

Magical History

What's Left of Chavez?

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(to the memory of Yolanda Salas)

Given the polarization of debate around the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela led by Hugo Chavez, discussing any aspect of his regime is entering a mine field. Both in Venezuela and overseas, it is hard to talk about Chavez without falling or being pushed into one of the opposite extremes. Particularly among Venezuelans—but also among those who follow Venezuelan events closely---it is easy for partial political differences of opinion to be construed as total personal ontological differences , for emotions to replace reasons, or to descend to ad hominum disqualifications in terms of political convenience, moral inferiority, crass material interests, or simply cognitive dysfunction.

For those of who may not be familiar with this debate, I'll start this discussion by presenting briefly the two extreme views; although they may seem to be exaggerated caricatures, they in fact capture the basic outlines of the two polar

positions:

From one pole, the Bolivarian Revolution is as a radical revolution, an innovative process of fundamental historical change that is transforming Venezuela--bringing well being to the majority of Venezuelans, deepening democracy, integrating Latin America, and countering imperialism. The country is developing a nationalist energy policy and the economy is healthy and growing. Petroleum is now for the benefit of Venezuelans. Chavez is a world historical leader, a veritable comandante, a redeemer, Bolivar incarnate.

From the other, the Bolivarian revolution is a fake, a revolution travesti, more of the same, a change of elites, the boliguersia replacing the old bourgeoisie, a bunch of pillos (thugs). The oil policy is a disaster, a collapse of oil prices would lead not only to the collapse of the government but of the whole economy; Venezuela imports 75% of its food, and is able to produce less and less of everything, including oil. Chavez is a new version of the old populism, a new Peron, Vargas, or Velasco Alvarado, a charlatan, the coward of the 1992, not a comandante, but a mico-mandante--a monkey that rules.

As Venezuelan cultural critic Yolanda Salas often commented, these clashing images are specular, mirror images of each other that share the same

assumptions and manichean structure. Although moving to the middle, away from these extreme caricatures is perhaps the beginning of wisdom, it is not a matter of shifting from Black or White to gray, or from Red or Blue to any other one color, but of breaking out from this Manichean, fundamentalist framework. In brief, the point is not to see gray, but to grasp the vibrant colors of a complex reality; if we are to find any truths, we must seek them in life's rich complexity—and often, through significant details.

I have called this talk Magical history in part to explore what's happening to "history" in Venezuela under the Chavez state-- a state that is being increasingly defined as yet another manifestation of what I examined as the "magical state." For instance, in an article published last summer titled "The New Debut of the Magical State," the respected Venezuelan historian Margarita Lopez Maya, objecting to the concentration of power in the person of Chavez, argued in that article that the Magical state, provides a template or a model for understanding transformation of the Chavista state. She argued that one could see the Chavez regime in the mirror offered by the rule of Gomez, Perez Jimenez, and above all, Carlos Andres Perez. Many others have made a similar point.

In that article Lopez Maya noted that in talk I gave at the Central University as part of a conference on the decolonization of knowledge, I had recounted my

own struggle to understand Venezuelan society and to develop categories that fit its distinctive reality. I explained then that the notion of the magical state was inspired by Jose Ignacio Cabrujas, a brilliant Venezuelan playwright and public intellectual, more free from the prison house of Eurocentric social scientific categories.

While most social scientists typically discussed the Venezuelan state in terms of categories developed to interpret the state of advanced metropolitan nations---or as underdeveloped versions of these nations---Cabrujas managed to address its fundamental reality. He argued that the state in Venezuela, thanks to the nation's oil wealth, came to be personified in the figure of the president as a magnificent sorcerer. As a magician performing tricks of prestidigitation, the president in Venezuela brings realities out of hat---cosmogonies, factories, freeways, constitutions.

In *The Magical State* I develop this insight, expanding it into a critique of social theory, including marxist analysis of Latin America, centrally focused on the relationship between capital and labor, and forgetful of land, the third element of what Marx called the secret of capitalist society, the Trinity Form: of course, by "land" Marx meant not just land, but all the powers of nature. In the case of Venezuela, land is the foundation of both the Venezuelan state and Venezuelan

society. It is also the foundation of the powers of these magical presidents.

