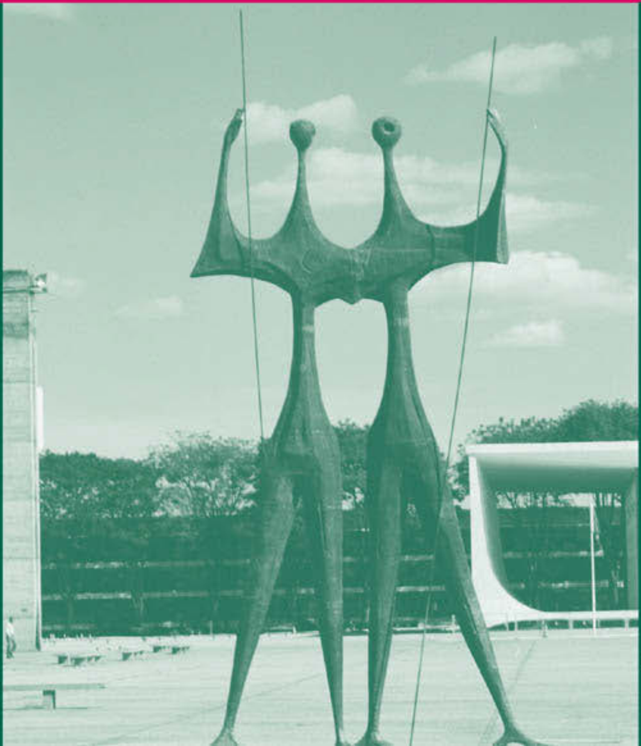
STUDIES OF THE AMERICAS

# REINVENTING MODERNITY IN LATIN AMERICA

## *Intellectuals Imagine the Future, 1900–1930*

Nicola Miller



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# Reinventing Modernity in Latin America

## Intellectuals Imagine the Future, 1900–1930

Nicola Miller

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction: Against Fate and Ascription[1]

The nations of Latin America were founded upon visions of modernity. Independence leaders imagined republics based on popular sovereignty and liberal freedoms blazing a trail through obscurantism and oppression toward a utopian future in which the full potential of humankind would be realized. Latin America would become distinctively, gloriously, hospitably modern, "disclosing to the Old World the majesty of the New," proclaimed Bolívar.[2] In practice, the notorious gap between ideals and realities in the region has meant that Latin America's modernity has indeed long been regarded as distinctive, but usually only in a negative sense. Peripheral, uneven, fractured, labyrinthine—these characteristic metaphors of deficiency all imply that the region's historical experience has been particularly prone to inauthenticity and inconsistency, even more so than might be anticipated by any general theory that the modern condition is generically at odds with itself: incomplete (Habermas), ambivalent (Bauman), or paradoxical (Berman).[3] It is not unusual to find Latin America's history represented as a struggle between modernization and resistance to it. But this is to overlook one of the region's most compelling features: namely, that the eternal return to an emancipatory project has been just as evident as has the recurrence of exploitation, repression, and frustration.[4] Latin America has been distinctive not only for a tendency to resist models of modernity imposed from without, but also for an enduring capacity—against all the odds—to generate affirmative visions of modernity from within. Social conflict was more about *how* to be modern than whether to be so. Thus there were not just two categories of response to modernization in Latin America, as has often been argued, but three: the technocratic, capitalist model of modernity that has been dominant since the mid-nineteenth century has indeed been resisted, usually unsuccessfully, by antimodern essentialisms, but it has also been repeatedly and at times successfully opposed by an alternative conception of modernity inspired by the values upon which independent Latin America was based. The contemporary projects of the New Left are only the latest in a long line of examples. This book explores the intellectual origins of this alternative, truly distinctive Latin American modernity.

## Four Latin American Challenges

What makes it distinctive are the four main challenges it poses to the technocratic model—often taken to be modernity *tout court*—that became hegemonic in Europe, the United States, and indeed, if often in debased and violent form, in Latin America itself. First, the alternative version offers a rethinking of the role of reason, conceiving it not as instrumental but more in terms of what Habermas has called communicative reason,[5] which highlights the processes of reasoning (rather than their outcomes) and aims to be intersubjective (rather than based on subject-object relations). Rationality in Latin America, far from being the disenchantment of the world, has been conceptualized as "the intelligibility of its totality,"[6] open to aesthetics (which instrumental rationality turned into an alienated enemy) and to ethics (which technocratic modernity, enthralled by science, delegated to organized religion). Second, the Latin American alternative seeks to deepen the concept of popular sovereignty, arguing that procedural democracy and the law of contract are not in themselves sufficient to guarantee it; also necessary are democratic participatory associational life and the solidarities it can build, which are seen as the only effective way to counteract the inbuilt individualism of modern life. Third, history has been interpreted in Latin America less in terms of moments of rupture—a feature often assumed to be intrinsic to modernity—and more as a process of continuity. In Latin America, the dynamic between the traditional and the modern has entailed not so much a break with the past as the integration of past and present in creative synthesis. Fourth, against the boundaries and exclusions of technocratic Western modernity, Latin American alternatives have championed openness, inclusiveness, and heterogeneity. Thus, Latin America's distinctive vision of modernity goes beyond the claim that Latin American experiences did not fit European norms (the "discourse of the autochthonous" analyzed by Julio Ramos)[7] to embark upon a radical revision of the very *categories* of modernity in order to elaborate a different conception of what it could mean to be modern. In short, this alternative imaginary of modernity was not just claiming to be different, but was paving the way to thinking differently about difference itself.

