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# Hypertext in Context: Space and Time in Latin American Hypertext and Hypermedia Fictions\*

By Thea Pitman

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## Abstract

The vast majority of hypertext and hypermedia fiction available today is produced by Anglophone writers living in the First World. Nevertheless, such works are presently being created by writers in the developing world and in languages other than English. This article seeks to explore the different perspectives that Latin American writers bring to the creation of hypertext and hypermedia fictions through the detailed study of two such works: *Dolor y viceversa* [Pain and Its Opposite] (2001-02) by Mexican/American author Blas Valdez and *Tierra de extracción* [Land of Extraction] (2002) by Peruvian/Venezuelan author Doménico Chiappe.

## 1. Introduction

Although Latin American experimental writers such as Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar played a key role in the generation of proto-hypertextual forms of writing, many years before creation of the World Wide Web<sup>1</sup> the participation of Latin American writers in the contemporary field of digital hypertext and hypermedia works<sup>2</sup> is often overlooked, both in Latin America as well as in Europe and North America. For example, many Latin American cultural critics have given the Internet and its implications for Latin American culture, in particular, literature, short shrift. Carlos Monsiváis (1997) has commented that, '[t]he greatest fashion accessory and must-have item in Latin America today is cutting-edge technology: we have to keep ourselves up-to-date in the world of computing, and upgrade ourselves apace with the rhythms and structural demands of globalisation. One word – Internet – sums up preoccupations and obsessions; it presents itself as the unquestionable deity, the great virtual community of idolisers of high-tech. Reality becomes an accumulation of special effects. Hyperreality, paradise. [...] The experience of

reading becomes marginalised. Our sense of the past diminishes and the future gapes wide open before us' (13).<sup>3</sup>

While the main impetus of Monsiváis's argument is that the Internet accentuates social exclusions and constitutes merely the most recent form of cultural imperialism, as well as forcing out individuality in favour of a globalised consumer culture of North American origin – 'electronic Americanism' in the words of another cultural critic (Kim 2003: 182-83) –, he also appears concerned that Literature with a capital L is on its way out, and that, in a region where literacy is still low and technology such as telecommunications networks and computer terminals still badly distributed, using the Internet as a way of distributing Literature and finding readers is futile.

Another critic – Carlos Jáuregui – who at least concedes the existence of, and finds a role for, Latin American cyberliterature as a whole, nevertheless warns against focusing exclusively on hypertextuality as the be-all and end-all of literature on the Internet, arguing that hypertext constitutes little more than unreadable 'avant-garde pyrotechnics', and that in essence hypertext is not 'necessitate[d] nor constitute[d] by the electronic medium' (Jáuregui 2001: 289). He ultimately prefers to search for communities of Latin American readers and writers of 'traditional' short-stories grouped around a Spanish-language literary e-magazine hosted by Princeton University. And in a similar vein, still other critics argue that hypertext is by and large an Anglophone phenomenon which has had little take-up in Latin American literary circles (Perea 1998: 32).<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, hypertextual and hypermedia works have been produced by Latin American writers in the years since Monsiváis, Jáuregui and Perea made the statements cited above and they have met with a more positive reception from other cultural critics in/of the region. For instance, Jesús Martín-Barbero (2000) has claimed that digital technology and the Internet are creating 'a new qualitative episteme' which promotes 'an entirely new play of interfaces' and facilitates 'new architectures of language' (69), all of which he applauds. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the subtle ways in which the production of hypertext in and/or about Latin America may differ from that disseminated from the heart of the old metropolitan centres of the First World.<sup>5</sup> Another writer and cultural critic who has welcomed the advent of the Internet in Latin America is Alberto Chimal. Of the most cutting-edge work coming out of Latin American literary e-magazines, he notes that '[i]t might be argued that this concern with the scraps of postmodernity, and how they react on contact with our (still extant) premodernity, is an obsession pertaining only to the users of the Internet, who are still a minority [in Latin America]; however, although the Web necessarily imposes certain concerns, it also facilitates our access to a global culture which is evolving rapidly, not only in Mexico, but also in many other countries, and which is not identical to that global culture that we can read about in Wired or other supposedly alternative publications. At the very least this [Latin

American] global culture confronts some of the most burning questions to do with globalisation, cultural change and new technology, from points of view that are different from those of the First World' (Chimal 2002: 80).

It is precisely the interaction between 'new architectures of language' and 'points of view that are different from those of the First World', that which is facilitated by global technologies and that which is nuanced by local context, that this article aims to explore. In order to do this I will focus on the notions of space and time in Latin American hypertext fictions. In Martín Barbero's article cited above, he explores some of the key issues thrown up by the development of audiovisual, and, increasingly, digital culture as it pertains to Latin America. In particular he focuses on the question of space, exploring the relationship between cultural products and their 'embeddedness' in a given space such as the nation;<sup>6</sup> and on that of time, examining how changes in the conceptualisation of time in new media may accommodate a distinctively Latin American perspective on history and narrative.

