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Notes After the End of the World: Freedom, Common Will and Decolonization

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Introduction: What is Freedom?

In the *Manuscripts of 1844*, Karl Marx defined emancipation as “the explosion of the sensibility of will” (28). This means that a concrete process of liberation entails the re-appropriation of the means of intellect by a willing group of individuals “who define themselves as individuals in struggle, yet who also mobilize as individuals in a group, a group with a collective practice, based on voluntary cooperation and a collective will and imagination.” (Merrifield 142-3). The means of intellect include language and imagination, and their products such as knowledge and technology, with a specific orientation.

What determines the specificity of the orientation of the means of intellect? Crucially, the means and products of intellect constitute a commons; they are given to us, in their specificity, as the shared store of our art and culture. This means two things: first, imagination, language, knowledge and technology are priceless; they are not mere commodities, priced goods for sale to the few. Second, they constitute a gift not only in the sense that they come to us from our ancestors at no price, but also in the sense that a gift is immeasurable.

When we say that the means and products of intellect constitute a commons, we are also saying that the relationship between truth and financial gain is not straightforward. For truth is in excess of financial gain or any other selfish end. Financial gain has to do with securing for oneself a goal, called profit, in the future. In this view the future only exists as an object of forecast, and the unknown only as the background of one’s epistemic hubris. Carving a future for oneself is the same as gaining dominion over it, which by definition excludes all other possibilities of action in the future. It entails focusing on the destination and not the journey. Understood in this manner, the future becomes a fate or a destiny defined in terms of exclusion rather than action. And in becoming the despots of our own time, and of the shape of all things to come, we also become fated or enslaved. Put otherwise, we end up asking for the ground of everything that exists and can exist – a conceptual support for all possible historical development. This is of course, the very opposite of liberty.

To speak of liberty and freedom is also to be reminded that grounds are often shaky, unsteady, and that tectonic shifts occur all of a sudden as a consequence of the long-term but seemingly imperceptible action of some hidden forces. For every ground, then, there is groundlessness; and for every actuality that emerges from the possible, there are also actualities

emerging from impotentiality and unground. In fact, to define freedom, liberation and emancipation as an explosion, as the flash of a star (as Marx seems to be doing) is also to refer to an action undertaken by a group of individuals whose basis – will, cooperation, imagination- is baseless.

This is so insofar as the image of the future that motivates the action and will of the group is dark, without firm conceptual support, incomplete or flawed. It is an act of self-negation and a lack of ground that is itself a ground. This leaves us with a basic problem: how to explain creation (the future, the coming of the new, the path to truth) if the group of creators is indeed negatively thought of as being in a position of non-Being, impotentiality, or as the dark unground and night of the world? Three classical philosophical (and political) problems follow from this question: (1) the issue of truth as destination or path; (2) the ontological question of how something can be created from nothing; (3) the onto-economic problem of multiplicity (commons, use and management in common) or indivisible unity and dominion (accumulative appropriation and dispossession). This essay will deal with such questions, as crucial for those working out the consequences of liberation and decolonization, without aspiring to arrive at a firmly grounded destination, but rather, focusing on the path.

1. The Priority of Truthfulness and Creation

In contrast with the seeker of financial gain and selfish ends, for the friend of truth what matters is the path rather than the goal; for him the future is really unknown and the unknown is both the name for what is radically new, which cannot be predicted or calculated as if it were just a matter of fate or sufficient reason, and what is not –nothingness or non-Being. The friend of truth affirms this nothingness and the rights of the unknown. He also says that no one absolutely owns truth or future becoming, and that there is no such thing as the set of all possible actions. This is the opposite of dominion and despotism; it is liberty, emancipation or freedom.

