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*Are You Convinced that the Earth is Egg-Shaped?*

## ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the philosophical and political limitations of problems of identity. By investigating the role of difference within fields of identity, this paper reconfigures the otherwise static relationship between metropole and periphery in terms of a non-symmetrical but dynamic movement both between stable and unstable cultures and within these same cultures.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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## ARE YOU CONVINCED THAT THE EARTH IS EGG-SHAPED?

Auschwitz, generally taken to be an adequate or even a final symbol of the evil of mass killing, is in fact only the beginning of knowledge, a hint of the true reckoning with the past still to come.

– Timothy Snyder: “Holocaust: The ignored reality”,  
*The New York review of books*, July 16-August 12,  
2009

### I. PROLEGOMENA TO THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

More than curious, the diverse meaning that the terms ‘identity’ and ‘difference’ undertake in contemporary philosophy and in socio-political formulations is astonishing. In a commentary on Heidegger’s ‘essence of identity’, Virginia Cutrufelli writes: “Identity cannot be revealed to us without difference.... Difference is not but the self-evident side of identity.... Figures of identity transform themselves indefinitely; such as they appear in differences, they can annoy us or help us to understand that neither identity, nor difference exist by themselves.”

The formulations are quite clear by emphasizing the interaction between both concepts. In a more speculative way, we may understand that they act on different levels: if “figures of identity transform themselves indefinitely” and manifest in differences, it is exactly because differences *contain* the dynamics of the relation, while “figures of identity” *display* the result of dynamics.

We don’t intend to discuss the philosophical statement in itself but to face it with the questions usually posed, in the last decades of the western world, of identity. Not long ago, its focus was concentrated on the rights and peculiarities of women. More recently, the question of feminine identity has unfolded into the question of sexual minorities; that, in its turn, stressed the trouble suffered by ethnic minorities. In all these cases, the emphasis does not fall in the interrelation with difference, nor in its dynamics.

The question is rather placed in political terms and the pattern of feminine identity, of sexual, religious or ethnical minorities, exposes itself as someone who denounces and rebels against an invading identity; that, manipulating power and laws, constrains the rights of slaughtered individuals and communities. In short, while for the philosopher identity and difference combine themselves to the complexity forming the human phenomena, for the agency heard in social debates, the kernel of the question lays in the affront to the differences, which can be defeated only by the manifest acknowledgement of non-recognized identities.

Before the antinomy of meanings, one may wonder if they are not explained by the different fields they have in mind. Philosophical discussion is proposed to the quite close circle of academic space; socio-political debates visualize the public assembly instead. However if by any means we are not appeased by describing the distinction – and to describe supposes the practice of “neutrality” – we will be forced to notice that that distinction is as harmful to philosophical reflection, as to political discussion. Why so? Because if one enthralls the attention and the other provokes the emotionalism of their partners, in common they lose, respectively, in efficiency and flexibility. The philosophical discussion loses in efficiency because its dialectical interaction is limited to the professional life of their interlocutors, while the political action is frozen for creating partisans. From this second statement follows a consequence so known and repeated that it has already become anonymous: in social space, the establishment of an identity, wherever it appears, provokes the simultaneous appearance of marginality. So, we could take as a parody of philosophical pride: there is no marginality without the parallel existence of an aggressive and powerful identity.

Since the question is quite delicate, I’ll take what happens in my own country as an example. We are accustomed to praise Brazil because, although colonized by the slave arm, we would not know racial discrimination. It doesn’t hurt the point to say now that this is not quite true. Sure, we have never known the deep prejudice that has tainted American history, but this does not mean that ethnic discrimination is out of our social behavior. At the moment, what concerns us is to think over the question of race in Brazil from a different angle. We recognize that we are a blended nation, or, as it was usual to say some years ago, a hybrid nation. Our identity, therefore, is of an ethnically mixed people. This assertion, although potentially democratic, however, is not enough to prevent problems; i.e., unexpected forms of marginalization and tendentious discrimination. We evoke only two: (a) without being a general and common case, the white man, blond, especially blue eyed, can suffer a surprising discrimination. Since, in fact, this type belongs to the minority and matches with the agents of greater political and economical power, it is not strange that in the environment in which the brown type is