What this article proposes to do is to test some of Martín-Barbero's arguments by applying them to two seminal works of Latin American hypertext fiction: *Dolor y viceversa* [Pain and Its Opposite] (2001-02) by Mexican/American author Blas Valdez and *Tierra de extracción* [Land of Extraction] (2002) by Peruvian/Venezuelan author Doménico Chiappe. As a by-product of this investigation, it intends to elucidate the ways in which such works may be seen to relate to and participate in the development of the canon of Latin American literature, placing particular emphasis on areas where hypertextual elements combine with and enhance Latin American cultural features. By way of a conclusion, this article will consider whether hypertext endangers Latin American culture by force-feeding 'globalised' cultural products to audiences in the region, leaving them adrift in global time and space, or whether it can perhaps offer a local, emancipatory, resistant solution to the more nefarious effects of globalisation on Latin American culture.

## 2. Pain and Petroleum

Mexican/American author Blas Valdez (Guadalajara, 1972)<sup>7</sup> has been hailed as one of the pioneers of hypertextual narrative in Mexico (Chimal 2002: 79) and in Latin America in general (Chiappe 2003a). His proclivity for hypertextual narrative manifested itself even in his early pre-Internet works – the short stories of *Restos de corazón* [Remains of the Heart] (1998) are extremely brief, ludic narratives which are open-ended in structure, requiring reader participation in order to construct possible meanings. Valdez himself (2006) also claims that all his work is essentially hypertextual, relating the experience of reading and writing hypertext fiction to his

personal experience of a variety of neurological disorders: 'hypertext to me feels like home, it feels natural' [n.p.].

After a BA in Multimedia Communication in the United States in 2000, Valdez started to write and programme full-blown hypertextual works with hypermedia elements, commencing with *Dolor y viceversa*, a series of twelve short stories, accessible via a traditional index, which between them contain the traces of an ill-fated thirteenth story not indicated in the index. The first drafts of the stories that make up *Dolor* were written (on paper) in the late 1990s. They were subsequently transferred to the editing software programme Macromedia Director by the author himself, together with artwork by Valdez and others – photos, video clips, graphics and music –, and first presented in public at the 'State of the Arts' festival held at UCLA in 2002. The work was subsequently exhibited in its full hypermedia version at the Mexartfest in Kyoto and Artmedia festival at the Universidad Maimónides in Buenos Aires. Today only the hypertextual version can be accessed online.<sup>8</sup>

The *leitmotif* of the collection, as the title indicates, is 'pain and its opposite'; or rather, they are all fatefully doomed love stories, written in a very unsentimental style. A description of one of the more malevolent characters in the story 'O+' [Zero Positive] may serve here as a guide to the tone of the collection: the rapist and murderer Bruno is described as behaving 'with impressive indifference' and when he reads a document containing key information – the blood test results of the woman he has just raped which demonstrate that she is zero positive – he reads it 'as one would read a shopping list, with minimal emotion'. Another of the stories involves a character who tries to kill his old sweetheart by sending her a letter-bomb which is subsequently opened by the old sweetheart while both characters are travelling on the same aeroplane ('Für Elise'). The bitter ironies of many more ineluctable, untimely deaths pervade many of the other stories in the collection. In thematic terms, the collection is reminiscent of Raymond Carver's *Short Cuts* (written 1976-88), Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991) and some of the more disturbing recent work of Chuck Palahniuk, although none of these authors are direct sources of inspiration on the author.

Peruvian/Venezuelan author Doménico Chiappe (ne Lima, 1970) is one of the most active proponents of hypertext and hypermedia fiction in the Hispanic world: he participates in numerous online discussion groups and workshops, maintains a literary blog and is currently working on a doctoral thesis on the subject at the Universidad Carlos III in Madrid. His publications include the novel *Lapas* [Limpets] (2000) and the prize-winning collection of short stories *Párrafos sueltos* [Miscellaneous Paragraphs] (2003b), both of which were published in traditional print format, as well as the on-going collective novel *La huella de Cosmos* [The Trace of Cosmos] (2005-) and the hypermedia novel which is the subject of this article *Tierra de extracción*.