## Modernity and Modernization

All this starts from the premise that modernity is not an inherently Eurocentric or teleological concept, although it is often claimed to be so because it is both prescriptive and future oriented. One way of freeing it from Eurocentrism is to distinguish it clearly from modernization (the two terms are often used as if they were virtually synonymous, especially in sociological literature). This confusion has had particularly unfortunate consequences in relation to Latin America, where U.S. "modernization theory," which promoted free-market capitalism as the most efficient route to political stability, became hegemonic in the Cold War context of the 1950s.[8] Modernity, seen as equivalent to modernization or, worse still, U.S.-style modernization, therefore, came to be widely regarded in Latin America as coextensive with dependence on imperial powers, a view that precluded consideration, both intellectually and politically, of other possibilities for Latin American modernity.[9] The subsuming of modernity into modernization helps to sustain what Mark Thurner has called a "metanarrative of the deficient" in Latin American history,[10] whereby Latin America is continually found to be lacking or tardy or otherwise inadequate. It also condemns Latin America to a Hobson's choice of accepting external versions of modernity or retreating into a defensive antimodernity. Yet, as this book illustrates, there were alternatives, which become more visible if Eurocentrism is confronted. The well-nigh inescapable fact that European modernization came first chronologically does not mean that it should be granted the analytical status of a universal model of modernity. Diverse European sociocultural projects (and they were, it is worth emphasizing, far more varied than is always acknowledged) developed in response to European experiences of modernization. As recent work adopting the "multiple modernities" perspective has highlighted, other experiences of modernization resulted in other conceptions of modernity, different configurations of the range of possibilities offered by objective rationality and subjectivity.[11]

In order to discern these alternative imaginaries, the historian needs to look beyond approaches that define modernity in terms of that familiar cluster of historical processes that can roughly be dated to the late eighteenth century and located in (parts of) Europe, namely capital formation and the emergence of capitalist relations of production; industrialization and urbanization; the privileging of empirical science and its associated technology as the prime source of knowledge; state bureaucratization; secularization; commitment to impersonality of the law; the promotion of individualism; the separation of public and private spheres; and the advent of mass politics. These processes, which are objectively measurable by positivist methods, are referred to in this book as "modernization," following Habermas's usage.[12] "Modernity" itself will be used to refer to the far more subjective "horizons of expectation" and "spaces of experience" (to borrow Koselleck's terms)[13] that the processes of modernization create. Taking the view that ways of knowing condition possibilities of being, modernity will be thought of primarily as an epistemological concept, denoting a specifically *reflexive* consciousness of time, space, and self in relation to other. My approach, inspired by Foucault,[14] will draw upon the aesthetic responses to modernity that arose from a reaction against European "bourgeois modernity": the explorations of ephemerality, elusiveness, indeterminacy, and contingency of modernist writers and artists from Baudelaire to the Surrealists. Social theorists built upon their insights to develop ideas about modernity's transformed consciousness of time (Benjamin and Koselleck); the effects of fragmentation on consciousness (Simmel); and the possibilities for a dialogic understanding of language (Bakhtin). Many of these ideas, which are discussed in more detail where they are specifically relevant, have proved suggestive in my thinking about the allure of the modern in Latin America. In the spirit of such approaches, my starting point is that in its inbuilt relativity, the concept of modernity represents a state that is always achievable, but always already deferred (modernity is always elsewhere in time or space, its very elusiveness the secret of its power). In its inherent subjectivity, it is about ways of perceiving, understanding, and imagining the world. That does not mean that it lacks any analytical content, however. Modernity's generic promise is that historical transformation can be brought about by rational human agency, conquering space and time (i.e., geography and history) through scientific knowledge to create a society of greater justice, sovereignty, and liberty. The historian's contribution here is to analyze how each of these terms (rationality, agency, and so forth) is conceived in any specific historical context.

Even in the context of European history, it is widely acknowledged that there was a period in which modernity was the cultural aspiration of the minority before modernization made it the experience of the majority,[15] just as a nation can be imagined long before it acquires political anchorage in statehood. This was certainly the case in Latin America, where the dream of becoming modern had been present for at least half a century—say, from the 1820s—before modernization began to gather serious momentum around 1870. The wars of independence had, after all, mainly been conducted on the basis that anticolonial republicanism was an advance on European monarchism and despotism, and historians have recently found evidence that public debate and public opinion became significant for the first time during the course of those wars.[16] In their wake, the new republics embarked upon nation-state building, a modernizing endeavor if ever there was one, for all the compromises that nationalism is habitually obliged to make with the traditions that it, like any other modernism, invents for itself. Thus, although the term *modernidad* was not used widely in Latin America until the late twentieth century, when it became current in the context of debates about postmodernity,[17] *moderno* often occurred in the works of intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century and became ubiquitous in the printed media (at least in urban areas) from the early twentieth century onward. It was especially prominent in the fields of culture and consumption, sometimes appearing in the titles of the popular magazines that began to circulate, and often in the articles and advertisements inside.[18] Moreover, Latin Americans were also compelled to accept "the modern" as a category applicable to them because outsiders had no hesitation in applying it, even if usually to say—as they still sometimes do—that Latin America was *not* modern.