considered synonymous to *brasilidade*; i.e, in economically less well situated sectors of the population or in specific sectors, as show business – the so-called *branco azedo* (sour white) is seen, at least, with a certain dispraise; (b) the second is recent and that maybe the reason why it is not so well known: considering that the black and/or creole population is massively the poorer sector of Brazilian population, from the last years on, the government has adopted a practice already known by American universities: the establishment of a quota for these students. Since they have received an inadequate secondary education and their families were not from a ‘good’ cultural background, most of these students experience greater difficulties in tertiary learning. It would be expected that, on one hand, they reckoned upon the understanding of their professors, and, on the other, they struggled against their impediments. This is not, however, what actually happens. They seem to consider that the easiness they found in getting into the university was a sort of compensation with which the society paid them back for practices against their forebears and themselves. So, if they finish their courses, they will have only finished their courses, and either they will become bad professionals or, thrown off by the labor market, they will continue at the margins.

Although we had developed this reflection in strictly ethnic terms, it has a larger reach. An extremely unique, Brazilian novelist of the nineteenth century (indeed, a remarkable one), was blamed by a prestigious critic, and contemporary, for adopting a *witzig* accent as a consequence of his imitation of the English novel; and, more recently, an internationally famous sociologist of last century, Gilberto Freyre, added that Machado de Assis ignored nature, to such a degree, his novels seemed like houses without windows. Both critics discriminated against the novelist based on a criterion of literary identity, widespread since the romantics, who lived at the time of Brazilian independence (1822). I furnish a short explanation. Considering that, since colonization, we have spoken Portuguese, we were dispossessed of a language of our own; while at beginning of the nineteenth century, to cultivate a national language was considered in Europe a necessary condition to express one’s *Volkgeist*. From there stemmed a terrible consequence: how, then, could a Brazilian literature be displayed? Today, the question would seem a ridiculous one, but, at the first half of the nineteenth century it provoked an inflamed polemic. It would be solved by the intervention of an emigrant French, Ferdinand Denis, who deserves the credit for stressing an aspect that will seem quite irrelevant today: if the Brazilian writer does not possess a personal language, he does have at his disposal a luxurious tropical nature. So the precise description of the sublime tropical landscape would compensate, and quite profitably, for the absence of a language of our own. Denis would have established a real life-saver for the Brazilian writer if his elected *topos* – nature – had not provoked a trouble that, in a certain sense, survives still now: the emphasis on the description of nature provokes a stress on documentalism. This could remain unnoticed during realism and naturalism. But nowadays it is patent that this documentalism actualizes an interdiction against the imagination and, therefore, against fictional writing. If this predicament was not enough, another one appears: the attempt to state a supposed national essence. (It is true that this attempt was not exclusive to Brazil). In short, aside from the difficulties created by the assertion of a supposed Brazilian ethnic type, the *mestizo*, another obstacle appeared: to manifest its nationality, our literature would have to actualize what I, personally, would theorize as the control of the imagination.<sup>ii</sup>

Although these are trivial considerations, I have taken some time on them because they help us to understand the specificity of the question of identity in the field of the humanities. I cannot, however, finish these prolegomena here, for that would make one suppose that I stand against the discussion of the theme itself. How, as someone who belongs to a peripheral nation, could I be opposed to the discussion of political identity!? This would at least be irresponsible, I must add that we support the cause of the most different identities – gender differences, religious, sexual or ethnic ones – with the hope that they act inside certain limits – and establishing these limits is surely a great practical difficulty. Such manifold manifestations of identity are necessary and worth standing while they are tools of political affirmation; stating it explicitly, while they defend the right of same opportunities to different creeds, races or sexual choices.

This being said, we can come closer to the thematization of my proper question. Already the title of this paper insinuates that the roundness of the earth is correct only in physical terms. At the moment, however, when we are accustomed to talk in terms of globalization, it would be useful to be conscious that socio-cultural human condition is exposed to asymmetric possibilities according to its location in time and space. This position conditions a diversity of horizons, and this diversity provokes the need for another preliminary explanation.