The initial inspiration for *Tierra de extracción* stems from Chiappe's studies in oceanography in the early 1990s during which time he performed fieldwork in and around Lake Maracaibo. The first drafts of some of the plot lines that make up *Tierra de extracción* were written (on paper) after Chiappe had abandoned oceanography and was starting to make a living as a writer in Caracas in the mid 1990s. Nevertheless, he quickly realised that the complexity of what he wanted to achieve did not fit traditional print formats because of the 'web'-like structure of the story and because of his need to spill over into other media such as music. As a result of this, Chiappe started to explore the pragmatics of transferring his work to a digital medium and of finding a team of people to help him with the complexity of the task, most significantly Andreas Meier, the technical director of the work as it is today. Although the beginning of the composition of the novel technically dates from 1996, its first version in Macromedia Director was exhibited in conjunction with the symposium on 'El desafío de la escritura multimedia' [The Challenges of Multimedia Communication] hosted by the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas in May 2000 and distributed as a CD-Rom by the Venezuelan publishing house Comala. Nevertheless, Chiappe and Meier continued to work on the project and a second, much improved, version was exhibited at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo in Caracas in 2002. Since then the work has continued to evolve and Version 3.0 was made freely available online in early 2007.<sup>9</sup> Chiappe's hypermedia work has met with critical acclaim in Venezuela, Spain and elsewhere in the Hispanic world, both in traditional print media as well as in online journals such as *Letralia* (see, for example, 'Escritura multimedia').<sup>10</sup>

The novel itself is comprised of sixty-three small chapters which may be made up of one or more lexias and some of which have little by way of a traditional textual component and instead exploit the full potential of the 'new architectures of language' available in hypermedia (Martín-Barbero 2000: 69). Ultimately, although one still feels a strong tendency to ascribe primacy to the textual dimension of the 'novel', the other modes/media used – music, art, photography, newspaper cuttings – can stand apart from the text, telling their own story in their own way and they are executed in a sophisticated and thought-provoking manner which adds to, rather than distracts from, the textual dimension.

The chapters are all accessible via a navigation map which is arranged along four main axes (see Fig. 1).<sup>11</sup> The way of moving from chapter to chapter which suggests itself is to read one's way up the axes: clicks on the left or right-hand side of the screen within individual chapters generally confirm this ordering. Such a method offers some sense of sequential development along the five main plot lines which comprise the novel. Nevertheless, clicks at the top or bottom of the screen within individual chapters move the reader from one axis to another in a more graphically erratic but thematically cogent manner – this is a way of following the fates of individual characters as they appear in different plot lines.

Fig 1: Navigation map of *Tierra de extracción*.

The narrative itself concerns the interrelated lives and loves of a whole host of "small town" characters. Of these the most developed are all men – Jonás Valleterno, Matías Gracia, Rafael Bastidor and his son Rafaelito, Azuceno Correa and others. Female characters display much less psychological depth and are prone to being essentialised through recurrent emphasis on their sexuality. Indeed, a substantial number of lexias are set in the Grand House discotheque in the centre of Menegrande where women act like sirens, letting their passions run wild and driving men mad.<sup>12</sup>

### 3. Embeddedness and Multiple Temporalities

Jesús Martín-Barbero's (2000) main concern about new media is that in the audiovisually and digitally mediated world culture suffers increasing 'disembedding' which he posits as a loss: 'for when it is disembedded from its national space culture loses its organic links with its territory, and with language, which is the very fabric of the work of the intellectual' (62). While I do not want to endorse Martín-Barbero's hankering here for such a stable, traditional, anchored relationship between culture and national or even regional space, I do want to explore some of the implications of this statement, as well as suggest that hypertext can offer a space where literature, Latin American or other, can be just as embedded or disembedded as it has been since at least the early twentieth century and where it can make a deliberate effort to convey its position on this matter to its audience. It is not just a case of the medium and its mediations being essentially disembedded because of the ease with which materials can be circulated around the globe – in this argument the form and content of hypertext works can overcome such technical 'disadvantages'.

Typical assumptions about hypertext by conservative cultural critics tend to assume that the minority language – in this case Spanish – will be overpowered in cyberspace by the language of cultural imperialism and the *lingua franca* of the Internet – English (see cultural debates outlined by Kim 2003: 181-84, and Ensslin 2007: 160). Typically such critics assume that authors will either prefer to write in English or simplify their mother tongue for easier translation into, or correspondence with, English. Indeed, in the case of Spanish-speakers, the fear is that they may opt to write in a kind of "Spanglish" or "*ciberespanish*".<sup>13</sup> This is the argument for the 'disembedding of language' in hypertext, yet this is manifestly not true of hypertextual production by Latin American authors. To date I have found no evidence of authors preferring to publish in English, and a brief perusal of Valdez's

(né Guadalajara) and Chiappe's work reveals that both writers use the idiolects that they preferred prior to moving to the digital medium: Valdez has always written a very pared down, terse and ironic kind of prose with short sentences and little regional vocabulary, 'suitable for translation into English' (cf. arguments of cyber-sceptics outlined in Kim 2003: 182); Chiappe's style is much more allusive and effusive, though no less effective, inflected by regionalisms particular to the Caribbean coast of South America. Even the title of *Tierra de extracción* does not offer itself up for easy translation.<sup>14</sup>