My analysis focuses not on the issue of the presence or absence of modern institutions in Latin America, but rather on the creation of a *social imaginary* of modernity. This term is Charles Taylor's, and he designed it in order to go beyond analysis of social theory and social practice as distinct fields, in the hope of exploring the "common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."[19] To posit ideas and material forces as "rival causal agencies" in history is to set up a false dichotomy, he argues: "Ideas always come [ . . . ] wrapped up in certain practices, even if these are only discursive practices," and, in turn, practices, even when coercive, are shaped by "self-conceptions, modes of understanding."[20] Modernity has been variously conceptualized in terms of a historical consciousness; an accumulation of socioeconomic and political experiences; a project for shaping the future; and a self-reflexive discourse. The concept of the social imaginary makes it possible to integrate these different approaches, which have often been seen as mutually exclusive, and to try to understand modernity *in relation to* modernization without reducing it to modernization. To confuse the two terms obscures the extent to which the question of what it meant to be modern itself became part of the political struggles that arose out of modernization in Latin America.

Latin America's distinctive approach to modernity began to take shape during the period from 1900 to 1930, which is the focus of this book. The onset of a new century, together with the imminent Independence centennials and the increasingly intrusive presence of the United States, prompted Latin Americans to take stock of the cumulative effects of modernization processes that had been building up momentum, albeit unevenly, for several decades. During the late nineteenth century, at least in the wealthier Latin American countries, the central state had begun to extend its powers, constitutional government had functioned more reliably than previously (albeit still imperfectly and not without interruptions), capitalist labor relations had started to prevail in key sectors of the economy, and capital cities had been refashioned along modern lines.[21] It is often forgotten that during the late nineteenth century the Southern Cone countries, particularly Argentina, underwent one of the fastest processes of modernization in the world. In 1900 Buenos Aires, with a million inhabitants, had a larger population than many European cities, and in 1914 Argentina had a higher percentage of its inhabitants born elsewhere (30 percent) than was ever reached in the United States.[22] Opportunities for public assembly, debate, and organization were more extensive in Latin America during these three decades than has always been recognized in the historiography (post-1930 authoritarianism, a reaction to the World Depression, has cast a long shadow). Public spaces began to open up: plazas, boulevards and parks; museums, art galleries, theaters, concert halls, libraries and cinemas; department stores, shops and arcades; cafés, bars, and restaurants. Political parties seeking a mass base began to form,[23] labor and peasant organizations began to make economic and political demands, and the "social question" began to be widely discussed, not only in periodicals and at exclusive salons, but also in handbills and on the streets.

## Intellectuals as Mediators of Modernity

Intellectuals enjoyed singular prominence in these debates, at a time when their own unevenly modernized conditions of production acquired an element of the adventurism characteristic of the region's boom-and-bust economies.[24] While such unpredictability undeniably made it harder to consolidate a stable cultural sphere, it also allowed for a certain degree of freedom that some intellectuals found exhilarating. By this time the modernization of intellectual life, which was relatively rapid compared with many other areas of activity, had created the opportunity for writers to earn a living through their work (mainly from the newly expanding press), independently of private income or patronage. The generalist *letrado* of the nineteenth-century Republic of Letters, who moved freely between politics and literature, playing multiple roles as ideologue, legislator, educator, scholar, was giving way to the modern, specialist *literato*. For the first time in Latin American history, thinkers and writers could establish a role for themselves as independent "intellectuals" (the term began to be used in the region during the 1890s). As well as these new options, however, modernization also brought about the decline of the Republic of Letters, which led to a loss of status and influence for modern professional intellectuals compared with the scholar-statesmen of previous generations.[25] Moreover, as the effects of modernization became visible in Latin America's own cities, there was an increasing sense among intellectuals that universalism did not necessarily imply inclusion and autonomy, as Sarmiento had assumed ("Let us *be* the United States!") but could lead to exclusion and greater dependence (Martí: "[Let us beware] our formidable neighbour who does not understand us").[26] In the aftermath of the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, not only was there U.S. military and economic might to contend with, but also the equally ruthless power of cultural imperialism: the Afro-American dance, the cake-walk, swept all before it just as inexorably as did Roosevelt's Rough Riders or the magnates of Chicago and Manhattan.[27] In these circumstances, the new generation of Latin American intellectuals found it hard to share the confidence of their predecessors that barbarism could be civilized through their own agency. In response to this dual crisis of culture and politics, in the context of the international ascendancy of a model of modernity widely perceived to be in thrall to material gain at the expense of liberty and justice, leading Latin American intellectuals began to rethink what it could mean to be modern from a Latin American perspective.