As I argue in *The Magical State*, forgetting land obscures the dynamics not just of Venezuela, but of societies of the South, built so much not just on the exploitation of labor power, but also of nature, not just on the extraction of value, but of riches. Of course, this forgetting or erasure of "land" in Venezuela makes this invisibility of nature particularly visible.

The notion of magical state also builds on notions of fetishism, Marx and charisma, however. It suggests not just a one way, top down flow, but a dynamics interaction: a mutual construction. Charisma entails a charismatic community that confers charisma to the leader. Similarly, the notion of magic suggests trickery, but also the real power of unseen forces. It is this complex formation I seek to analyze in *The Magical State*.

With Margarita Lopez, I believe that Chavez is a magical state, perhaps the most magical of all, and he is the most magical of our presidents. But I think there is a difference. And I think this difference has to do with the kind of history that Chavez is trying to produce. I want to explore this in fact by examining Chavez's relationship to history, understood in its double as words and as happenings.

The inspiring idea for this talk, in fact started from a detail. Last week I read an

article in the Venezuelan newspaper Tal Cual about a meeting with Chavez and leaders of the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). One sentence jumped at me: he told these leaders that they should be disciplined and forget personal projects and vices-- that they should not like whisky, but be ready to die for the nation. I found this juxtaposition remarkable, this bringing together the demand that they don't drink whisky, and be ready to die for the nation.

For those not familiar with Venezuela, Venezuela is the first consumer of whisky per capita in the world. Under Chavez regime, it has become quite common for leaders not just to drink the already expensive 12 years old whisky, but also the much costlier 18 years old. What Chavez demanded from his leaders was something that everyone knew was not possible—not that people would be ready to die for the nation, because this was imaginable, but that they would not stop drinking whisky. Yet, people accepted this and applauded Chavez. What to make of this disjuncture between what Chavez says and what is, between representations and reality? Even if we accept that people understood “whisky” as a general metaphor for vices, and “dying” for the nation as a metaphor for working hard for the nation, what to make of this manner of presenting alternative codes of revolutionary conduct?

Why Magical history then? I've chosen this title....

Today I want to reflect a bit about this relationship between words and world by focusing on what has happened to History in Venezuela not just under Chavez but through his mouth.

My focus today will be limited. While I'm concerned with history as a cosmology, with ideologies of histories, today I want to explore one aspect noted commonly and constantly in Venezuela but seldom analyzed: not just what Chavez says, but the fact of his saying it and his saying it so repeatedly. I want to explore what seems his formidable verbal production, for some his extraordinary pedagogic presidency, for others his verbal incontinency or verborrea--his production or overproduction of history through words. How does this proliferation of words relate to the transformation of the world?

For those who are unfamiliar with Venezuela let me just say that Chavez speaks publicly a lot, as far as I know, more than any political leader on earth, ever. According to those who like to count count, he speaks an average of 40 hours a week, a full time job. He has spoken now for more than year continuously, 24 hours a day. He does not hold regular cabinet meetings, like previous president, where technical reports are presented and discussed carefully and in private; his method is to convoke the nation to weekly meeting, his also president, where

policies are defined and proclaimed--sessions which have no time limits--one knows when they start, but not when they end--some last more than seven hours.

What does all this talking mean? What's is this production or overproduction of words about? How does his narration of history relate to the making or changing of history?. I'm going to explore this by focusing on seven themes or ideas , seven steps towards understanding Chavez's world of words, his making of history and his narrative of History. This is highly exploratory, and I want to benefit form your presence here for comments and suggestions.

Ok, these are the steps--steps to understand the difference within continuity of Chavez's magical state.

1. What comes out of the the Magicians Hat is now different: not elements of history, but History itself. And it is a history not for the whole nation, but for part of it.. A radicalization of the narrative of History itself: what comes out of a hat is not cars, factories, hospitals, schools, or even a cosmogoy, but history itself, a different history.

If one examines Venezuelan history from Gomez to Caldera, one finds a

remarkable continuity in the content of the modernization project. The means were different, but the content was similar.