With respect to the representation of historico-geographically and socio-culturally indistinguishable places – of 'territory' in Martín-Barbero's terms – Valdez's work is patently less 'embedded' in Latin American culture than Chiappe's. Many of the stories are nominally set in the wealthier neighbourhoods of Mexico City – Polanco, Pedregal, Chapultepec –, and the protagonists are by and large (upper-)middle-class young adults from the capital. The plot lines also map closely onto the coordinates of life for this sector of society in the post-apocalyptic metropolis as relayed in urban myths: Aids and casual sexual encounters, random violence and premeditated terror, new drugs and illicit raves. Nevertheless, there is no obvious way in which any direct comment on contemporary Mexican or Latin American society can be read into these stories. The protagonists are part of a globalised community, meeting up by chance or by fate as much in New York as in Mexico City. In Deleuzian terminology, their territory is the 'smooth space' (Deleuze & Guattari 1988) of the 'lines of flight' (Deleuze & Guattari 1988) that link Mexico City to other points on the globe: it is characterised by constant transformation and movement, and by pervasive parallelism and contingency.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, many of the stories feature a character named Mariana, an air-hostess, and the account of the blowing-up of a plane in which she is flying is reiterated in several of the stories – Mariana dies different deaths in both 'Iluso' [Dreamer] and 'Für Elise', and there are references to her/the plane in which she dies in 'Debut y despedida' [Beginning and End] and 'Violanchelo' [Cello / Raping Chelo]). Furthermore, Valdez consistently refuses to contextualise: for example, he does not give a sense of causality to the actions of the bungling suicide bomber on Flight #1301 from Mexico City to New York in 'Iluso' by encasing the event in a sociopolitical context.

The more clearly embedded nature of Chiappe's novel is evident in the recurrent references to Venezuelan topography and history. Furthermore, the novel engages with a substantial cross-section of Latin American cultural and social phenomena, from exploitation at the hands of multinationals to the many faces of social deprivation, and from prodigious natural habitats to the massive impact of *telenovelas* (regionally-produced television soap operas). This is a novel that is *about* Venezuela, the nation-state and its insertion into the global economy via the petroleum industry: 'this is Venezuela, a land of extraction, murmured one of the workers' ('Lluvia' [Rain]). This kind of approach is of course what is familiar to many



readers of Latin American fiction.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Valdez's more deterritorialised approach is not unknown in Latin American fiction, the most famous exponent of this being, of course, Jorge Luis Borges.

Evidence of differing degrees of cultural 'embedding' and confirmation of the validity of the different approaches of Valdez and Chiappe with respect to the canon of Latin American literature is also apparent in their use of intertextuality. Arguably, both works are extremely well embedded in Latin American literature, even if Valdez's intertexts also speak of his more disembedded approach to Latin America in general.

Valdez openly acknowledges as sources of inspiration for his work the Argentine writers Julio Cortázar and Ernesto Sábato, both of whom pertain to the more disembedded current in (avant-garde) Latin American literature. Both writers also stand as key precursors in a Latin American proclivity for digital fiction and for hypertextuality: Sábato was one of the first Latin American writers to start experimenting with transferring his literary endeavours to the digital medium (Ahumada 2000: 26) and, as mentioned earlier, Cortázar's *Rayuela* [Hopscotch] (1991 [1963]) has been signaled by hypertext theorists across the globe as one of the most seminal proto-hypertexts in world literature.

Indeed, Valdez consciously set out to write a 'cyber-*Rayuela*'<sup>17</sup> and, although his stories are hardly reminiscent of Cortázar's novel in their brevity or in their unsentimental aesthetic – in the latter case they are more clearly reminiscent of Sábato's work<sup>18</sup> –, their webbed structure as a collection and their narrative relocations do seem to allude to the world of *Rayuela*. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, *Rayuela* is an inspiration to Valdez in terms of his approach to the new medium itself. His work most closely resembles Cortázar's in the way in which it challenges the limits of the medium in which it is written: where *Rayuela* pushed at the boundaries of the print novel thus paving the way for hypertext fiction as we now know it, *Dolor y viceversa* does not just follow *Rayuela's* lead, but instead it seeks to push at the boundaries of hypertext fiction. Or rather, if hypertext fiction is characterised by its lack of closure, its multi-linearity and its interactivity, then Valdez imposes some rather strict boundaries on his work. For example, Valdez uses hypertextual links as a way of offering the reader illusory escape routes which inexorably lead back to, and compound the pain of, the conclusion already apparent in the first lexia. In many of the stories, he has dis-enabled the back-button function to force the reader to follow the story to its bleak conclusion rather than search for happier endings. Indeed, in this respect, these stories may be seen to be anti-hypertexts and Valdez's strategies echo those observed by Robert Coover (1992), who warns that, in a backlash against the 'vast networks and principles of randomness and expansive story lines' (quoted in Moulthrop 1995) that constitute hypertext, writers will inevitably feel the need 'to struggle against them, just as one now struggles against the linear constraints of the printed book' (Coover 1992

quoted in Moulthrop 1995). As a result, however, Valdez's (anti-) hypertexts also remain strongly hierarchical in structure and logocentric in essence.

