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Hector A. Torres
Flight Time Conference

The Disappearance of the Author and Chicana-Chicano Critical Discourse

To compare money with language is...erroneous. Language does not transform ideas, so that the peculiarity of ideas is dissolved and their social character runs alongside them as a separate entity, like prices alongside commodities. Ideas do not exist separately from language. Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue into a foreign language in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy; but the analogy then lies not in language, but in the foreignness of language.
(163)

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*

Paralogízomai, dep. To reckon wrong, misreckon, miscalculate
Paralogismós, false reckoning, a fallacy
Parálogos, beyond calculation, that which is beyond all calculation, an unexpected issue, miscalculation

Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*

Introduction: Notes on a Paralogy

In "Toward a Theory of Minority Discourses,"(1990), Abdul R. JanMohammed and David Lloyd address the complex question of the economy of the author-function as it affects minority writers in multicultural America today. Certainly there are faults in their narrative articulations as there are bound to be in any theory that moves towards a comprehensive grasp of its topic. But there is also much to praise in this work and even more than ten years later we can still learn a lot from it if we can put into practice many of the theoretical protocols they put into narrative. The aim they take on Western humanism and its values of self-interest is especially sharp. Most refreshing is their refusal to see minority discourses, and the subject position in particular, as simply a matter of the affirmation of essence. Their struggle for a theory of minority discourse calls for a dialectical exploration of the subject position minority writers occupy and that preoccupies them today:

The project of systematically articulating the implications of that subject-position—a project of exploring the strengths and weaknesses, the affirmations and negations that are inherent in that position—must be defined as *the* central task of the theory of minority discourse. (9)

The placement of the definite article in italics before the nominal that expresses the essence of their theoretical project already begins to hint at the difficulty of the task. It is to their credit that they ^{exchange} recast questions of ontology into ^{for} questions of practice, no doubt just to dispel this trick of language or the coercions of the dialectic to make their project appear to aim at a definite essence. The dialectic is essential if one is to steer between the essentialist and the non-essentialist implications of the subject-position and therein lie the coercions of the dialectic. In the postmodern condition, even the dialectic is likely to pose an illusion and an allusion to minority writers. This illusion and its attendant allusions, I will argue, stem from a fundamental paralogy accompanying the dialectic at every step of its movements. What I am here calling a paralogy in the dialectic is what Marx articulates as the sheer lack of analogy between language and money. My argument will be that this paralogy or miscalculation is one that belongs to all of us.

Notwithstanding Karl Marx's warning against making analogies between the circulation of money and the expression of ideas in language, apparently neither the warning nor the lack of analogy have been sufficient to keep the analogy from being made. No one less than the founder of modern structural linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, made this error, and today the misanalogy continues to hold currency in the linguistic theory of someone no less than Noam Chomsky. From Saussure's maneuver to turn signification into a species term of linguistic value to Chomsky's formulation of economic principles for the derivation of grammatical sentences, linguistic science has held economic metaphors in high regard. Similarly, today, the fields of literary and cultural studies abound with talk of cultural capital, symbolic exchange, and libidinal economy. However, in the train of Marx's warning against the language to money analogy, Gayatri Spivak is not having any of this talk, or at least as little of it as possible. In "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" Spivak not only repeats Marx's warning but argues specifically ^{ly} against readings of Marx that take use-value, exchange-value, and ultimately, surplus-value, to be in a continuous trajectory. It is these 'continuist' readings, she adduces, that lend themselves to the false analogy between consciousness and labor-power, language and value. Critiquing such continuist readings of Marx, Spivak takes apart Marx's formula in the *Grundrisse* in which Labor, Value, Money, and Capital are conjoined in a chain by the functions of representation and transformation. That is, as Value represents Labor and Money, so Money transforms