## II. CULTURAL CONDITION AND SOCIAL-ECONOMIC FACTORS

*One must take into account that the condition of culture receives the basic interference of social-economic stability or instability of the area in which it occurs, and tends to be altered by it.* The statement does not mean we endorse some kind of economic determinism. To refuse it, however, could not be a reason to defend the

silliness of denying the relevance of the economic factor and, in a minor proportion, of geographic or climatic ones.

As an example of instability – both social and economic – I will look at the area of Quebec. Although we could choose better known examples, I prefer the Quebec one because it allows us to come to an excellent illustration of the point I want to arrive at. In a long interview yielded to Gordon Shepard by the wife of Canadian novelist and dramaturge, Hubert Aquin, a letter he had sent her, a little before he committed suicide, is transcribed:

One does not live in Quebec as one can live in another place – you know better than I. In “stabilized” countries (France, England, United States...) each one can take oneself as his/her own end. Here, the individual and the collective are often mingled: what one does as a personal act has a relevance, a collective meaning and this all the more one is a “personality.”<sup>iii</sup>

When I read the deposition, I had the feeling I read it before. It was not difficult to remember the source of my impression: it is the same difficult expressed by Kafka, in his *Journals*, to free himself from the claws of mammy Prague, in an adherence he recognized not only as something negative. On the contrary, it could even be praiseworthy, as was embedded in Humbert Aquin’s same reason: the indistinctness between the individual decision and the collective effect. (Later, the reflection was celebrated by Gilles Deleuze reflection on property of “*littérature mineure*”):

Die Lebhaftigkeit einer solchen Literatur [he was referring to the Jewish contemporary literature in Warsaw, according to the information he had received from the actor Jizshak Löwy] ist sogar größer als die einer talentreichen, denn da es hier keine Schriftsteller giebt, vor dessen Begabung wenigstens die Mehrzahl der Zweifler zu schweigen hätte, bekommt der literarische Streit in größtem Ausmaß eine wirkliche Berechtigung.<sup>iv</sup>

How could one explain that, as Yanacopoulo had observed, in unstable areas, exclusively individual decisions are much less practicable? An explanation that would include Kafka’s positive reaction before the so-called minor literature would be that the collective insecurity provokes a strong gregarious feeling. We may understand that cities situated inside this unstable area grasp as possessing claws, similarly to what Kafka said *apropos* Prague, since the affective or professional group of reference, threatened by the loss of one of its member, behaves itself as if it had suffered a treason. On another hand, still considering Kafka’s quoted passage, this gregariousness would carry out another intellectual response: since there is not an indisputable talent, the debate of ideas undertakes the character of “a real justification” (“eine wirkliche Berechtigung”). The collective dependence, in short, would well provoke a gregariousness potentially immobilizing, as it would also furnish a concrete dimension to the debates; it would just as well diminish the margin for private decisions as would increase the involvement in the exchange of ideas. Is it probable, however, that this involvement would have the positive trait that Kafka lends it? I guess that we must consider that the quoted passage is fortuitous in his *Tagebuch*, and stemmed from information received from an admired friend. A way to correct the optimism with which Kafka faces the situation of minor literatures would consist in introducing the restriction: the national collectivity is stimulated by prolific debate if an intellectual system already exists; i.e., if the socialization of a set of values (or, in the case here considered, literary values) is already given, taken as properly intellectual. On the contrary, the spark for the discussion may run out other values – political, ethical, religious – and its result provoke passionate, and hardly positive confrontations. We are familiar with this antagonism in Brazil, if not in all Latin America, where gregariousness tends to actualize a corporative spirit, whose motivation aims toward group protection rather than being properly interested in intellectual purposes. One must still add: this gregariousness, corporative or not, seems to explain the restriction, and, therefore, the minor autonomy of the intellectual system. Explicitly, either in its positive sense – surpassing of encyclopedic amateurism - or in a negative sense – the capability reduced to an area progressively more restricted (preventing the expectation to make wide, complex and unexpected connections) – the existence of an intellectual system is probably reduced to the areas which need the political-economic base. This could explain the absence of a visible philosophical restlessness in minor literatures. (I must not generalize the conclusion, but it seems proper to Latin America).