Furthermore, where subject matter related to cyberpunk<sup>19</sup> and to cyberculture in general is frequent in hypertext works in an Anglophone context, thus backing up form with content, despite the unsentimental aesthetic, the subjects of these stories are emphatically not members of the cyberpunk generation as it pertains to Mexico. Indeed, many are evident technophobes – see, for example, Alex, the 'novice terrorist' who cannot deactivate the time-bomb in 'Iluso', and who is described as 'he who so often criticised technology'. What all this means is that Valdez is very aware of the traits and the traps of hypertext, but rather than retreat into print culture, he tries to trap hypertext itself by denying it some of its most recognisable characteristics. As Moulthrop (1995) has argued, '[r]esisting hypertext is by no means a simple matter', but, following Moulthrop's arguments a bit further, Valdez's focus on 'breakdowns', physical, psychological and social, taken alongside the strategies mentioned above, suggest that this is our best hope of finding a resistant form of hypertext as well as a challenge to the social order. Valdez's is thus a conceptually avant-garde project despite the shortcomings mentioned earlier.

In Chiappe's case, the intertexts constitute some of the more clearly embedded examples of twentieth-century Latin American fiction: the work of Juan Rulfo, Mario Vargas Llosa, Horacio Quiroga, Salvador Garmendia and Alfredo Armas Alfonso,<sup>20</sup> and most obviously of all, Gabriel García Márquez. Although Chiappe refutes any sense that his work might be derivative of magical realism, ascribing many of the similarities – prodigious natural phenomena and similar historical paradigms – to the proximity of García Márquez's Colombia to the region of Venezuela featured in *Tierra de extracción*, there is clearly more to it than this. *Tierra* narrates the development of a settlement – Menegrando, located on the shores of Lake Maracaibo – and its development over a period of nearly 'one hundred years' – from 1914, the date of the opening of the first petroleum extraction plant in Venezuela in the environs of Menegrando, to the present day – in a way which can only remind the reader of the even less literal 'hundred years' of *Cien años de soledad* [One Hundred Years of Solitude] (1998 [1967]). The prophetic and baroque overtones also coincide, as do the themes of travel and prodigious sexuality; of encounters, cultural or sexual, and the resulting heterogeneity and coexistence of radically different worlds that is Latin America. But what is significant is not so much the echoes of García Márquez as the fact that Chiappe has successfully transferred the Marquesian world to the digital medium and exploited the extra facets of the new medium to good effect in so doing, in particular its ability to handle complex temporalities.<sup>21</sup>

These complex temporalities can be fruitfully considered through Martín-Barbero's (2000) comments on the treatment of time in audiovisual and digital media: 'the perception of time within which the audiovisual sensorium is inserted and/or

inaugurated is characterized by the experience of simultaneity, the snapshot and flow' (62). While this can lead to the mass media's 'cult of the present', to 'a weakening of the past' and 'an absence of future' (63), he goes on to assert that the move towards time being conceived as constant 'flow' is 'the most authentic metaphor for the end of "grand narratives", both religio-political and aesthetic. [...] For by proposing the equivalence of all discourses – news, drama, science, pornography or financial data – and the interpenetrability of all genres, we are left with the exaltation of what is changeable and diffuse, of the absence of closure, and of temporal indeterminacy as the key to the production of aesthetic pleasure' (64).

All of this – equivalence of discourses, absence of closure, temporal indeterminacy – constitutes an accurate description of some of the most recognisable features of hypertext. Furthermore, with particular relevance to hypertext fiction in a Latin American context, Martín-Barbero emphasises the importance of hypertext's refusal of linear historiography: with particular reference to (hypertext) fiction on the Internet, he singles out its ability to allow Latin Americans freedom from rigid, totalising, linear, historical narratives by allowing different time-planes to coexist (see Martín-Barbero 2007, and 2000: 70-71). He does admit that this is not the unique preserve of online hypertext fiction, citing *Rayuela* as a key example of the co-existence of multiple temporalities in Latin American literature, but hypertext intensifies this particularly Latin American approach to time and to history on a massive scale.

