. It would be unfair to ignore the historical relevance of his approach, but at the same time, it cannot be denied that his strengthening of the link between culture and identity through collective sensibility brought with it a series of mystifications and paradoxes that are difficult to resolve. For a long time these conceptual tensions have caused confusion and consternation for writers and intellectuals in Peru. They are constitutive aporias of the language of cultural identity that, in my opinion, can be best understood by analyzing the grammar of this language. The procedure, however, that has most often been used to address these circumstances is the critique of ideology, that is, the kind of social and cultural analysis that correlates scientific assumptions, aesthetic expressions, and simple common sense with the interests of powerful groups. Under the auspices of this approach, it is often argued that the imaginary freezing of the Indian has been a major ideologem (something like a solid nugget of ideology) in the discourse of the Creole elite. The judgment is correct, but it should be noted that its rationale does not in any way express a necessary correlation. The attribution of quietism to the Indian has not been limited to the elites. Many progressive thinkers and intellectuals (Arguedas, to start) adhered to this idea, motivated by aspirations other than that of legitimating an order of domination. In taking for granted that the habit of immobilizing the Indian is an attribute unique to white Creole ideology, one ends up making crude

generalizations. One might end up suggesting, for example, that Arguedas, deep down, was colluding with the hegemonic discourse, or, in an alternative version, was co-opted. Faced with these questionable and disconcerting claims, I found it more productive to emphasize the function of the language of cultural identity and the circumstances in which, due to the slipperiness of its own grammar, it gets out of control.

There is, indeed, a constitutive instability in the vocabulary of cultural authenticity, a tension that becomes dramatically obvious when one examines the elements that Peruvian intellectuals felt that they needed to reconcile in order to create a viable image of Peru. For a long time, white Creole intellectuals considered Andean communities to be a people without history. In view of this, it was natural to think that the appropriate remedy to the prostration and misery of these populations was to modernize the countryside. But as we have seen, this recipe, copied from Europe, proved less and less convincing as the idea that these people were repositories of a culture that linked them with a centuries-long history gained ground. Giving due recognition to the people of the sierra meant recognizing their right to their past. They were not only proletarian peasants; they were the representatives of an ancient culture that, despite its subjugation since the conquest, managed to survive. Their prostration was not only economic, but also cultural. How could the quality of life of these people be improved while recognizing, at the same time, their cultural identity? Arguedas put in place the groundwork of this puzzle, but he did not know how to solve it satisfactorily. Modernization was, for him, the most

disastrous and frightening of all the possible alternatives. As suggested by some of his narratives, principally *All Bloods* (1964), he would rather maintain the servitude regime of the hacienda than acquiesce to modernization. At the other pole of the equation is, of course, Vargas Llosa. But it should be noted that he emphasizes, along with the benefits of modernization, the modern guarantee of individual rights. For Vargas Llosa, traditions (traditions in a post-traditional society, we should add) shelter repressive forces that frustrate the development of the individual. Tradition can be tyrannical. Raising culture up as an anthropological idealization not only harms the material welfare of the people; it ultimately frustrates the people's ability to develop their individual capacities backed by law. In this sense, Vargas Llosa has a point. The problem, of course, is that his characterization only works in the relatively rarefied atmosphere of abstraction. Where Arguedas recharges the substance of culture to the point of rendering it unbearably burdensome, Vargas Llosa makes it so extraordinarily tenuous that it is next to nothing. As in the "Soliloquy of the Individual" (1954), by the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra, Vargas Llosa's subjects only manage to repeat: "I am the Individual." They move forward, cross borders, but do not have time to bury their dead. This description of the social world seems too narrow because it fails to address the way in which people relate to their past.¹⁸² It is worth noting that, in this sense, the two authors often

¹⁸² In fact as, Seyla Benhabib observes, an exaggerated theoretical emphasis often distracts us from the very subtle epistemic and moral negotiations that occur between cultures, within cultures, between individuals, and even within individuals themselves when dealing with discrepancy, ambiguity, discord and conflict. Seyla

come together in the same paradoxes because both write about idealizations or generic types: Arguedas writes about Culture, while Vargas Llosa writes about the Individual.

For years, the Peruvian intellectual scene has been divided into a relentless struggle between these two extremes. Following the lesson of Arguedas, some have thought of the future as the recovery of an impossible instance, fusing what is to come with the remote past of the Inca stones. For others, seeing things from the point of view of Vargas Llosa, history (especially the history of the Inca) has rather represented a burden of totalitarian atavisms.