### III. FIRST APPROACH TO OUR HYPOTHESIS

What difference is to be found among members of culturally stable or unstable areas? In more precise terms, what differs in their patterns of socialization?

An immediate reply would be: socialization and consequent interaction for the members of stable areas are characterized by confidence in the efficiency of the existent norms and, therefore, in the internalization of the *frames* valid there.<sup>v</sup> For those pertaining to an unstable area, the effectiveness of norms is all the more in

question the more important its area of actuation is. That is to say, the more earnest the incidence of a norm, the more the norm is submitted to a negotiation in which social position, political prestige and “moral” authority of the agency *against which* the norm is invoked are taken into account. So, the deserving of the norm changes from case to case and its own character of ordering collective conducts sometimes works, sometimes does not work. So the saying spread out in Brazil: this norm “catches or it does not.”

Starting with this distinction, we try to understand that the differences of behavior in different areas in the world are always located (and changeable). That is why our planet is not so round as we were taught. On the contrary, to belong to an unstable area shows specific difficulties of communication and interaction. It results from the fact that the acknowledgment of the rights of the parts in a dispute depends on the identity of his/her social position. That the content of a norm is not socially internalized means that the norm in question is worth according to the share of power of the agency in favor of or against which it is invoked. And this considering only the case in which both partners belong to the same unstable culture. The question becomes more troublesome when one partner belongs to an unstable and the other one to a stable culture. Brazil, for instance, is known as a country that receives foreign people well, at most if the person belongs to the block of stable cultures (countries of Western Europe and United States). We can, however, doubt if this good reception arises from a “mythic” cordiality, as is usually said, or, simply, is due to the reverence previously rendered to someone who one supposes is endowed with a higher *Bildung*. My illations must be heard, however, only as preliminary remarks. Besides, the opposition drawn up to now is too rough.

#### IV. PORTICO OF THE QUESTION: FORMS OF IDENTITY

Up to now, everything seemed to be submitted to a play of dualities and antinomies. A metamorphosis takes place: instead of that play, one is faced now with non-symmetrical couples. The relevance of the observation lays in preventing the receiver from not waiting for an equivalence among the four situations to be examined. Each situation is equivalent only to itself. In order to be at the level of the complexity to be observed, let us start from the supposition that stable and unstable cultures are internally homogenous. This is not, in fact, strictly true; however, it is useful to start by a certain simplification. Besides, we must draw attention to the fact that to be able to take into account the differences of behavior in an asymmetrical world, without the analysis of some specific case, we need to employ the Weberian typical-ideal description.

Two ways of behavior will be immediately foreseeable from the socialization accomplished in a culturally stable area. The first one is chosen by the majority, and is typified by the trend to *automatize* internalized frames in one’s culture. So, for example, what, till the end of the Second World War, was dominant among Frenchmen, nowadays becomes proper of Americans (and not only of American tourists): the firm supposition that anywhere in our world the use of English language will be enough, and that the patterns of behavior and the chart of values will be the same as practiced in their country. The tourism nets answer to the presupposition of their customers and usually offer resorts that duplicate at such a point their criteria of excellence that, if everything works well, at the end of their vacations, the client will have the comfortable feeling that he/she traveled without traveling. From the visited place, it will remain a sort of tamed exotic land: the difference in taste, the moving landscape, something of the accounts told by the guides. The identity of such stable agency is defined by his/her automation. From automation runs the controlling of difference – difference is transformed in sameness, if not into a sort of mesmerism.