both Labor and Money itself into Capital. Spivak deconstructs Marx's function-chain of Labor-Value-Money-Capital not by providing neoclassical alternatives to the labor theory of value but by invoking the name of textuality. "This chain," she states, "is 'textual' in the general sense on at least two counts. The two ends are open, and the unified names of the relationship harbor discontinuities"(158). As Spivak explains, the work of the negative disrupts the functions of representation and transformation, taking their mappings from term to term far beyond their desired destinations. Representation, for instance, far from simply exhibiting the contradictions of money as both particular commodity and universal equivalent, ends up as sign of indifference among human beings caught up in the coercions imposed by capitalist exchange. Similarly, the origin of capital, as Marx is well aware, requires a founding moment, a moment prior to the capitalist mode of production. Such a moment would require a utopianism before the name, a communist estate that has yet to exist. In other words, the yield of abstract human labor would be use-values and exchange values without the medium of circulation, wages, prices, or profits. Somewhere, running around both inside and outside the circuits of exchange, Spivak might say in philosophical language, are materialist subjects super-adequate to themselves, that is, both, owners of their use-values and expropriated from it by Capital. This structural moment in the birth of capital, which Marx must posit as a historical possibility displaces the origin of capital first into a process and ultimately into an open-endedness. In sum, at both ends of the series beginning with Labor and ending with Capital, Spivak finds only indeterminacy and thus little grounds for an analogy between language and money, thought and value, consciousness and labor-power. Indeed, she doubles her critique against such analogizing moves, first by insisting that revolutionary practice finds its rationale in precisely the lack of 'theoretico-teleological justification"(161), and secondly by describing the careless deployment of an economic category such as use-value. It appears that the situation she described at the scene of writing where she wrote "Scattered Speculations" has marked time rather than marched forward:

In the continuist romantic tradition anti-capitalist version, it is precisely the place of use-value (and simple exchange or barter based on use-value) that seems to offer the most secure anchor of social 'value' in a vague way, even as academic economics reduces use-value to mere physical co-efficients. This place can happily accommodate word-processors...as well as independent commodity production (hand-sewn leather sandals), our students' complaints that they read literature for pleasure not interpretation, as well as most of our 'creative' colleagues' amused contempt for criticism beyond the review, and mainstream critics' hostility to 'theory.' (162)

Here, Spivak's essentialist strategy is to place false analogies between linguistic and economic value within continuist readings of the use-value/exchange-value distinction, displaying what little use she has certainly for the continuist tradition, the false analogy, and the variety of ideological effects and practices they sanction as social values. She doesn't linger long over this essentialism as she quickly reiterates her own lack of foundation: "In my reading, on the other hand, it is use-value that puts the entire textual chain of Value into question and thus allows us a glimpse of the possibility that even textualization (which is already in advance upon the control implicit in linguistic or semiotic reductionism) may be no more than a way of holding randomness at bay" (162). Use-value has this unsettling property because it will not stay on the input side of exchange-value but occupies it on the output side as well, which is to say nothing more than that it can never be counted absent from capitalist circulation. This said, Spivak's careful placement of the name 'textualization' in the gap between order and chaos affords her a hinge that could be called a syntax inasmuch as it arranges linguistic and economic value into two incommensurable orders of human experience. If the arrangement holds, ideas will not run alongside language, but will instead keep in line with Marx's warning. In the meantime, language and the economy will indeed run alongside each other in parallel lines, which, if these ever meet again, their bending will end in a gross miscalculation or paralogy.