Previous presidents sought to modernize the nation by various means. Juan Vicente Gomez during the first quarter of the 20th century, by pacifying the nation and ruling like a private hacienda. General Perez Jimenez, in the mid twentieth century, by means of a “revolution in the physical geography”—freeways, hotels, petrochemicals (Venezuelans keep talking about this golden period of physical achievements and social peace, there is nostalgia for this period.)_ Carlos Andres Perez One, by means of grandiose industrial plans, as with the “Great Venezuela,” and Carlos Andres Perez Two, through the “Great Turn Around, breaking through the illusion of the state-led development and proclaiming as real the illusion of market-led modernization.

With Chavez, it is different. It is a matter of qualitatively changing Venezuela—it is not just more “development,” or more modernity, but a different kind of development and modernity. If other presidents, to use Cabrujas’s imagery, would bring progress to Venezuela out of a hat, Chavez claims to bring out a different Venezuela out of a hat. This change, I think, requires an overproduction of words—a framing to explain particular changes within a general scheme.

(As I argue in the Magical state, Not true that Siglo XX started with the death of Gomez, as mariano picon salas argued. This myth made Cabrujas himself focus on Perez Jimenez and Carlos Andres. But they build on the foundations established by Gomez--. Two aspects: the foundations, the petrostate. But another I haven't explored in the Magical state: regime, but the opposition--a sort of perverse dialectic. Gomez created the conditions for imagining the struggle of all against one man. . Betancourt: a class alliance, defeating those who believed that divisions were essential.

(This notion perseveres---Trienio was sectarian, it sought to present its a revolutionary, but its ontologization of history was partial--it was a partial rupture, it drew a lot from the past, it was not moral or historical epic battle: it was the displacement of a ruling sector by another, not the annihilation: both were fighting for a similar conceptino of modernity.

Chavez in many respects, as many have noted, is a repetition of 1945: the eruption into the stage of Venezuelan history of the masses and new leaders who represent them; similar reaction of the ruling elite, similar disdain. Las negritas who greeted Chavez in 1998 reminded AD leaders of the negritas who greeted the Junta in 1945 or Gallegos in 47,.)

But this history is also not for all. Since Gomez, the nation that was produced by

the state was more or less inclusive; in principle, it was for all Venezuelans.

Despite its fractures and differences, the relative small size of Venezuela's population, its limited ethnic divisions, and social differences made it possible to imagine a historical project for a whole nation--and this of course was part of the genius of Betancourt against marxists who argued for social divisions.

Today we have a fractured Venezuela: Chavez offers to this Venezuela a History that recognizes this profound division: the division of history and before and after entails also a division of venezuelan society: a history for the majority, not for all. Profound sense of exclusion from this history of many sectors--if they are not with chavez, they are not only of the government, but of history. The virulence of the opposition against Chavez cannot be explained simply by the exclusion of a sector from positions of privilege; particularly for the large middle classes, for whom this privilege has been reduced anyway, the virulence is explained by a loss of identity, of a sense of place in society, the fear that the future won't belong to them.

The creation of this narrative of history, particularly because it ruptures an old hegemonic conception, requires constant narration.

2. . The intensified personalization of the state. The state is Chavez. The

Venezuelan petro state has always led to the personalization of political power in the office of the president. But with Chavez this situation has become even more intense. Five factors contribute to this: first, the breakdown of institutional mediations, including political parties, that had constrained in the past the extraordinary power of presidents; second, the 1999 constitution, that concentrates further of powers in the figure of the president; third, the extraordinary financial resources of the state resulting from this new oil boom and the clientelistic structures it has created; fourth, the control of all the branches of the state by Chavistas, and fifth, the very uncertainty of a new political landscape with undefined historical horizons. These factors create a combination of monopoly of power and "programmatic or ideological vacuum" that must be filled. Chavez fills it not just with actions, but mostly with words.