Since such duplication is non-exclusive to the typical tourist, often we listen to lectures and interventions of American scholars that could seem rather fitted to his/her native audience, up-to-date with everyday concerns and fashions of some American intellectually legitimized area. So, I have already had the experience of listening to a feminist talking about New Yorker women’s conquests against male prejudices, with the astonishment or the delight of a Brazilian audience; or a comparative expert showing the advantages of cultural studies on his own campus. The version accomplished by these scholars was not discovered by contemporary automatic agents but goes by the presupposition of their forerunners: they take for granted that the audience to which they are speaking knows only some elementary English and is not updated with the most prestigious publications. The role of these agencies would have to be to be diluted in the most banal form by some well established propositions. In short, the confidence in their own norms is actualized before the foreigner under different degrees of *automation*. The search for exoticism, already present in internalized norms, transforms the travel, pasteurized before-hand, into a controlled chance for getting in touch with a space and its “typical” experiences, normally proscribed. For the automatic agent, to climb the Great Wall of China is quite similar to going through the narrow waterways (*igarapés*) of the Amazon River.

Aside from this first form of identity actualized by stable agents an opposite concretization occurs. Either as a result of an ethos in the so-called humanities or of philosophical and/or poetic reflection, or by biographical accidents, the stabilized agent becomes sensible to the usual responses of his/her environment and is now conscious of the meaning of automatism, if not his/her questioner. If sensibility and consciousness develop together, they will tend to be systematized. This, however, does not imply that the agent breaks the links with his/her primary socialization. That is to say, neither by becoming someone strange to his/her environment nor someone whose conduct could be described as one that stayed between Rome and Mecca. This agent goes on belonging to the stabilized culture, although the direction of his/her behavior is quite the opposite of the automatic one. I will take the ethnologist Kurt Nimuendaju (1883 – 1945) as a brief example. German by birth, Curt Unkel, his original name, was born in Jena, and arrived in Brazil as an emigrant, in 1903. Two years later he started his carrier among the Amazon Indians, changing his own name – ‘Nimuendaju’ means, in an Indian idiom, “he who opened his own way.” Even though he came to live among the Indians, dying with them, Nimuendaju-Unkel or simply Nimuendaju, converted his assimilation into a condition by which he became internationally known: as a researcher of the Apinayé, the Timbira, the Tukuna and collector of the myths of Apopukuva-Guarani. When he died, Nimuendaju had published or left as manuscripts more than fifty specialized monographs.<sup>vi</sup> I will consider now another example with which the listener will be acquainted.

In *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), Gustav Aschenbach is a middle-aged writer, famous and at the edge of sterility. His choice of Venice already seems to hold more than the decision to spend his vacation in a sumptuous hotel. On top of that, traveling to Italy has, since Goethe, a special meaning for the German intellectual: Venice is singled out for its mixture of a power of the past and corrupted pomp irrigated by the unhealthy waters of its channels. At first, through his process of seduction provoked by the young Tadzio, Aschenbach still believes that, dyeing his hair, he will be able to interest the teenager. The mask of supposed rejuvenescence is not enough, neither to call Tadzio’s attention, nor to solve the writer internal quarrel between homoerotic fascination and his strict moral code. Informed that a plague rages the city, Aschenbach chooses to remain. To escape would be to entrust himself to the sterility whose threat he felt. So, accepting the challenge of the plague takes on a double connotation, an erotic and a vital one, proving his struggle for life. If the stability, with whose values he had triumphed, as refers either to the honors that the account reports, or his living at the center of Bavarian traditions, the Prinzregentstraße, was not enough to defeat the impotence that he felt, what challenge would better demonstrate his rebellion against the norms that didn’t respect his complexity before erotic identity but confronting death in a face to face relationship? The Dionysian attraction that persecutes Aschenbach would be misunderstood if we interpret it as a sign of aestheticism. Nor would it be the decisive point in Thomas Mann’s obsession in facing the extreme risk, such as will be later presented in *Doktor Faustus* (1947), but in his decision (through Gustav Aschenbach) of fictionally thinking over the homoerotic fascination, repressed by his socialization. In doing so, Mann’s text becomes thick with the *exploration of the limits of norms* that, remaining as his norms, are at the same time put into question. Death corroborates his connection with eros, at the same that it hinders that eros from defeating the internalized norm. One does not deal with a final conformism: *exploration of limits* must not be confused with *exploding limits*.