It is precisely this paralogy, lack of analogy, or outright miscalculation over the independent figures of language and money that I ^{am} would-like to explore ^{ing} today. This exploration seems all the more warranted at a time when the reduction of the self-presence of the Cartesian subject to a grammatical function with a heartbeat is regarded not only with alarm but sometimes with the hostility Spivak speaks about. Roland Barthes' postmodern *énoncé* that the capital A Author died sometime ago continues to be read literally. This is oftentimes done with little regard for what Barthes says about the Scriptor and the Lector, performance in general, or, for me, most surprisingly, the performative contradiction housed in the *énonciation* itself. (If taken with humor rather than horror, the fact that Hannibal Lecter is running around loose, like a subject super-adequate to itself, might be a way to disarm the metaphor of the death of the Author.) Furthermore, when Michel Foucault asks "What is An Author?" the question opens up a gap between *énoncé* and *énonciation* from which issues a linguistic excess that institutes, if it wasn't already an institute, the Author-function. The Author-function spells out neither a literal end for subjects or subjectivity nor threatens writing in any way.

the question of trying/desiring to close the gap
betⁿ ED/ER - reduce arbitrariness

Foucault tells us as much when he correlates the death of God with the disappearance of the human subject:

It is not enough, however, to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared. For the same reason, it is not enough to keep repeating (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died a common death. Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers.

Hence, to read the disappearance of the author as a literal phenomenon that threatens writing is to miscalculate the scope of the performative contradiction and to miss the call for the empirical work of discourse analysis Foucault points to through both *énoncé* and *énonciation*. As far as the scope of the performative contradiction, the competence to utter it banks on the duplicity of postmodern knowledge, or even on that kind of knowledge that elsewhere Foucault calls disqualified. It is perhaps Jean-François Lyotard who best and most explicitly articulates postmodern knowledge as a paralogy present in both positive and hermeneutic knowledge. To be sure, the generation and legitimation of postmodern knowledge does not displace the protocols of scientific method, but neither does it exalt them above other modes of knowledge. Instead, because all forms of knowledge take the form of distinct language games, each of which will have its own mode of legitimation, postmodern knowledge calls for competence in narrativity, in the art of telling stories (1984). For the discourses of science this narrative criterion has increasingly grown in magnitude the more researchers locate themselves in the field of the observer's gaze. No doubt, Western science may be narrativized as just such a series of moves, which ^{reverse} begin with Copernicus and in our time tarry over fractals.

Perhaps it is such a line that Lyotard draws when he describes postmodern science:

Postmodern science—by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, 'fracta,' catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes—is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word *knowledge*, while expressing how such change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown. And it suggests a model of legitimation that has nothing to do with maximized performance, but has as its basis difference understood as paralogy. (60)

in some
times ↓

This description sufficiently accounts for the performative contradiction that declares the death of the Author at the scene of writing. Should we not say in other words that the scope of the performative contradiction is not equipped to satisfy the demand for a perfect marriage between *énoncé* and *énonciation*? The satisfaction of the demand would be on the order of a Christian mystery like the incarnation, as when Saint Paul declares that Christians die to themselves but live unto Christ. Were the same to obtain with respect to the death of Author, being born again would not be a happy outcome since the subject could not be raised anywhere. Hence, why is the description of the death of the Author as a species of postmodern knowledge necessary today at all? After all, the history of the subject's death or disappearance Foucault condenses is a call for a critical discourse analysis.¹ Even if it has not always lived up to its promise, such a critical discourse analysis would keep a sharp eye on the authority of the subject of Western Humanism to pronounce its own self-constitution via the genres of literature, philosophy, history, political economy, and of course, the hard sciences. On this account, the author's disappearance serves as a constant reminder that despite its exposure to the cold play of always already contingent linguistic signifiers, the Author-function is a condition of possibility, even, or especially, as a paralogy. In the face of the double binds of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism, we know for instance that postmodern ethnography has found great value in the concept of irony, as a mode of critiquing the *ethnos* away from the privilege of Western scientificity.

Now, at this point it may appear that I am arguing against someone who does not exist or is not there—a straw subject so to speak. Since I am arguing against literal readings of the author's disappearance, I will now turn to the field of Chicano and Chicana literary and critical discourse as a concrete example, not of the author's disappearance but of the author's paralogy. It is my contention that the Author's paralogy is kin to all of us who work in the fields of minority discourses and that the kinship stems from the confusion of linguistic and economic value.