IN the United States George Bush claims he is, as he says, "the decider;" everyone knows that he is not; it is known that decisions come from Cheney, the Pentagon, the energy and military industrial complex, that decides. In Venezuela Chavez claims he is a soldier of the revolution, a *brizán de paja en el viento*. But we know that Chavez is the decider. The point of the comparison is not compare two men, but two situations: in the USA there are entrenched interests, institutions, organizations, that decide policies. In Venezuela, in the context of a dissolution of institutions, it is Chavez who fills the gap.

Chavez often says he is just the soldier of the revolution, he also presents himself as the indispensable agent of the revolution, as the embodiment of the spirit of Bolivar, of Christ, of History, and as such, as the person who makes the fundamental decisions. Let me give you two examples, or rather, let me ask you a question that I like to ask Venezuelans. I once asked Teodoro How did venezuela become socialist in this participatory democracy? Was there public discussion? Teodoro didn't know. ((please if I've asked you now, don't respond)).

It was in 2005, in Porto Alegre, in a moment of personal illumination akin to Galileo's Eureka, an intimate, private moment without public discussion, Chavez decided that Bolivarianism was insufficient as guiding ideology of his revolution, that "the third way" was no way at all, and that Venezuela should march towards socialism. And he decided this by himself. Let me quote him: Bueno, ¿qué produjo todo esto? (his acceptance of socialism) El Golpe del 2002, paro patronal, sabotaje petrolero, contragolpe, discusiones y lecturas. Llegué a la conclusión –asumo la responsabilidad porque no lo discutí con nadie al hacerlo público en el Foro Social Mundial de Porto Alegre– que el único camino para salir de la pobreza es el socialismo. Well, what produced all of this? (he means, his acceptance of socialism rather than bolivarianism and the third way). The coup of 2002, the business lock out, the oil sabotage, the countercoup,

discussions and readings. I arrived at the conclusion—I assume the responsibility because I didn't not discuss it with anyone when I announced this publicly in the Porto Alegre Forum—socialism is the only way to overcome poverty.

Second example: he was proud that the articles of the Constitution Reform were the product of his own mind, as he said, written in secret by his puno y letra.

This personalization of the state can lead to silence or to words. In the case of Gomez, who wanted to rule the country by turning it into an hacienda, it led to silence; silence worked well. His Ujim, his looks, were enough. Skkurski has analyzed this as a "hacienda model of rule," one defined by established practices, what Bourdieu would call habitus or doxa. Against Gomez's orthodoxy, the generation of 28 proposed a heterodoxy that shared some of its basic principles: the centrality of the petroleum state, the need to sow the petroleum (a formulation produced at the end of the Gomez period by USIar). For Accion Democrtica, sowing the oil was diversifying the economy and creating a welfare state. For Perez Jimenez, it was a revolution in the physical geography: bring modernity as a blueprint already existing.

When the basic picture of the future is given, as with Gomez, Perez Jimenez, or

AD, words may be used, they are not indispensable to define reality. But in the case of Chavez, words are indispensable. The question is not to bring to Venezuela a familiar modernity, but to create a new modernity. Chavez has to provide a frame for this: constant narrative to give meaning to all that happens. Each event is a battle in history. And because he is the decider, he is the one who has to give meaning to history. Because the revolution is from above, he has to define it--he cannot rely on collective definitions. Overproduction of words.

3. A Rhetorical, nominalist revolution: it is not just that words are produced as part of the revolution, but that words produce the revolution. To the extent that Chavez IS the revolution, there is really no social revolution or a limited social revolution, for revolution, by most understandings of this concept, involves collective action and transformation. In the case of Venezuela, the revolution is verbal before it is social, it is anticipatory--the narrative of revolution prefigures or perhaps even replaces revolutionary transformations. In the context of limited historical transformation, the production of a new history requires an overproduction of words: particular events require a verbal framing which make them meaningful as radical events by being placed within a narrative of a revolutionary history. The very name of the nation has been changed: Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela—the national symbols have been redrawn. Now the

flag has a new star. In our “escudo nacional,” the white horse runs towards the left.

So, rather than the silences of Gomez, or the revolution of the physical geography of Marcos Perez Jimenez, or the Great Venezuela of Perez, that combined words and actions, we have a Bolivarian or Socialist revolution that alone is defining. IN the previous cases, there was a concern to make a fit between the dictates of the state and reality; in the case of Chavez, there is a concern to make the statements of the state DEFINE reality. Chavez is always giving content to reality by complementing actions or events with words.