Casting themselves as *porteurs* (carriers) of ideas (Pomian),[28] not only as translators and expositors but also as opinion makers, through their newspaper columns and the journals they founded to disseminate images of modernity, intellectuals came to serve as touchstones of the modern, the mere invocation of one of their names or texts being sufficient to establish a position in a debate. As both “witnesses and products” of the social changes they lived through (Chartier)[29]—in other words, as mediators of modernity—their work provides a key source for the historian seeking to trace the cognitive possibilities of their times. Although their migrations through modernity, both literal and metaphorical, were undeniably elite journeys, in this respect it is important to bear in mind the argument that elite culture is not created in a vacuum but is itself constituted “in large measure by [ . . . ] a subtle game of appropriations [and] reusages” of nonelite cultural practices.[30] Modernization processes had their democratizing side effects in Latin America,[31] as elsewhere, and more than enough evidence has now been accumulated from various disciplines to state with confidence that it was not only the region’s intellectuals and technocrats who were interested in the modern and how it might intersect with existing cultural practices in different social sectors.[32] Work in Latin American cultural studies from the 1990s onward, explicitly refuting the cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt School, has illustrated the enduring creativity of the varied ways in which the “goods” of modernity (from consumer durables to products of the mass culture industries to political values) were assimilated throughout society from the early twentieth century onward.[33] A broad range of reading material circulated among popular organizations, particularly but not exclusively in urban areas, and was read aloud to those unable to read it for themselves. It is difficult, if not impossible, for historians to trace the processes of mutual influence between Latin American intellectuals and popular organizations, but we do know that contacts took place, and it is, therefore, highly probable that the workers and peasants had an effect on the intellectuals just as the intellectuals had an effect on them. The visions and blueprints elaborated by intellectuals drew upon a more diverse range of ideas and practices than can be accounted for by the old model of the elites championing modernization and the masses resisting it—a model that would rarely be explicitly endorsed now but that is still implicit in much of the scholarly literature on Latin America.[34]

I have, therefore, chosen to illustrate each of the themes identified as inherent to Latin America’s distinctive modernity by focusing on the work of four leading intellectuals who became particularly associated with the debates at issue: (1) the role of reason—the Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó (1871–1917); (2) the relationship between the state and society—the Argentine Juan B. Justo (1865–1928); (3) the meaning of history—the Mexican Alfonso Reyes (1889–1959); and (4) the character of revolution—the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui

(1894–1930). The ideas of each of these intellectuals are explored in a broad context incorporating both the conditions of their production and the history of their reception, processes that I see (drawing on the work of De Certeau, Jauss, and Febvre) as interrelated.[35] Any radical separation of production and consumption is untenable, because cultural consumption is in itself an active process of producing meaning and cultural production is shaped by consumption practices both as experienced in the past and anticipated for the future. Identifying how and why certain intellectual figures became iconic can reveal a great deal about ideas of modernity far beyond the individuals themselves, going beyond discourse analysis to take a series of soundings on Latin American responses to the modern. Thus the work of each of these intellectuals will be viewed not as a closed body of ideas, but rather as an open site for the social contestation of particular aspects of modernity. Together, it will be argued, they constitute a coalescing project (moving from caution to confidence) of an alternative modernity that aimed to integrate critique, autonomy, progress, and universalism with spiritual quest, social solidarity, hospitality, and an ethic of authenticity.

## Four Faces of Modernity: Rodó, Justo, Reyes, and Mariátegui

Why these four intellectuals? At first sight they might seem to be an ill-assorted bunch, especially given the variety of the political solutions they proposed (Rodó was a moderate liberal, a lifelong member of the reformist Uruguayan Colorado Party; Reyes a more radical liberal who lent critical support to the Mexican Revolution; Justo a democratic socialist who founded the Argentine Socialist Party; Mariátegui a revolutionary socialist who founded a Peruvian Communist Party). They came from two different generations and there is no evidence that any of them met, although they would all have been aware of each other's work to some extent.[36] Justo, Reyes, and Mariátegui all acknowledged an intellectual debt to Rodó, but they each built very differently on the foundations he had laid for a modern culture. Justo and Mariátegui both identified themselves as socialists, but Mariátegui needed only a brief exchange of letters with the Argentine party to decide that their reformist approach was unacceptable to him.[37] In no sense, then, can it be said that they constituted a group. They all embraced modernity, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm ranging from Rodó's hesitancy to Mariátegui's enthrallment, but that in itself does not mark them out from the previous generations of writers and thinkers, dating back at least to the late eighteenth century, who had addressed the issue of how Latin America could become modern.