We have offered here only an example. As a matter of fact, *exploration of limits* can be undertaken in the most different of ways. Even in a large and ambitious work as Nietzsche’s, which endeavors to question all Western metaphysical tradition, the purpose is exploration of limits since exploration is defined by questioning, and questioning implies admission of limits. One must allow, however, that an anarchist movement like Dadaism was not restrained by questioning the limits of art identity, but, indeed, aimed to upset them. But who told us that Dada was embedded in stable conditions? It is not fortuitous that its arrival coincided with the exceptionally unstable moment following the First World War. In the same sense, one must consider the tradition that is opened by Marcel Duchamp when, with his *Fountain* (1917), he shows a chamber-pot as a sculpture. One could not speak here in an unstable moment that would be corroding a stable society. Duchamp shows an extreme case, which had to provoke a specific analysis. Since we cannot do it now, we must only say: the best proof that the distinction between stable and unstable situations supposes an economical basis (not to be mistaken with economic determinism) appears when one recognizes that a stable society may become the take off point for exploding all limits of a cultural field. In Duchamp’s case, this is the field of the plastic arts. So we must add: when socio-economic conditions are joined with the explosive purposes of an agency in conditions that influence all of the nearby fields, we arrive at the negative ideal conditions for the extinction of the field in question. Being impossible to go farther here, we restrain ourselves to state: Duchamp is considered for many art critics as the twentieth century revolutionary artist *par excellence*. I prefer to see him as the *marchand* who promotes its suicide. If we prefer a less polemic argument, we could state that he is the pattern of movements in plastic arts which, under the pretext to continue the negative tradition of the avant-garde, offer objects well adapted to the market.

Also, an area characterized by unstable conditions, first, socio-economic, then, a cultural one, grants two modes of actualization. Each one has the same *sense of direction* to the corresponding one of the stable area. Considering that the unstable situation is characterized by the basic experience of insecurity as to norms and values, its first mode of actualization is disclosed by a tendency toward *imitation of stable patterns*. In his *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno has observed the disappointment of Marxist intellectuals before the students coming from colonized countries: instead of undertaking the expected attitude of rebellion, they were the most pliable to the most conformist directions in the metropolitan culture. “Es wäre schlechte Psychologie, die annähme, das, wovon man ausgeschlossen ist, erwecke nur Haß und Resentiment.”<sup>vii</sup> The imitative tendency trend to increase whenever there appears an economic crisis, such as happened during the decade of 1980 in Latin America. In the same way, the imitative agent panics when the crisis spreads out and seizes societies usually considered stable, and, as a consequence, affects the manifestations of metropolitan culture. This is happening now, since the second semester of 2008. The panic of the imitative agent does not mean, however, that he accomplishes some radical turn. Simply, he appears disoriented and waits to see what is going to happen. Nowadays, maybe the heavier risk is that, if the unstable financial situation in Europe and United States remains, the imitative might adhere to some form of populism that surpasses the political arena and enters also into the cultural scene. We are still in the middle of the wave and cannot yet foresee the next step of the imitative agent. (I don’t dare to guess what is going to happen in the stable areas).