It is not that there are no changes, but that changes, however limited or grand, cannot match what is expected of them, the historical work they seek to produce: the transformation of Venezuelan society and people. To do this, they have to be differentiated from changes inscribed before the previous scheme of modernization, and placed as part of a historical break: from the production of lettuce in farms in the heart of Caracas to joint oil ventures with transnational capital in the oil industry, Chavez has to present events as revolutionary, inscribe them within larger narrative, lift them out of ordinary context and present them as part of epic.

4, The redefinition of the relationship between Civilization versus Barbarism.

This dichotomy, in its multiple articulations, has been a building scheme of Venezuela and Latin American nations. For the opposition, even taking into account a global crisis in projects of modernity, modern civilization is still imagined as what metropolitan centers have already achieved; barbarism, on the other hand, is identified with our traditional past, a primitive past that now Chavez incarnates.

Let's go to history, to an instant which captured this tension and has become a turning point in this redefinition.

Barrios. Colonial allegory. Model of civilization. Tell here the Barrio's allegory, 1989...

For Chavez, in contrast, civilization stands for a non-existing order, a future socialist society to be created, without precedents or models on earth—socialism of the 21 century. Barbarism is located not in the past, but in the present—in the savagery and selfishness of neoliberal capitalism. The issue for Chavez is not just modernity, but justice: justice for the many who have suffered at the hands of the few. He has inverted the discourse of barbarism and civilization. But since this was such a hegemonic discourse, he has to produce it through constant

repetition, through its overproduction.

he previous discourse civilization and barbarism dichotomy assumed a transcending through harmony--Santos Luzardo and Marisela. la raza cosmica of Vasconcelos, the discourse of mestizaje.

Always in battle. A cosmic battle: national and global, personal and collective, natural and social: against the soul, against selfishness as much as against Bush and the war in Iraq. An ontologization of history, history as cosmic and personal at once. Bush, sulfur, Chavez cojones.:

Chavez has intensified. Sulfur, cojones. A world divided between good and evil. Not unlike president Bush. These are not just words. Opec, Alliances, Telesur, Alba.

Critical here is his relationship with Fidel Castro: the sharpest expression of a moral conception of struggle between revolution and imperialism, between the morality of collective principles and the immorality of market egotism.

5. From the illusion of harmony to the illusion of Revolution. From Gomez to Caldera. a dominant scheme became hegemonic: Venezuela is or should be a unified nation where all have a place. This was the result of struggles in the thirties against Gomez--the victory of Betancourt against marxist conceptions of

Venezuelan society as divided. This conceit was sustained by oil wealth.

Even with the breakdown of the illusion of harmony, this discourse continued to rule; it was so hegemonic, that Venezuela could not recognize itself in another reality, despite the caracazo and the coups 2002. These notions, part of the habitus, constrained the political imagination of the leadership, old and new. Even Irene Saez and Salas Romer subscribed to it--their politics of anti-politics resembled the politics of politics.

Chavez was a better reader of the sign of the times. Not only his 1992 coup was an instantiation of a rupture, but the recognition of this rupture. His electoral campaign was different.. I saw the opening of his campaign in 1998, in Petare. Same day as Irene. A cloaca. Clean the past. A discourse of unity through division. Irene was reproducing the same discourse of Unity and harmony. Chavez has been doing this. He needs to do this to represent him as the representative of the majority against the majority that has marginalized it.

The Fifth Republic replaces the Fourth. This is a temporal, a historic break. But the Fifth Republic also is a social break, a rupture of the social body of the nation: the escualidos versus the revolutionaries. One can attribute this to Chavez--he has championed this division. But this division was there, but denied,

disavowed, in sotto voce. Somos cafe con leche. Negritas of Chavez are our negritas, claimed the leadership of AD in 1998. . But in 1989 the negritas, and negritas were treated as savages, as barbarians to be killed so as to preserve "roll orices,, televions, and not go tback to guayuucos."