Chicano and Chicana literary and critical discourse, proclaims critic Rosaura Sánchez, is occupying a historical irony that goes by the name of the postmodern. A declared Marxist and semiotician, Sánchez summarizes this postmodern irony thus: "The questioning and subsequent denial of the subject comes precisely at a moment in history when women and marginalized ethnic minorities are trying to assume their subject status to create a voice for themselves to overturn the 'othering' to which they have been historically subjected" (1987, 6). Sánchez assumes a view of the postmodern that empties it of any possibility for political engagement and she credits this empty reserve to deconstruction. For reasons having to do with deconstruction, postmodernism is overly

disposed to view reality too much as text and therefore does not distinguish enough between discursive and non-discursive reality. In league with deconstruction, postmodernism takes political aim at nothing and hits it. On her account of the postmodern, Chicano and Chicana literary production "...is far from postmodernist, as this is a literature marked by historicity, wherein representation is not problematic" (19). Except for a few works here and there, Chicano and Chicana literary production contests postmodernism as the cultural dominant of Anglo-American letters and criticism, asserts Sánchez. And as for those works that display features of the postmodern, these do not fare well under her scrutiny because they display politically and aesthetically "...a contradictory combination of modernist and postmodernist notions" (9). Interestingly, for some historians of the postmodern such as Andreas Huyssen and Charles Jencks, these sites of contradictions between modernism and postmodernism are where the latter finds its potential for political engagement. Moreover, in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, it is just such a contradictory relation between modernism and postmodernism that David Harvey describes: "Eschewing the idea of progress, postmodernism abandons all sense of historical continuity and memory, while simultaneously developing an incredible ability to plunder history and absorb whatever it finds there as some aspect of the present" (1990, 54). Inasmuch as this holds true for a vast array of Chicano and Chicana literary texts, as I maintain, it is their plundering of history that also lends them their political and aesthetic value. The absence of a patronage system, inherited money, or a rentier culture, such as supported modernist writers, Chicana and Chicano writers exploit the value of the author-function in order to enter their literary productions into the market of exchange, which is to say quite simply that they want to make a living through the social act of writing..² I think it is fair to say that this is not just a matter of how much or how little history enters their works, but what *works* in the postmodern. But perhaps the question of modernism and postmodernism is an old one and so in repeating it here I—we—experience a lag time. But if there is lag time, then there is also a resistance. This lag time and resistance are what define for me the postmodern irony Sánchez decries. For instance, it is not at all clear to me that the mark of historicity in Chicano/Chicana literary discourses implies that representation is unproblematic. More than one critic of this American variety of literature has addressed its vast concern with history but not simply to declare it as an unproblematic turn or trope. On the premise that history and representation are unproblematic for Chicano-Chicana literary discourses, Sánchez's argument fails to distribute a middle term, namely language itself. Bearing in mind the lack of analogy between language and money, this is like saying that the exchange of commodities needs no universal equivalent. Here, we

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should recall however that none other than Saussure exploits this lack of analogy just so as to illustrate the mediating function of *langue* in the exchange of all *paroles*.

Saussure conceives of signification in general and linguistic value in particular in economic terms. The systems of *langue* allow not only like things such as words to be compared and exchanged, but equally, unlike things like words and ideas are also subject to such circuits of comparison and exchange (115). Based on the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, this displacement and replacement potential of *langue* has manifold implications. One of these concerns the status of concepts, which in *langue*, are never already formed and thus never the source of *a priori* value. Every piece of linguistic datum Saussure adduces points to one incontrovertible fact:

Instead of pre-existing ideas then, we find in all the foregoing examples values emanating from the system. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the systems. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not (117).