Consider Socrates, the archetypical friend of truth. He confesses not to know, but in doing so he does not renounces truth. Rather, he recognizes himself as a conscious being in his capacity to take distance from the world as it appears to him and reflect upon it, introducing a gap between the present situation and the future, or between his goal and the path leading to it. This gap is a negative condition in which positive capabilities reside, since being conscious of my lack of knowledge also means to realize that knowing and creating a future is only possible as a common quest. A quest that is potentially endless.

There may be truth, Socrates says, but it is not necessarily out there for him, “not in his lifetime at least” as Eduardo Mendieta observes (256). This is why to accept payment for truth is a pernicious act. Firstly, because nothing guarantees that one will be able to provide it in return, and secondly because in fact all that one can return for payment is what has been assumed to be true here and now, which may not be the truth after all. The price of truth is therefore a made up truth, a lie, or the illusion of a completed path. It is also the illusion of despotism: that in the quest for knowledge, one can exclude the potential of all others.

To sum up, financial gain is not truth, but the enemy of truth, because it involves no creativity whatsoever but only received opinion and a denial of the positive capacities of all in nothingness and the future. This is why Socrates refuses knowledge that is paid for. Whereas for the friend of truth in time everything is still up for grabs, for the friend of profit time has come to a halt and we cannot expect anything radically new, no act of creation.

Socrates' orientation towards truth implies an ethical imperative, a principle: You ought to create, or indeed, you *must* create the means of intellect. Moreover, you must do so in common. Rather than lying to ourselves, selling out, or fleeing the anxiety of having to live up to our potential freedom we must make conscious choices obeying no other law than that of unfettered imagination and the extreme realism of language; even without a firm conceptual basis. This is the point made by Marx in his 1844 definition of emancipation, cited above. More recently, Latino philosopher Eduardo Mendieta has referred to this orientation and its implied ethics as “the priority of truthfulness over truth” (255). “Truthfulness is an orientation to oneself by way of relating to others”, he says (257). On the one hand, truthfulness is related to sincerity, honesty, courage, fearlessness, respect and fidelity, as he points out, and on the other it is a way of creation, of creating forms of living and thus making the future happen.

Mendieta evokes the figure of Socrates as a stand in for the priority of truthfulness over truth just as I have invoked Marx as well as Socrates: as instances, real embodiments, of the ethical and poetic principle according to which “You must create the means of intellect in common.” It goes without saying that I consider both principles to be compatible, and to form a veritable alliance.

In his study of politics and imagination, Andy Merrifield compares those who act in accordance with such an alliance of principles, in good faith and free will, with the character Remedios the Beauty in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (125). According to Merrifield, Remedios the Beauty served as a symbol of subversion because “she obeyed no other law than the law of spontaneity”, guided by “the imagination that produces a work of art, that re-appropriates our freedom and turns it into an oeuvre.” He speaks of a magical imagination: “it is magic because it conjures up imaginary forms ... because free consciousness can always formulate the real constitution of an image and therefore posit imaginary images that are realizable possibilities. We know these images exist but know they do not yet really exist” (Merrifield 143).

Following García Márquez, but also Sartre and Marx, Merrifield frames the problematic inaugurated by the distinction between images that exist and those that do not yet really exist. He speaks of the double aspect of nothingness as a slippage between two futures: the future expected and the not-yet real but desired future, conceived of as “a desired object that lies outside of ourselves and which ‘we vigorously strive to attain.’” (144) Echoing the *Manuscripts of 1844*, Merrifield explains that what accounts for the ability to abandon our particularities and become universal is the fact that we can convert our conceptual and imaginative drives into an active transformation of given and expected time, as well as into an act of self-negation and self-creation. Therefore, universality and freedom have to do with the sort of action that releases us from the world as it is and as it is expected, and strives to close the gap between the current situation and the imagined but not-yet real future, regardless of whether or not our striving is actually consequential.

This means that claims to universality and freedom are ethical and poetical, that they belong to the realm of creative action, and not simply to the realm of what we already know. The alliance of principles that I referred to above—truthfulness is prior; you must create the means of intellect in common—must be understood in that sense, as part and parcel of an attempt to open up the field of the ethico-poetic (or unground) from within the field of epistemology.