Chavez as presidnet has been blamed for creating differences. He has not. He has intensified them. He bujilds on difference. It is not the discourse of Betnacourt--closer to the marxists of the 30's. He is no Betancourt, or at least he has been a very different sort of Betaoucrt.. Different from AD. NO longer the unjity of the nation as marriage of urban elite and the vital pueblo, of Santos Luzardo and MArisela. Chavez is writing his own novel: it is now the history of the insurgency of the opprossed against the elite: a mixture of tamakin, el vengador errante, bolivar, but bolivar popular, christ, fidel, che--it is a struggle of the people against the elite.

6. The fetishization of history. What is general--the unfolding of cosmic, epic history--is represented through particulars, and each particular become not just an icon of the totality, but a symptom of its presence, a moment of its realization. As in Hegel's geist, the real, the spirit, is constantly being expressed in particularities. But this does not happen without discursive work. Laclau has illuminated populism by treating populist leaders as signs, as empty signifiers

given content by social demands. But in my view, populist signs are not empty signifiers but always already saturated by history; they are not the empty signifier of Laclau building on Saussure,, but more the social sign of Bahktin and Volosniov, always site of class struggle.

(Within this Manichean discourse, Chavez is depicted alternatively as hero or villain, as a new Bolivar or as a monkey (mico-mandante). His supporters are represented as virtuous pueblo or as primitive savages---as the violent masses of the Caracazo, or the "turbas" of April 2002, examined in the excellent work of Luis Duno. The opposition, in turn, is depicted as alternatively as embodiments of civilization or of savage capitalism.

Neoliberalism: what Charles Hale calls multicultural neoliberalism: the acceptance of difference. But Chavez criticizes this antispectacular multicultural liberalism. He is faithful to a Hegelian/Marxist notion of totality. For Chavez, the nation can only be united through revolution: through justice. Through acts of civilization against the savage capitalism. Chavez has emphasized it, constantly building on a discourse of friends and foes. He makes explicit the racism and elitism of Venezuelan society, uncovers its denied presence, unmask its true but superficial egalitarianism--one built on profound differences..

7. A miasmatic, murky reality. Chavez's nominalism does not mean there is no distinction between words and world, but that words merge with world, confusing the boundaries between representations and the real. Of course, Chavez is not not unique, but part of a long tradition. In the *Magical State* I examine this as part of the culture of the Baroque, as discussed by Maraval, centering on the spectacular production of appearances. As many presidents, his his performances are not directed to much to persuade through the power of logic, but to enchant, to leave the public boquiabierto. As in a theater or in a movie, one suspends disbelief--one pretends that what one sees is real, while one knows full well it is not--yet one cries, suffers, etc.

But Chavez has transformed this further-- The Chavez effect. It is as if in his presence the public is prone to suspend belief in the real and believe in its representation: to believe that future leaders are going to die for the nation, love their work and not whisky.

How to read Chavez's words has been a problem from the outset. This has been a problem not just for Venezuelans, but those who have huge stakes to interpret Venezuela. The US government has huge computers, constantly transcribing and analyzing everything Chavez says. For US ambassadors

Maisto: : pay attention to not to his lips but to his hands, not to what he sayus, but to what he does. But then others came to believe that Cahvez ends up doing whtat the says--Maisto was removed, and Drona Hrniak first and Shapiro later were brought at a time when the US was actively supporting regime change in Venezuela.

What's striking is not that these different interpretations, but that they all focus on Chavez: chavez as the decider, as the one who defines reality, policies. And this is ironic. For his supporters people, chavez remains pure. He decides, but others do. His motivations are pure, other are impure. He is with history as imagined; others are with history as process. Chavez can exclaim, what revoloution is this, the revolution of hummers, of whisky? He places himself above the terrain where hummers and whisky define quotidian practices.

I'm not prone to suggest that this is universal condition, a la Badrillard.. Perhaps mass media creates condition of

Not a simple double discourse. Rather, a miamsatic, ambigious, infection--as in the dictionary definition of misama, a vaporus influenece or emanation, an atmohnphsere that corrupts. In Venezuela this has been attributed to the oil, el excremento del diablo, Buit of course, oil has very different effects in Alaska or Texas; oil can help shape the historical landscape of Venezuela but this

miasmatic atmosphere is the product of our history, not nature. It is in these terms that the oil industry itself remains a mystery, where complex oil policies are kept out of public discussion--another huge paradox of Venezuelan politics.