Thus in Valdez's work we can find examples of present-day Mexico City coexisting with the pre-Columbian and early Conquest periods: there is an echo of Julio Cortázar's fantastic short story of 1956, 'La noche boca arriba' [Night Face Up] (included in *Final del juego* [The End of the Game]), in Valdez's 'Tlahueliloc' where a rave in the Museo Nacional de Antropología cleverly merges with a bloody battle between pre-Columbian tribes with the police doubling as conquistadors. Other stories such as 'Iluso' move abruptly backwards and forwards in time thus destroying a sense of causality or development and also insinuating that all these times – past, present and future – already coexist. There are also cases of impossible temporalities where, for example, a lover is discovered to have died before the birth of the main protagonist ('Hasta que la muerte nos separe' [Until Death Do Us Part]).

In Chiappe's case, historically the action of the novel spans the whole of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the narrative frequently suppresses references to historical time – temporal links between different chapters are rarely clear –, and, together with the prophetic tone of many passages and direct references to myths and to cyclical temporalities, it suggests a reading where Menegrande and environs constitute a timewarp and a trap. This is also accentuated by the emphasis on cyclical journey patterns and labyrinthine paths which suffuse the narrative.

Of course, these complex temporalities are a key feature in much Latin American fiction since the Boom – as explored above, the work of Cortázar and García Márquez are the obvious references here – but the facility that hypertext has to represent such temporalities is a feature than can and should be used to emphasise this aspect in order to ‘appropriate’ the new medium.

## 4. Globalisation, Emancipation and Resistance?

Nevertheless, to return to Martín-Barbero’s (2000) comments about the dangers of ‘cultural disembedding’ (61), we should be aware that the focus of his attention is not really intertextuality or the representation of space and time in any given cultural product. Rather, it is how consumers of cultural products may be disorientated by the apparent proximity and hence importance of global culture via the screens of new technology and the corresponding distance or waning in importance of their local culture.

There are two counterarguments to this stance. In the first case, following the arguments of Alberto Chimal (2002) cited earlier, we might suggest that, no matter how superficially globalised the subject matter, both Valdez’s and Chiappe’s works offer ‘different points of view [with respect to globalisation] from those of the First World’ (80). Chiappe’s work deals with the impact of one form of globalisation in Venezuela – the petroleum industry managed by multinationals like General Asphalt and Royal Dutch-Shell. However, this is globalisation as seen, and as countered/resisted, from a Venezuelan perspective. Chiappe makes a concerted effort to explore how the petroleum industry has affected Venezuelan society, considering such issues as the growth of prostitution around the settlements where petrol extraction plants are located,<sup>22</sup> the poisoning of water supplies, the corruption of society. As the narrator of *Tierra de extracción* comments: ‘This Land of Extraction doesn’t only offer the riches of its soil to those who would plunder them; it also allows its people to be attacked. [Black] gold is extracted, but so too are people’s lives; along with the petroleum go people’s values; with the stolen cars, people’s morals; with biodiversity, their ability to love; with wads of money, their ability to reason (‘Fácil’ [Easy]).’

Furthermore, he also represents petroleum in a localised context – ‘el mene’ is the indigenous name given to crude oil in the region – and in fact the incantatory repetition of the topography of the region – place names as well as the presence of substantial reserves of fossil fuels in the subsoil – results in the land taking on the role of lead protagonist.<sup>23</sup> ‘El mene’ even stands as a symbol of the novel’s construction: both literally, in its underground movements between ‘vases communicants’ and its sporadic bubbling up to the surface, and metaphorically, in

the web of semantic associations that Chiappe weaves around it, it is essentially rhizomatic, and the rhizome constitutes one of the most common structures of hypertext narratives (Moulthrop 1994).

In Valdez's case, the work clearly does participate in a more globalised world, and perhaps some of the value of the work of a writer such as Valdez lies in his ability to create characters who are citizens of the world, not bound to an exclusively Mexican or Latin American *Weltanschauung* and not remotely interested in commenting on or relating to Latin American identity. Like Valdez himself they are not Mexican, not North American, not Chicano, not Latino – they do not need labels of this type whatsoever. The national/regional and sociocultural framework for identity so prevalent in Latin American studies has dissolved and this should be applauded not lamented. Nevertheless, if we so desire, this may still be recuperated, in Chimal's terms, as a 'Latin American' version of 'global culture': it might be argued that, at some level, the sheer bleakness and unflinching nature of Valdez's outlook and his anti-hypertextual, resistant approach coincide with a 'Latin American', politicised response to the First World's more utopian dreams of the possibilities of the new medium.