But outside of these matrices, it is surprising to note that some elements of the language of the Andean culture have managed to forge their own paths in the literary and artistic imagination. The myth of Inkarrí, which Arguedas helped to disseminate, offers an excellent example. The image of the mutilated body looking to recompose itself in order to restore the lost order seems to have inundated popular culture. Julio Ortega puts this body in motion in his tale *Adiós, Ayacucho* (1984), the protagonist of which sets out on a trip to Lima after being burned and maimed by police officers, who accuse him of being a terrorist and take half of his bones away in a plastic bag. “Vine a Lima a recobrar mi cadáver” [“I came to Lima to recover my corpse”] says Canepa before leaving his hometown in search of his remains so that he bury himself.¹⁸³ Gustavo Buntinx, meanwhile, has made many suggestive interpretations of contemporary Peruvian art departing

Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 31.

¹⁸³ Julio Ortega, *Adiós, Ayacucho* [1984], in *Puerta Sechín. Contra la violencia en Perú* (Mexico City: Jorale Editores, 2005), 105.

from the vocabulary of rivers and torrents established by Arguedas. In addressing the artistic depiction of the experience of migration, Buntinx often refers to those landslides that in Peru are called *huaycos*, “the Quechua term alluding to avalanches that descend suddenly from the heights onto the lowlands—Lima, for example—with a regenerative violence that fertilizes the soil while devastating it.”¹⁸⁴ A work by Moiko Yaker, painted on the blanket of a domestic worker, shows three men wearing Inca hats who dream the history of the republic (*Tres cholos durmiendo* [Three cholos sleeping], 1990).

These digressions in the lexicon of Andean culture are an indication, in my opinion, of a process by which some terms of that language are gradually pulling away from the rigid matrices that gave rise to them and adopting new meanings that, many times, openly disagree with their original significance. The language of culture, as Arguedas used it, made culture (Andean culture, specifically) into a source of identity. As I have been saying, this is an association that, for many people in the world today, has the status of incontrovertible evidence. But parallel to this, a tendency to use culture as a resource has also emerged. Culture, George Yúdice notes, “[...] is increasingly wielded as a resource for both sociopolitical and economical amelioration, that is, for increasing participation in this era of waning political involvement.”¹⁸⁵ In virtue of this instrumentalization, it appears that the ethical imperative of cultural authenticity ends up fading in some cases.

¹⁸⁴ Gustavo Buntinx, *Lo impuro y lo contaminado. Pulsiones (neo)barrocas en las rutas de Micromuseo* (Lima: Micromuseo, 2007), 13, note 4.

¹⁸⁵ George Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture: Uses of Culture in the Global Era* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 9.

This is the phenomenon that late-twentieth-century brichero literature emphasizes. “Brichero” is the name given to the gringa hunter of Cusco. It is a character—something of a mestizo picaro—who, using the stereotypes of his ancestral culture, manages to cajole and seduce female tourists. Luis Nieto de Negregori, in his story “In Search of an Inca” (1994), tells the story of an attractive Spanish tourist, significantly named Laura Cristóbal, who travels to Cusco and succumbs to the charms of one of these characters.¹⁸⁶ But even before meeting her lover, Laura has been finding a number of things that hint at the fact that Cusco is not what it used to be: peddlers can be seen everywhere and anthropologists seem to be *too* eager to explain to her the meanderings of the Andean soul. It was then that, “curada de sus inclinaciones antropológicas, de su afán de encontrarse cara a cara con la historia, decidió volver al redil para terminar de conocer el Cusco como una más de la manada de turistas, cámara fotográfica en bandolera y un enjambre de vendedores de chucherías siguiéndola a todas partes” (140) [“cured of her anthropological leanings, of her desire to meet history face to face, she decided to return to the herd to finish her visit to Cusco as one more of the flock of tourists, the camera slung over her shoulder and a swarm of trinket peddlers following her everywhere”]. Laura went looking for an Inca, but it should be noted that, outside of fiction, there were others who did the same.

With the title of his story, Nieto Degregori gives a humorous twist to a celebrated history text whose author was inspired by

¹⁸⁶ Luis Nieto Degregori, “Buscando un Inca,” in *Señores destos reynos* (Lima: Peisa, 1994), 139-143.

Arguedas. In *In Search of an Inca. Identity and Utopia in the Andes* (1994), Alberto Flores Galindo claimed that the element that constituted the identity of the Andean people over the course of five centuries was the messianic belief in the return of the Inca. The story begins in November 1532, when the Spaniards capture Atahualpa, the last of the Inca rulers, and its direction is decided in April of the next year, when the monarch dies, garroted by his captors. Flores Galindo claimed that this tragic episode, etched into the Andean collective memory, triggered a mystification of the pre-conquest past whose echoes can still be heard today. Within the reach of the Indians remained imagination and memory; the alliance of these modest resources matured into a group of mythical stories, such as the so-called Inkarrí cycle, according to which “the Conquest figuratively chopped off the Inca’s head and separated it from his body. When head and body are reunited, the period of disorder, confusion, and darkness that Europeans initiated will end, and Andean people, *runas*, will recover their history.”¹⁸⁷ What is longed for is the memory of an order that the harshness of colonial domination embellished, rendering it just and benign: “A long pre-Columbian history was identified exclusively with the Inca empire, and a world with inequality and oppression was transformed into a homogeneous and just society. The Incas ceased to be a dynasty to become a singular entity, the symbol of an order in which the country belonged to its previous and