I intend to pass quickly over analyzing the imitative agent since clearly distinguished from the correspondent direction of stable areas (the automaton), the imitative one shows the same sterility. In turn, the correspondent agent to the contrary direction in a stable area, characterized by the *exploration of limits*, drives us toward the greatest precision that we are capable. This is because it seems very difficult for those who have not had enough life experience in both stable and unstable societies to grasp the distinction between *exploration of limits* and what I have been calling *explosion of limits*. Let us try to explain it with a single example. Coming from the same Goethian *Bildungsroman*, that stimulates the identification of the reader with the protagonist, Franz Kafka would ironically invert this confluence and, establishing paradox as his basic procedure, initiate an explosion of the fictional tradition founded on the belief that the common denominator of norms (I mean, the law) has a natural substratum; i.e., is naturally inscribed in the order of things. Therefore the identification of the reader turns against itself and the reader does not therefore understand why in *Der Prozeß (The Trial)* a judicial process loses its face and becomes an instrument to question the very fundament by which courtrooms are constituted. Kafka is not, as we are accustomed to think, the scenarist of the absurd, but someone who plays with the enlightened expectations of his reader; expectations that are transformed in interrogation marks for not corresponding to the world undergone by their protagonists. To explode the limits of art is not to be confused with the banality of declaring that what we call art is merely a question of convention; art or life, sculpture or chamber-pot, Malevich’s *Self-portrait* or Marilyn Monroe’s multiplied image, everything is the same, with designations more influential. If we refuse this triviality, what is the difference between *explosion* and *exploration of limits*? Sure, exploration means a risky crossing, but, in a certain measure, the explorer is supported, since he has at his disposal a tradition with which he may communicate. Questioning metaphysical truth, Nietzsche proceeds from the very statement that he denies. That which he refuses furnishes him a certain condition for the assertion he accomplishes. For he who explodes limits, since living in an unstable area, does not count on a certain basis which could support him/her. This basis could exist but it would not be internalized by the culture of the agent. The absence of a tradition which lends him/her determination against the unpredictable makes him/her feel like floating. As Borges has said: “To be renowned in South America is not ceasing to be an unknown.”<sup>viii</sup> Before a surprising thinker or artist, the reader wonders: who does he follow? And, since he does not receive a positive answer, replies to himself: he is untrustworthy. In short: he who explodes limits needs to be first recognized outside his/her own culture. Only then, a certain margin of appraisal can be open to him/her.

There is no time even for naming the topics I would like to develop. For economy of space, I will attempt examples from two contiguous situations. The first one consists in verifying how he who provokes the explosion of limits needs the acknowledgment that comes from the outside. I will rely on Borges’ example. His first reception in Argentina stressed what was considered his Byzantine style, his searched preciousness, his absence of national feeling – “nobody has less country than Jorge Luis Borges” said one of his critics. So as not to go too far, let us remember what J. C. Portantiero said about him: “Borges is, consciously, the literary provider of an elite, more or less identified with our great farmers (“vacunocracia”).<sup>ix</sup> How was this denial defeated? Borges himself, in an interview at the end of his life, would say precisely, when assigned to Roger Caillois, exiled in Argentina during the Second World War, the reason for the change he received: “Before I was not seen, now I am seen too much.”<sup>x</sup> The second situation consists in surpassing the naïveté of supposing that the block of stable cultures would have a common property to provide the necessary hold for innovative explorations. In his biography of William Faulkner, Jay Parini, notes the impact caused by the translations into French done by Maurice Coindreux, that these “would precipitate a genuine enthusiasm for Faulkner among the French, who

would grant this author canonical status well before critics in the United States ever came closer to such valuation.”<sup>xi</sup> The history of tango and of jazz would show other corroborations, while, in exchange, Jacques Derrida reputation in United States would reverse the direction.

If this approach is convincing, then the question of identity needs an investment that must take into account the different forms undertaken by identity in different parts of our egg-shaped planet. If this is not done, then we will continue with our mutual misunderstanding.

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- <sup>iv</sup> Kafka, F., *Tagebücher (in der Fassung der Handschrift)*, Koch, H.-G., Müller, M. and Pasley, M. (eds.), (Reutlingen: S. Fischer, 1990), 314.
- <sup>v</sup> I employ the term *frame* in the sense developed Erving Goffman in *Frame analysis* (1974). For it we understand the automatized or quasi-automatized combination of gestures, exclamations, corporal posture, a certain accent done to the enunciation of words and stereotyped expressions with which members of a culture or a sector/class of it respond to a total or reasonably standardized situation. Looking for offering an immediate reply to an ordinary situation, it is common that the application of a frame transforms itself in misunderstanding, at most when the partners belong to different cultures or different sectors, classes or geographical regions of the same culture; Goffman, Erving, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization Of Experience*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).
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