The rationale for my comparison is as follows. All four of these intellectuals had careers that were made possible by the effects—both good and bad—of modernization on Latin American intellectual life. Thus, although none of them were from elite families, apart from Alfonso Reyes (and his family's wealth and status were sharply reduced during the Mexican Revolution), they were all able to take advantage of new opportunities to achieve national and regional influence on the basis of their intellectual production alone (whereas illustrious predecessors such as Sarmiento or Martí had accumulated cultural capital at least partly because of their respective political roles as Argentine president and Cuban independence leader). Rodó was acclaimed at the time for being the first major figure to achieve regional influence with the written word alone, that is, as an intellectual.[38] More recently, Julio Ramos has argued that Rodó was operating in a wholly different discursive context from the *letrados* of previous generations, such as Sarmiento, who had spoken from "a relatively undifferentiated field, authorized in the rationalizing will and in state consolidation."[39] In Rodó, by contrast, "a specifically *aesthetic* authority is at work," and in this he was different even from Martí.[40] Thus, something qualitatively different started with Rodó, which is why I start with him. Given these new conditions of cultural life, it was no coincidence that each one of the four intellectuals founded a major periodical, which I analyze as windows on their worldview and the ways in which they conceptualized modernity. The emerging market for cultural products was fickle, though, which meant that their standard of living was adequate rather than comfortable, and they often felt themselves to be, and in many senses were, isolated from other elite groups. Although they were all politically active, none of my four held executive power, unlike others who could potentially have been included, such as José Vasconcelos, who became Minister of Education after the Mexican Revolution and oversaw the virtual creation of primary education in Mexico.

Politically, all four of these intellectuals opposed the dominant corporate institutions of Latin America (Church, military, and large landed estate), but they were also unpersuaded by the laissez-faire liberalism promoted by many of their nineteenth-century predecessors. They were all against both corporate and arbitrary power, but, like other critics of conventional liberalism, they argued that freedom from such constraints was a necessary but not a sufficient condition for happiness. They were all against organized religion, but equally, they saw a vital role for some kind of spirituality in the modern world. They were committed to nation building to the extent that they identified the nation-state as the best means of integrating the masses into society, but they were all wary of introverted nationalism, preferring to maintain a balance with a universalist perspective that would keep Latin America open to ideas from elsewhere. They all had the experience of living under governments that were committed to using the state as an agent of modernization (Batlle in Uruguay, who put in place one of the world's earliest welfare states; the Radicals in Argentina; the Mexican postrevolutionary leaders; Leguía in Peru, of whom it was joked that he would have paved the Andes, such was his enthusiasm for public works). They were all worried about the impact of modernization on Latin America, particularly because of the rise of U.S. interventionism, which provoked fears that modernization could only mean Americanization. They all resisted the instrumentalist implications of the debased form of positivism that had taken hold among many Latin American elites in the late nineteenth century. But it is important to note that they all welcomed positivism for having challenged not only scholasticism but also romanticism, which all four intellectuals discussed in this book explicitly spurned because of what Reyes referred to as its "utopian sentimentality."[41] They all worked from fundamentally positivist assumptions about the relativity of knowledge and the significance of historical analysis.

All four intellectuals questioned the universal egalitarian promise of modernity, arguing that historical and local differences would persist, particularly outside those countries already deemed to be modern, because capitalist interests required it to be so. Even so, they feared skepticism and nihilism above all, and sought to revive the optimism that animated the European Enlightenment and—more significantly—the Independence of Latin America. Unlike many of their counterparts in Europe, none of these intellectuals advocated a retreat from modernity; rather, they sought a critical reevaluation of its key assumptions. Their conceptions of an alternative modernity should not be confused with the irrationalist alternatives that have sometimes been identified with Latin America, such as "macondismo," a term derived from the magical realist representation of the town Macondo in García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, or the "baroque modernity" elaborated by Pedro Morandé.[42] The intellectuals discussed in this book were all committed to ideals of rationality, sovereignty, and progress, although they did not necessarily define them in the same way as Europeans did. On that basis, they developed a critique of modern life that still allowed for engagement and participation in it, hoping that Latin Americans could thereby achieve control over the modernization processes to which the dynamics of international capital would inevitably expose them. They all saw culture as a key element in any alternative social imaginary of modernity. Thus, although none of them was modernist in the conventional European sense of pursuing radical formal experimentation, they all drew on modernism (defined for the purposes of the argument here as aesthetic reflection upon the modern) to the extent of adopting variants of what Reyes called "fragmentary forms"—essays, chronicles, anecdotes, and notes—in order to test out different ways of representing the modern.