A second counterargument to Martín-Barbero's concerns would have it that, as the French hypertext theorist Jean Clément (2000) argues, '[w]hat characterises hypertext is the pre-eminence of the local over the global. It is true that most hypertextual systems offer a global vision of their structure, but this vision is not accessible through the text itself, but rather it belongs [...] to the level of paratext. For readers, a hypertextual work will always be that bit that they have read; that is to say, that part of the whole that they have extracted during their passage through the work, the partial actualisation of a virtual hypertext that they will never know in its totality.'

Thus, even if the content of individual lexias does not refer to something local for the reader, the dynamic between the local and the global in the synecdochic structure of hypertext should keep such important dynamics alive in the hearts and minds of consumers of such cultural products. Indeed, Martín-Barbero (2000) concedes that digital culture does have an emancipatory role, precisely because of this facility to negotiate between the local and the global: 'Faced with the fraudulent utopia of the "information society" – fraudulent because it claims to be neutral – art offers the last territory for technological experimentation which is emancipatory in spirit. [...] I am referring to its ability to communicate, to make the modern communicate with the traditional, the personal with the other, the global with the local' (70). This 'emancipatory' negotiation between the local and the global is precisely what we have seen at work in the characters of Valdez's short stories and in Chiappe's localised narrative of globalisation in Venezuela.

Furthermore, some postcolonialist critics champion hypertext as emancipatory precisely because many of the key characteristics of hypertext are simultaneously those that best represent postcolonial experience. As the Hawaiian scholar Jaishree K. Odin (n.d.) argues, both hypertextual and postcolonial aesthetics require the switching 'from the linear, univocal, closed, authoritative aesthetic [...] to that of [a] non-linear, multivocal, open, non-hierarchical aesthetic'. She goes on to contend that the aesthetic of hypertext 'is most suited for representing postcolonial cultural experience because it embodies our changed conception of language, space, and time'.<sup>24</sup> Although such arguments may be overly optimistic, hypertext might still thus be championed by some as an ideal medium through which Latin American writers should continue to explore their attitudes to space and time, globalisation and resistance. One might even suggest that it is a medium that postcolonial subjects can and should strategically 'counter-colonise' both in order to get their voices heard, and because it can translate their experience of the world so effectively.

Nevertheless, other critics of hypertext still advise caution with respect to such emancipatory, postcolonialist claims. For Stuart Moulthrop (1994), hypertext is still predominantly logocentric and conservative, not a guarantee of freedom from established orders, social or linguistic. Exploring how the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari elaborated in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1988) might map onto hypertext, he argues that at first hypertext would appear to offer 'a laboratory or site of origin for a smoothly structured, nomadic alternative to the discursive space of late capitalism' (304) and that this suggests that perhaps experiments in hypertext fiction might be able to propose radical (re)visions of culture and society as we know it. Ultimately, however he concedes, as Deleuze and Guattari do, that 'technonarcissistic' experiments might look radical, but ultimately may turn out to be very conservative and that 'smooth' and 'striated' spaces 'exist only in mixture' (316). He thus queries hypertext's ability to function as a site of resistance, just as he above queries whether it is possible for writers to resist the pull of hypertext.

What we have seen in the work of Valdez and Chiappe offers food for thought in the light of the above. In the eyes of Martín-Barbero, Chiappe's sophisticated 'new architectures of language' may well be deemed emancipatory, particularly when taken in the context of his ability to address issues of globalisation from a Latin American perspective in so doing. In those of Moulthrop, Valdez's attempted resistance of hypertext might be seen to be the closest one can get to a radical (re)vision of (implicitly Latin American) culture and society. Whatever the case, the work of both writers is proof that sophisticated and potentially radical hypertext/hypermedia works are being produced by Latin American authors and that such work provides a complex site of negotiation between the global and the local.

