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A VIEW “FROM THE OTHER SIDE”:
ROMÁN DE LA CAMPA

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Román de la Campa, my friend and colleague, and sometime accomplice, is not only a solid point of reference in transnational academe, in pedagogical environments, and in intellectual debates. He is not only the author of well-researched and passionate books about Latin Americanism, Cuban culture and literature, cultural criticism, and latinxs in the USA, among other topics. He is, for those who have been lucky enough to enjoy his company and wit in more informal situations, someone who can always see *the other side of things*. In conventional and often unexciting scenarios, Román always has the ability to find the irony, the paradoxes, and the contradiction that lay under the surface, thus providing a way out of the arrogance and solemnity of official and academic discourses. Effortlessly, he can deconstruct situations, interactions, and behaviors as if they were texts to be decoded in order to reveal the true nature of things. I enjoy his good humor as much as his serious writing, his colorful expressivity as much as his academic prose, his sharp observations on culture and literature as much as his reflections about life. Conversations with Román have always been for me an integral part of my participation in conferences and symposia: an occasion to explore the subtexts of our university life and the richness of our common field of study. Román’s interpretations of texts, cultural practices, and social developments have always been illuminating and fecund for me, because they come from someone who combines, in equal parts, intelligence and sensitivity, experience and knowledge, convictions and disbeliefs.

We had in common, even before we met, our *alma mater*, the University

of Minnesota, where we shared—although not at the same time—the benefits of an unusually rich and challenging department. In addition to those initial formative years, with time, we discovered many other areas of common interest: similar perspectives on culture, political movements, literary texts, and professional relations.

As for Román's multiple scholarly contributions, it is fair to say that his career has been characterized by intense and multifarious productivity. As a critic, he wrote, in addition to over a hundred articles published in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, many books that show a consistent interest in the articulation between aesthetic and ideological issues. His critical perspectives primarily combined the historical and the political points of view with a comparative methodology, while integrating deconstructive and postmarxist approaches. The result is a compelling critical production that illuminates discursive fields as the complex effect of material conditions and creative imagination. His concept of Latin America's "discursive communities" has been key to identifying critical projects in the region within the ample context of globalization. At the same time, his work on "new cartographies" allows for the understanding of intellectual diasporas, processes of hybridization and transculturation, the connections between neoliberalism and cultural studies, and what he calls *latinidades*, a cultural space that transcends North/South dualism and points to the global cultural crossover that Román studies both in the manifestations of "high" culture and at popular levels.

But it is possibly in his reflections on Cuba where the reader can perceive most clearly the critic's ability to articulate subjective meditations and analytical observations on movements, processes, and discourses. Here we see the richness of Román's approach to a national culture that exists as much in the original territory of the island as in its deterritorialized expressions, as a "severed" imaginary that is always missing and evoking the part that *is not there*. Román worked tirelessly during many decades in order to enrich our critical perceptions and the scope of our critical and political concerns. And even today, at the height of his productive trajectory, we continue to anxiously await the next offerings that his talent and exquisite sensibility will prepare for us, his friends and colleagues, both in the US and abroad. We need to continue learning from him, debating with him, and appreciating his wit, his humor, and his creative irony. Now Román adds his editorial work to the activities he pursues in the cultural and critical fields, another area

that he has enhanced with his hard work and critical capacity. As he did before with collective volumes and as editor of *Hispanic Review*, this will be another avenue for intellectual dialogue. I wish him the best in this new stage of his brilliant career and hope to enjoy his friendship and academic work for many years.