## Modernity and Modernism

It is part of my argument that modernism was a crucial context for the development of an alternative social imaginary of modernity in Latin America, just as radicalism in art and in politics came together in many European avant-garde movements. The relationship between modernity and modernism was played out differently in Latin America, however. In Europe, modernism is conventionally dated as beginning with Baudelaire and continuing inexorably on its sublime path to self-destruction with the Surrealists. In Latin America, in contrast, two distinct periods of modernism are usually identified: first, the literary movement, *modernismo*, which was launched by the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío in 1888 and lasted until the First World War; and second, the *vanguardista* movements of the 1920s. In Europe, modernism was primarily a reaction against a relatively well-consolidated bourgeois society (specifically, the Paris of the Second Empire), which had fabulous achievements to display as well as asinine follies, and which generated a grandeur that cast a rosy glow over its undoubted weakness for triviality. For all the spleen he directed at bourgeois morality, Baudelaire was no less admiring of bourgeois élan than was Marx. In late-nineteenth-century Latin America, however, there was no entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, constantly revolutionizing conditions of production, against which to rebel. Instead, fundamentally conservative landowning oligarchies held sway over a rising commercial bourgeoisie, often dominated by imperial interests.[43] These oligarchies had accomplished no wonders; "all fixed, fast-frozen relations" were *not* "swept away"; "all that was solid" did *not* "melt into air," "all that was holy" was certainly not "profaned."[44] Indeed, Latin America had demonstrated a remarkable capacity to absorb modern imports while its ways of life remained more or less untouched: "the automobile, the aeroplane, the radio, divorce, the 8-hour day, votes for women—none of this alters the essential fabric of our existence."[45] As Octavio Paz has pointed out, positivism in Latin America was not the ideology of a dynamic bourgeoisie, as in Europe, but rather of an inert landowning oligarchy that succeeded in sustaining its position of privilege until well into the twentieth century.[46] Operating in unholy alliance with Social Darwinism, positivism was welcomed by Latin American elites primarily as a means of promoting limited evolutionary change from above in order to contain radical revolution from below: in short, it was a recipe for order rather than progress. Technocratic modernization was personified in Latin America by the caricatural big, bluff, cigar-brandishing U.S. male (Darío's "buffalo with silver teeth")[47]; it was scarcely surprising, then, that *modernista* poets recoiled not so much from the delicious horror of industrial urban life (as had Baudelaire) but, rather, from the vulgarity and solecism of a growing commercial bourgeoisie that aped Parisian fashions and affected what they fancied to be Parisian manners.[48] Modernization in Latin America was also manifest in imported consumer goods, particularly but not exclusively for the elites, a commercialization that *modernistas* sought to counter with a parallel aesthetic world.[49]

The continuing debates about how to interpret *modernismo* echo the tensions and contradictions in and around this first artistic response to Latin America's uneven modernization. For a long time, *modernistas* were perceived as nostalgic and antimodern, in content if not in form, but since the "Boom" writers of the 1960s claimed them as a source of inspiration, doubts have been raised about the conventional image of them as Eurocentric elitists who retreated from the unsatisfactory social realities of their countries into an artificial aristocratic world of derivative aestheticism. [50] Their preoccupations with the exquisite and the esoteric, the transient and the transcendental, the classical and the cosmopolitan, were how they "registered their experience of the modern," argued Gerard Aching.[51] If they cultivated a finely wrought stylistic perfection, then perhaps this was not because they sought to escape to a classical Arcadia, but rather because they set out to counter all the negative images of their part of the Americas, painting (on ivory) an idyllic world of harmonious nature, transcendent art, and virtuous politics to substantiate the claim that "Latin America is the future of the world!."[52] Their use of language—incorporating not only the notorious *gallicismos*, but also American Spanish and indigenous vocabulary—and their formal challenge to Spanish poetic tradition have been reinterpreted as the first manifestation of a distinctively American voice in Spanish literature,[53] and the first instance of influence reversing direction to go from Spain's former colonies back to the metropolis. It has increasingly been recognized that there were different tendencies in *modernismo* (which Paz characterized as Latin America's true Romanticism)—just as there were in European Romanticism.[54] In late-nineteenth-century Latin America, the early aesthetic reaction to positivism evolved into an ethical and in some cases a political response (study of the *modernista* prose works, in addition to the more famous poetry, went a long way toward substantiating this position).[55] As Paz persuasively argued, *modernismo* drew upon a cosmopolitanism symbolized by Paris in order to discover other literatures and to reevaluate the indigenous past; it constituted a critique both of tradition (in sense of Hispanicism) and of a particular model of modernity, namely progress U.S.-style plus the debased positivism of Latin American elites.[56] Furthermore, one way in which the *modernistas* were indisputably modern was in their concern for literary professionalism: they succeeded in establishing literature as an exceptional space, into which intellectuals could project a modernity that compensated for the inequalities of development in other social institutions. If it had not been for the *modernistas*' self-proclaimed marginality, together with their defense of the autonomy of culture in the context of increasing market opportunities, it would have been harder for their successors to claim a role as independent social critics.[57] Yet the visions of modernity of the intellectuals discussed in this book were crucially shaped by their own reactions against *modernismo*. From Rodó onward, there was a sense that in attacking the values of technocratic modernization and in raising the profile of art, culture, and spirit over materialism, the *modernistas* had made the first move toward elaborating an alternative—but that they had done so at the expense of excluding ethics. It was partly in response to the perceived detachment of the *modernistas* from political and economic realities that their successors concentrated on addressing the question of what a distinctively Latin American modernity could be.