Before the close of chapter IV in the *Cours*, Saussure reverses the polarity of this insight into a positive value, but at this level of the argument it is clear that no representation of concepts can be conceived of as unproblematic. The mediations *langue* promotes at the speed of thought into conceptual equivalences in the exchange of *paroles* are not the sites of actual correspondences between the signifiers of latter with the signifieds of the former. While it's already a repetition to say that the mediations of value emanate from no fixed center in the system and are not the sites of stable correspondences between sound and thought, the mediations *langue* promotes into conceptual equivalences can be said to have the functional utility of theoretical fictions. Indeed, it is as a theoretical fiction that Spivak reads use-value in relation to exchange value in her scattered speculations on value in general. Perhaps it is the functional utility or use-value of these theoretical fictions that seduce us into the paralogy that the exchanges of *paroles* and the exchange of commodities are of the same order. It is easy to mistake these mediations for the process of commodity exchanges inasmuch as the computation of equivalence is accomplished in the head, as Marx say of commodities "...in one stroke" (*Grundrisse* 144). But then just as quickly can crises come about in both orders of experience. Witness the recent economic collapse of Argentina when it tried to fix the economic fate of its peso to the dollar.

Kant

And in effect my disagreement with Sánchez has to do with the relative lack of value her Marxist semiotic model places on Chicano and Chicana literary discourse that don't buy into a stable concept of history. However, that the concept of history has to be constructed is an ideological value upon which both linguistic and Marxist structuralism appear to collude. In *Reading Capital*, Louis Althusser stresses the necessity of constructing the concept of history: "... it is essential to construct the concepts of the different historical times which are never given in the ideological obviousness of the continuity of time ... but must be constructed out of the differential nature and differential articulations of their objects in the structure of the whole" (1997, 103). Running around this concept of historical time is Althusser's desire to make of historical materialism a scientific discourse. Ironically, the value he places on a such a theoretical practice leads him to skirt dangerously close to the Hegelian conception of time, for him, ideological in all respects and to be differentiated from the would-be-science of structural Marxism. When Althusser speaks of a *coupe d'essence* or essential ^{cut} section, he is picking on those properties of Hegelianism that stabilize the concept of history into a spiritual unity and totality. To make a vertical cut across this conception of time is to bring to the light how everything relates to everything else: "the Hegelian whole has a type of unity in which each element of the whole, whether material or economic determination, a political institution or a religious, artistic or philosophic form is never more than the presence of the concept with itself at a historically determined moment" (95). It is in this light that one might say that Sánchez's conception of history and representation as unproblematic *at any time* is closer to Hegel than to Marx. If Sánchez stabilizes the concept of historical time along Hegelian, ^{it is} it is against the best insights of semiotic science stretching from Saussure to A.J. Greimas. Simultaneously, it is not altogether clear whether Althusser did not himself also stabilize the concept in his search for a theoretical practice that would convert the Hegelian spirit into scientific historical materialism. Line

In the same year that Sánchez's essay proclaims this postmodern irony for Chicano and Chicana literature, José David Saldívar echoes similar sentiments:

It seems a bit ironic that just when all of these mainstream critics are talking about the end of the subject...that we should have Chicanos, people of color, and feminists, finally beginning to see themselves as subjects, as capable of action instead of just being acted upon...It may not be a coincidence that mainstream critics are talking about the end of the subject just when those people who have been cut off from power become aware of their potential role—as subjects—within the historical moment. (132 Interview with A. Chabram)

While Saldívar might not play as easy as Sánchez with such terms as ‘reality,’ ‘history,’ ‘representation,’ the conspiratorial tone of the sentence over the postmodern is disturbing. I agree that the postmodern houses an irony for Chicano and Chicana writers, but I do not believe that mainstream critics are pronouncing the death of the subject because minority discourses are on the rise or as a matter of conspiracy. It’s not just that since Nietzsche the categories of cause and effect have been a problem to the extreme, but that it is equally problematic whether Chicano and Chicana subjects have ever just simply been acted upon. At the risk of hyperbole, or worse, shocking you, I would say that without the collective labor of *mexicanos* and *mexicanas*, the United States could not be what it is today. On the back of this hyperbole, it may not be too much of a stretch to say that collective labor requires no unique individual subjective substance, what Nietzsche critiques under the name of a subject-in-itself. Exposing the subject-in-itself as a fictitious fund for those concepts we value or reify the most—truth, morality, cause, etc—Nietzsche does not denote it nihilism pure and simple:

All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore devaluated the world—all these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination—and they have been falsely *projected* into the essence of things. What we find here is still the *hyperbolic naiveté* of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things (WTP 13-14).