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## Notes

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1. Their role in this has received world-wide recognition by hypertext theorists such as Hayles (1999) and Landow (2006); nevertheless, the 'local' origins of such authors are all too often forgotten as they are absorbed into the 'global' canon of proto-hypertextual authors. It should also be noted that, strictly speaking, Borges's 'El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan' [The Garden of Forking Paths] (2000 [1942]), for example, functions as a metatextual prophesy of the multiple temporalities that hypertext would make available rather than as a proto-hypertext in itself (Bolter 1991: 138-38).
2. In this study, I will use the term hypertext to encompass both hypertext and hypermedia forms unless otherwise stated.
3. All translations in this article are my own unless otherwise acknowledged.
4. Although there are an increasing number of publications by Spanish or Latin American authors on the subject of hypertext, bar the statutory references to precursors such as Borges and Cortázar, the frame of reference of such works tends to be the emerging canon of hypertexts works written in English (cf. Carrión Carranza 1998, Vouillamoz 2000 and Pajares Tosca 2004). To date, the only publications in English to deal with Latin American hypertexts is a brief chapter in Hoeg (2000: 95-107) and a few rather dismissive paragraphs in Jáuregui (2001: 289).
5. Some of the Anglophone work does at least openly acknowledge the assumption that hypertext is for the 'First World'. Ensslin (2007), for example, opens her excellent book on the subject of Anglophone and Germanic hypertexts thus: 'The 21st century is characterised by a complex situation with regard to media consumption and media-related behaviour *in the developed world* (1; my italics).
6. In *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*, Bolter (1991) debates the ways in which the advent of hypertext has changed the way we conceive of the space of writing. While I do not take issue with his research and the hypertextual/hypermedia works studied here clearly participate in a new 'topographic' conception of writing, the focus of this article is on the relationship of a cultural product to the cultural space from which it emerges, about which it discourses, and within – and without – which it circulates.
7. Valdez's father is Mexican; his mother a United States citizen. He grew up in both Mexico and the USA and is identifiable as a fully-fledged citizen of either nation-state, or, perhaps, of both and neither simultaneously.

8. My comments on his work in this article are largely directed towards the hyper-text version. Much of the information concerning the author's background and sources of inspiration in this paragraph and elsewhere in the article stems from personal conversations and correspondence with the author. The same is true of similar material concerning Chiappe.
9. For the purposes of this article, the second version of *Tierra – Tierra de extracción, versión 2.0* – has been used, as supplied to me by the author at the time of writing (July 2006).
10. The many other newspaper clippings on the subject of Chiappe's hypermedia novel are too numerous to mention individually here.
11. In Version 3.0 three of the chapters are only accessible during certain readings rather than directly from the navigation map, and one further 'invisible' chapter is even harder to find, thus heightening the ludic nature of the novel (personal email correspondence with the author, 30 August 2006).
12. Although beyond the scope of this article, this is a problematic issue worthy of further attention.
13. See the concerns expressed about the advent of '*ciberespanglish*' by critics such as Xosé Castro Roig (2001), and even a critic as predisposed to transculturation as Néstor García Canclini (1999) displays some reservations with regard to the testing of the 'semiotic and aesthetic limits' of Spanish provoked by the 'expansion of communications subordinated to commercial criteria' (161); an expansion in which he sees the Internet playing a leading role.
14. *Tierra de extracción* refers to the place where petrol is extracted from the earth, but also to one's place of origin. Chiappe plays further with the meaning of the title: not only can something be extracted from the land – petrol or people – but the land also extracts something from the people, trapping them, sapping their ability to leave. Further webs of semantic associations link these meanings of the title to other of the recurrent themes and images in the text.
15. See Moulthrop's (1994) illuminating summary of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of space as elaborated in their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1988). In their attempt to break free from the constraints of traditional (print) culture, Deleuze and Guattari envisioned a new culture based on performativity rather than the word (logos), and premised on becoming rather than essence, on nomadism rather than fixity, on loose associations (rhizomatic in nature) rather than hierarchies, and on 'smooth spaces' and 'lines of flight' rather than the 'striated spaces' of traditional culture, where 'striated space' is characterized by 'routine, specification, sequence, and causality' (302-03).

16. Works of Latin American literature that are not set in a Latin American country and/or do not focus on Latin American characters still cause eyebrows to be raised, both among Latin American and foreign literary critics and more general readers. The general understanding in the region itself is still that Latin American literature is supposed to help elucidate questions of national and regional identity. Non-Latin American readers typically expect such works to cater to their taste for the exotic and the magical, all set against a recognisably Latin American backdrop, in line with the brand of 'magical realism' popularised by Gabriel García Márquez.
17. Personal email correspondence with the author – 13 December 1999.
18. Indeed, there are clear echoes of Sábato's *El túnel* (1988 [1948]) in 'Nelly sin pulso' [Dead Nelly] and 'Autoretrato #16' [Self-portrait Number 16].
19. Cyberpunk is a subgenre of science fiction literature 'in which computer technology is ever-present and all-powerful' (Bell 2001: 214).
20. The latter two authors pertain to the social realist/regionalist current in Venezuelan literature.
21. Chiappe also acknowledges Cortázar and Borges as key influences in terms of the more structural aspects of his work – the presence of doubles, parallelisms, forking paths, *mise-en-abîme* structures, and so on (personal email correspondence with the author – 26 July 2006).
22. This is made apparent through the use of hemerographic supporting materials, rather than through the narrative of libertinous activities that take place in the Grand House discotheque in Menegrande.
23. Chiappe (c.2003c) himself confirms this reading of the novel.
24. Further debate concerning the intersection of postcolonialism and hypertext, including citation of Odin's work, may be found in Landow (2006: 346-58).