## Beyond Ambivalence toward an Alternative

Not all Latin American intellectuals, therefore, fulfilled the roles that have conventionally been ascribed to them of either uncritical champions of modernity or implacable critics of it. Recent work has revised the stereotypical interpretation of Latin American intellectuals being either for or against modernity, and my point of departure was Jorge Larraín's book challenging the still widespread view that modernity and identity were irreconcilable in the region.[58] He argued persuasively that the two ideas have actually been interdependent since at least the wars of independence, when resistance to continued rule from Spain was channeled through the imported ideologies of liberalism and republicanism. The resulting states-that-would-be-nations were founded on the emancipatory promise of Enlightenment thought: rational principles of government would erode obscurantism, injustice, and disorder. From a different angle, and focusing on narrative fiction, Carlos Alonso has argued that from the mid-nineteenth century onward Latin American texts reveal a profound ambivalence toward modernity, simultaneously affirming and subverting it, in a manifestation of every Latin American intellectual's fear that the region could easily become "the negative object of modern Western knowledge," thereby denying it subjectivity and agency.[59] Catherine Davies has imaginatively applied Alonso's ideas to novels by nineteenth-century women writers, whom she interprets as trying "to inscribe [themselves and other subalterns] into liberal discourse as subjects rather than objects of modernity." As she perceptively suggested, their strategies were not limited to establishing the specificity of their own experiences of modernity, but went further to reinterpret the values of modernity, representing women as the agents of progress. Her crucial insight that while ambivalence may well have been the starting point of Latin American intellectuals' response to modernization, it was by no means the end point, is what I build on in this book, which was written in the spirit of mapping out territory. The image in my mind's eye is of an archipelago: each of these intellectuals emerges as an island out of a sea of ambivalence about modernization to propose a distinctively modern version of the region's future.[60] Only in the loosest sense do these islands constitute a unity, but they are related to each other and cannot be fully appreciated if looked at in isolation.

## Three Latin American Responses to Modernization

Thus the premise of this book is that there have been not two types of response to modernization in Latin America, as is widely assumed, but three: (1) technocratic modernity—the promotion of an ideology of progress defined primarily in economic terms, driven by instrumental reason and technology, and implemented by a knowledge elite; (2) essentialism—the rejection of progress and the promotion of identities conceived as innate and unchanging; and (3) an alternative modernity—committed to reason and progress but seeking to realize the emancipatory political and cultural promise of modernity as well as its economic potential. Each of these has a different conception of the relationship between the traditional and the modern, with different referents for those terms.

## *Technocratic Modernity*

This model was first fully elaborated by the Argentine Generation of 1837, particularly Juan Bautista Alberdi, who enshrined an opposition between technology and culture. Along with Sarmiento, Bartolomé Mitre, and others, he argued that modernization, in the form of industrialization and agricultural colonization by European immigrants, would eliminate the negative characteristics caused by the legacy of Spanish colonialism and racial mixing. This generation of scholar-statesmen was part of a region-wide reaction against the radical Liberal projects of the 1820s, which, it was argued, had failed so spectacularly because they were abstract blueprints that took no account of conditions in Latin America. In this context, Romanticism—with its emphasis on local particularities—was widely welcomed as a way of superseding an over-theoretical approach to nation building.[61] Thus, although the Generation of 1837 subsequently became notorious for its advocacy of foreign models, especially the United States, France, and Britain, it is worth emphasizing that this founding model of a technocratic modernity for Latin America was represented by its exponents as the means by which Latin America would ultimately overtake Europe, assume full control of its own affairs, and fulfill its rightful role as the avatar of modernity. The role of the Americas in the civilization of the world, argued Alberdi, was to put European theories into practice in a way that Europe itself had failed to do (specifically, he meant French theories, as he made explicit).[62] In science, the arts, and industry, Europe was worthy of emulation, he and others argued, but in politics it had little to offer. The men of this generation deemed law to be more important than technology in consolidating a modern state, and argued that laws had to be designed to fit local circumstances. They defined progress primarily in economic terms, but they also pursued a strong secondary theme of morality in the ideal of the virtuous citizen. This model of modernity, as formulated by the Generation of 1837, had a political component in republicanism, but its major shortcoming, as identified by the generations of the early twentieth century, was that it lacked any coherent vision of culture beyond despair about the colonial legacy and the mixed races of Latin America. As a result, although the Generation of 1837 did not actually advocate the mere imitation of external models, it was easy for their critics to represent them as having done so.

This version of technocratic modernity shed its political ideals over time and came to focus increasingly on economic progress. By the 1930s, states were in a position to assume a directive role in development and to impose a technological blueprint on Latin American societies. The populist regimes of the mid-twentieth century were basically implementing this technocratic model, even though they mitigated its fundamental ruthlessness by making some limited concessions to social welfare, in response to the debates generated by attempts to elaborate a more radical alternative in the first three decades of twentieth century (see the section "*A Distinctively Latin American Alternative*"). The advent of military authoritarianism in the 1960s signaled the end of such concessions and a determination to enforce technologically driven modernization by means of state terror. In the wake of the failure of these regimes, the same model has been pursued by neoliberals, albeit using soft power, pursuing targeted initiatives to alleviate the effects on the poor, and paying more attention than previously to developing a political counterpart in democratic accountability. In all manifestations of this technocratic approach "tradition," which was defined initially as the Spanish colonial legacy and subsequently also as the indigenous heritage, has been represented as an obstacle to modernity. The populists, who sought to neutralize the power of tradition by exploiting it for modernizing projects (e.g., through the nationalization of local forms of music and dance), had fundamentally the same agenda. Despite its lack of enduring economic success, technocratic modernity has been the dominant model of modernity in Latin America, shared by liberals, positivists, many on the orthodox Left, CEPAListas, bureaucratic authoritarians, and neoliberals. The recurrent descent into economic crisis helps to explain why Latin America has been far less successful than Europe or the United States at realizing the political hopes of modernity by marrying capitalist development with pluralist democracy; the Latin American compromise was populism.