It is not immaterial that Nietzsche is here referring to European nihilism at his scene of writing, since it would account for the talk of mainstream critics concerned with the Author’s disappearance. Indeed, the utility criterion Nietzsche deploys admits of no exceptions to the proposition that the world is founded on interpretation all the way down.³ His revaluation of all values would solicit the epistemology of any critic, mainstream or not. In enunciating that interpretation springs from a utility function, Nietzsche reminds us not to confuse the stimuli of our nerve endings for truth precisely because there is no true world. Interpretation serves our human need for “...a narrower, abbreviated, simplified world” (15). Herein, Nietzsche establishes the use-value of interpretations of the world and offers them to us wholesale. In the light of the paralogy against which Marx warns and for which Spivak has little use, Nietzsche’s own interpretation of Western philosophy would occupy a position similar to the one use-

transvaluation
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value occupies *vis-à-vis* the market economy. This is in part the credit Spivak gives to her reading of use-value:

For use-value...is both outside and inside the system of value-determinations. It is outside because it cannot be measured by the labor theory of value—it is outside the circuit of exchange...It is, however, not *altogether* outside the circuit of exchange. Exchange-value...is also a superfluity or parasite of use-value” (162).

At one and the same time, Nietzsche’s revaluation would be a superordinate category for all interpretations of the world and a subordinate one inasmuch as it is one other, or one more interpretation. It is in this light that I disagree with Saldívar and Sánchez that the postmodern condition is ironic for Chicano and Chicana writers to a useless degree on the one hand, or that on the other hand, the ‘othering’ Mexican people in general have experienced in the United States has made them the objects of unilateral domination. As a collective force, in the absence of unified subject positions, both on the inside and outside of the border separating Mexico ^{and} from the United States, Mexicans have not simply interpreted the United States or just been acted upon by it but have continually changed it, both in terms of the *Grundlage* and the *Überbau*.⁴ I have in mind here the ranching knowledge which the Texas Mexican *vaquero* passed on to the so called Anglo cowboy, the knowledge of *acequia* culture so called Hispanos in New Mexico passed onto white settlers, and generally the free rent squatters enjoyed for some time in California after 1848. These events are not immaterial because they fed the specific modes of production in what would come to be named the American Southwest in both synchronic and diachronic scales. From an Althusserian conception of historical time, these events cannot be reduced to a mere sequence of events, , *à l’événementiel* (RC 108). The essential cut or section in historical time of which Althusser speaks, for all its Hegelian impossibility, would here reveal the need to theorize just how much these events as determinations in the formation of the United States continue to feed the modes of production today. If not, it would at least show up the need to theorize Chicano and Chicana history and historiography in a different light, not to say in the light of deconstruction’s differance.

To conclude, I point to the struggles of Jacques Derrida to spell out the non-concept differance because it seems to me that his non-concept is our best effort to dupe the dialectic into reckoning with the empty funds of essentialism. That ability to think this region of our consciousness can have immediate implications for us. Inasmuch as

differance serves no kingdom, it can also expose the interests we invest in our subject-positions, helping us to put into practice the normative Marxist ideal of critique and, more importantly, self-critique. It is the difficulty of the task that leads Derrida to spell out difference with a graphematic <a> to remind us of the erasure mark hovering over our most cathected lexemes. The erasure of concepts has on more than one occasion led Derrida to speak of the social act of writing in the postmodern condition as a matter of strategy and economy. Is there a lag time effect in repeating that this is a paralogy?