¹⁸⁷ Alberto Flores Galindo, *Obras completas. Vol. III: Buscando un Inca: Identidad y utopía en los Andes* [1987] (Lima: SUR Casa de Estudios del Socialismo, 2005), 24. Quoted from Alberto Flores Galindo, *In Search of an Inca: Identity and Utopia in the Andes*, trans. Carlos Aguirre, Charles F. Walker and Willie Hiatt (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.

rightful owners.”¹⁸⁸ This idealization of historical reality found a place among those who—as Inca Garcilaso notes—submitted to the empire “más por el terror de sus armas que por el amor de su gobierno” [“more for the terror of its arms than for the love of its government”].¹⁸⁹ Nieto Degregori’s character uses this kind of “telluric” idealization, but not because he actually believes in it. For him, Andean culture represents an array of resources and opportunities, not a source of identity. In the world of Arguedas, bricheros would have been, if not “cholos leídos,” then definitely outcast and brazen cholos.

The touristic world of Cusco, with its “swarm of trinket vendors” and pisco sours that replace mate de coca (p. 141), seems to be quite far from the primordial reality of the treasures and monuments of the city of the Inca kings. Furthermore, it appears to trivialize that reality. Thinking about phenomena of this type, Néstor García Canclini argues that “What disappears is not so much the goods formerly known as cultured or popular, but rather the claim of some to be self-sufficient universes and that the works produced in each field are uniquely the expression of their creators.”¹⁹⁰ Others, with a more somber tone, wonder if it is legitimate to use culture for personal gain and suggest that culture is in fact distorted when it is instrumentalized and turned into a commodity.

These discussions, as one can imagine, are the order of the day. It is not on us, of course, to settle them here. We can say, however,

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 369; 244.

¹⁸⁹ Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* [1609], vol. 1, ed. Aurelio Miró Quesada (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1985), 210.

¹⁹⁰ Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, revised ed., trans. Christopher L. Chiappari and Silvia L. López (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 5.

that the relationship between cultural patrimony and commerce is but one more instance of the polemic between culture and economy, identity and survival. Philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, Charles Taylor and Martha Nussbaum—to mention only a few—as well as social scientists like Anthony Giddens, Zygmunt Bauman and Aihwa Ong, are notable interlocutors in these discussions. Precarious, no doubt, is the balance of individual and community that can be maintained in contemporary societies. This is largely because the flows of capital and human beings that are provoked on a global scale have removed the landmarks of the old social cartography, where everything had stayed in place. This *de facto* pluralist scenario has revealed just how difficult it is to think of interculturality and the diversity of traditions in the modern world because, as Miguel Giusti has astutely noted, “in order to define a tradition it is necessary to be, so to speak, *inside* and *outside* of it. If we were only on the inside, we would have no perspective in the strict sense, or, worse still, we would have only an ethnocentric perspective. And to adopt a perspective from the outside, we must abandon the parameters of our own tradition, which is forbidden by principle in the model.”¹⁹¹ This disheveled world, where people have to be inside *and* outside, recalls, in a way, the Chimbote of strangers that baffled Arguedas. It makes us think, too, of Vargas Llosa’s nowhere man who finds the opportunity to reinvent himself as a storyteller. Evoking these two cases, we should make one final point before concluding. Culture made its triumphant appearance as a topic of discussion at a

¹⁹¹ Miguel Giusti, *Tras el consenso. Entre la utopía y la nostalgia* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2006), 29-30 (emphasis in original).

late stage of modernity, which corresponds to a post-traditional phase. The term “post-traditional”, as mentioned previously, alludes to the fact that tradition is no longer conceived in traditional terms. This idea is important, for it reveals that, for the last two centuries, culture—more or less consciously and deliberately—has been being used as a resource. The most recognized of these uses has been as a source of identity. Understood thusly, culture has been used to strengthen nationalisms and imperialisms and to spark ethnic conflicts, but also to denounce the civilizing violence of the West and to confront the oppression of colonialism. This is a harvest full of dissimilar and even contradictory crops, it’s true, but in all these cases, the seed was a naïve understanding of the relationship between identity and culture that hid the engineering of its cultivation. This veil of naturalness, at least insofar as it concerns the researcher, can produce illusions and mirages. Perhaps we need to stop naturalizing the link between culture and identity and start thinking, as suggested by the story of the seasoned hunters from Cusco, that the important thing is not that people have a relationship with their tradition, but rather how they are able to think about it.

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