## *Essentialism*

Essentialist reactions against modernity, all of which imagine tradition to be a refuge from change, took shape in the late nineteenth century, largely in reaction against the perceived pro-foreign bias of the technocratic model. Examples include racial pessimists, some *indigenistas* and many *hispanistas*, cultural nationalists, among them the national character essayists, right-wing Catholic nationalists and, most recently, Felipe Quispe's revanchist movement seeking the recreation of an "Aymara nation." The most persistent, and probably most significant, of these is Catholic traditionalism, which has continued to enjoy a degree of social legitimacy, because, Manuel Garretón argues, "it advances a progressive socioeconomic perspective concerning the disenfranchised and at times is the only one to denounce the materialism and inequalities, and even the immorality, of the capitalist [ . . . ] economy"; nevertheless, he adds, it is "deeply reactionary [ . . . ] antirationalist [ . . . ] antifreedom."[63]

### *A Distinctively Latin American Alternative*

Finally, there is the alternative modernity that is the subject of this book. This early-twentieth-century response to modernization was skeptical of the emphasis on economic progress of the Generation of 1837, particularly given that events of the late nineteenth century had made it clear that it would be far harder than Alberdi et al. had expected for Latin Americans to control the modernization process, because of imperialism. The newly self-identified intellectuals of the twentieth century were, however, far more optimistic than their forebears about the region's culture.[64] In consequence, they helped to bring about a shift in debates from the moral to the ethical, in the sense of Habermas's distinction between the moral as what governs how the individual seeks validation from society "about the rightness of binding norms" and the ethical as what concerns the construction of identities, both individual and collective.[65] Their premise was that radical authenticity could not be realized in isolation but was in practice dependent upon recognition by others. This led them to question the distinction between the traditional and the modern, arguing that things labeled traditional coexisted alongside things labeled modern and that the two interacted in a constant process of reformulation. Their ideas were not as sharply or as rigorously formulated in this early-twentieth-century version of an alternative modernity as they came to be in the 1990s within Latin American cultural studies,[66] but the same questions and insights are there.

## How Was Latin America Modern?

In the short and medium term, these intellectuals' visions of how Latin America could become more humanely modern were eclipsed, first by the reactionary politics of the 1930s and then by the state-led populist, developmentalist models of the 1940s and 1950s. Over these three decades, governments of varied ideological hue expanded the state to promote top-down projects based on industrialization, infrastructure building, and the incorporation and/or repression of those social forces (a rapidly expanding industrial working class and an increasingly organized peasantry) that might have entertained any doubts about the desirability of making themselves modern in the image of the elites. In general, the masses were compelled to sacrifice the political rights promised by modernization in order to secure a meager, albeit rising, share in its material gains. From the 1960s onward, with the rise of military authoritarian regimes and Latin America's decline into debt crisis, the poor saw their share of national incomes decline again, although after redemocratization in the 1980s there was some increase in opportunities to exercise political rights. In other words, many of the fears expressed in the work of early-twentieth-century intellectuals were realized: authoritarianism did prevail—at least partly because of the effects of the Depression. That does not mean, however, that its ascendancy went unchallenged, or that there was a continuum from the frequent resort to authoritarian methods that happened both before 1880 and after 1930. Moreover, even though the project of an alternative modernity failed in the 1930s, it was kept alive over the next couple of decades—in reformist and revolutionary political parties, in universities, in literary/artistic circles and, almost certainly, although this is harder to document, in schools and labor unions—and it reemerged in force during the 1960s.

It is not difficult to find the themes of secular spirituality, participatory solidarity, integration of the past with the present, and hospitality in the discourses and practices of many twentieth-century Latin American opposition movements that were clearly committed to modernizing projects, from the revolutions in Bolivia, Cuba, and Nicaragua to the social movements that formed in the 1980s and 1990s, notably the Zapatistas and Evo Morales's Movement toward Socialism (MAS). These themes feature in the speeches of Lula, Michelle Bachelet, and even Hugo Chávez. They can be found in the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, in Liberation Theology, in the arts and particularly in literature, where they are evident far beyond the famous literary "boom" novels of the 1960s. Indeed, the English term "magical realism" is an exoticizing travesty of the far more suggestive "real maravilloso americano," which refers to a textual strategy dating back to the 1920s for inducing readers to explore the marvel that is Latin