HOW TO INTERPRET THIS OVER PRODUCTION words.

conclude: with two comments

a. one, a step to make sense.

Gramscian notion of the passive revolution. It is no accident that the thinker taken by southern scholars from India and Latin America, has been Gramsci. He is a thinker of failure. Of the difficulty of transition. Risorgimento. Much in common with the South. A failure of the nation to come into its own. Two modes: war of position, war of movement.

Cavouer versus Mazini. The idea was fundamentally simple: when you cannot take over the state, then you do a war of position. But what happens when you have taken over the state? This remains beyond his analysis. And this is the case of Chavez. Gramsci only imagine in the struggle over the state, but not from the state: how to fight capitalism itself. Yet war of position and war of manoeuvre, notion of passive revolution, perhaps can be applied also to struggles from the State.

For Chavez, Cuba is the paradigm. A war of maneuver. Taking over the state and revolutionizing society. Chavez has taken over the state, but cannot so easily revolutionize society. He faces the challenge that all nationalist projects confront in the Global South: the contradiction or tension between national conditions of state legitimacy and the international conditions of capital accumulation. Difficulty of imagining a horizon beyond the capitalist market, as the example of the leftist government in Latin America, starting with Lagos in Chile--socialism by enumeration at best, as Insulza has argued.

Chavez, to his credit, resists giving in to the capitalist market, at least the level of words. The reality of the World may prove recalcitrant, but Chavez holds the ideal of an alternative Future through his words. For him, a war of position is a war of maneuver--he turns it as such in words. I think in this he is fundamentally right about the need: to imagine an alternative future, even if we don't know how to imagine it. Unable to challenge it in reality, he challenges it in words; his in a sense is a poetic revolution.

I want to conclude with a story to suggest a more radical connection between words and politics: a story by Borges about the relation between words and world, poetry and politics: *La Parábola del Palacio*, published in 1960, a critical

year in the history of Latin American revolutions.

It is a story of an Emperor, the Yellow Emperor (perhaps one can imagine him as the Red or the White Emperor). The emperor shows the poet his empire. He travels through his empire, figured in the story as a labyrinthian palace, with paths and rivers and people, a complex architecture that glorifies the emperor and subjects the people to his implacable power; anyone who disobeys or disrespects the emperor is punished or killed. At the end of this journey, the poet recites a poem that reproduces the empire point by point; this brings the poet both immortality and his death. The emperor tells the poet: "me has arrebatado el palacio" "You have taken away my palace." And the verdugo killed the poet. The story within the story states that this story could be false--that what may have happened is that in the world there could not be two similar things, and that when the poet produced this representation of the palace, the palace vanished. Or yet another story within the story, that in reality the poet was a slave of the emperor and that nothing happened, the poet was forgotten, and his descendants are still looking, and won't find, the word of the universe.

Perhaps it is too early to tell if Chavez is leading a revolution or a change of elites, or even a readjustment of elites--see the Venoco case, or the Cisneros/Chavez affair--but he has certainly revolutionized the imaginary in

Venezuela. In his socialist palace, people are central actors, not just Juan Bimbas, (the John Doe or everyman) made famous in the forties, but a diversified population that should have rights, including their right to different identities. I don't think it would be possible in Venezuela ever again, or at least for a long time, to say what Gonzalo Barrios said in 1989, to treat the people as barbarous masses and to justify their killing using a colonial allegory, and to have these words accepted by parliamentarians, politicians and civic organizations.

I think this change, this granting centrality to the people, is a huge progressive step largely created by Chavez's words. . Still, he remains too much the owner of the word. And the task remains to create conditions in which the people have the word---a deep democracy where not the empire's poet, but all the people, for in this democracy every person would be a poet (at least a poet some time in the day, as in an old wise man's utopian dream) would encounter the Word of the Universe and to define the universe according to their words.