I believe this is the point of the so-called “decolonial turn”, which began as a project for the identification and uprooting of the long-term effects of colonization in the social sciences and within it epistemology, at the intersection between at least five intellectual legacies: liberation philosophy, world-systems theory, the sociology and political economy of dependency, the critique of racial geography, and pragmatist semiotics. What started as a critique of the universal claims of some parochial standpoints quickly evolved into a political economy of knowledge production in the time of globalization, on the basis of these five traditions of thought (Mendieta 263). It denounced, in truly Socratic fashion, the relationship between the orientation towards financial gain at a planetary level and universal claims to be in possession of the truth as false –as trading in counterfeit coin.

I would like to argue that such a critique is now ready to take the next step: from epistemology to the ethical and the poetic, or even beyond into ontology (the discourse on Being and non-Being, or creation). Rather than appearing as a “turn”, a mere change of direction in the exploration of the co-relation between thought and what it thinks about, the way forward for decolonization is to contribute to the opening up of a field of study comprising ethical and poetic acts of creation; to salvage ethico-poetic action, language and imagination outside of empirically given forms and transcendental norms, from the wreckage left by apocalyptic financial globalization.

2. The Tale of the Two Sorts

What we need now is to help the emergence of the ethico-poetic, radical novelty and creation, beyond the epistemic. Conversely, this also entails the intervention of the ethical and the poetic against epistemology. We begin with a world after the fact of its apocalypse, for instance the Amerindian world post-1492 (posited also a simile of our post-crises times) and the need for a model of construction. Then we follow with an act of recognition of the precariousness of the knowledge upon which we strive to build that model.

Given that all we have been left with are remnants (ruins, junk signs and catastrophes, rather than infallible recipes for change or flawless images for things to come) we should not ask, “What is to be done?” or “Where are we going?” but rather “When are we now?” (Calder Williams 202). For as Evan Calder Williams says, the problem with apocalypse is that it is never apocalyptic enough (47). Our battle-lines are drawn between uneven timescales, as the Latin American Dependency school of thought once taught us.

According to Dependency sociologists, economists and historians, once capitalism was forged out of the enclosure of the commons in England and the Americas the life of societies in this planet became a game of catch up and mimicry. Above all, it has been about making damn sure that once you’ve secured a piece of the pie “you will bar others from entering the system except as

markets for your goods, pools of cheap labor for your production, and sites of resource extraction”, that is, as “brutes of labor”, as Simón Bolívar put it in his 1815 *Letter from Jamaica* (Guardiola-Rivera, Ch. 4, see also Calder Williams 151). The point drawn by Latin American Dependenceists from all this was that the void between those peoples “lagging behind” but rushing headlong forward and those “already there”, at the market-confirmed promised land, may be actually infinite but it is potentially productive; meaning that, on the one hand, crises are a systemic necessity rather than an accidental failure, and on the other, that the position of latecomers, “our barbarians at the value form gate” (Calder Williams 152) in this story is that of a deferred presence, a sign without referent, a tale constantly repeated without context, or “a copy that precedes its original” (Bracken 5).

Let us call this story The Tale of the Two Sorts. It is a fable that originated in the venerable tradition of philosophical geography received from antiquity by Albertus Magnus and others, which drove European explorers, legislators and conquistadors to project their fantasies of redemption in blood and gold onto the Americas from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onwards, and continued to darken the minds of otherwise enlightened people such as Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant, producing in the end veritable economies of race, epistemological decadence, legalities of plunder and other strategies of colonialism recycled to this day in every form but their name by humanitarian interventionists and development aid practitioners (Bracken 22-53; Gordon 87-106; Wey Gómez 107).

According to the tale there are two sorts of peoples: those who lack foresight, do not practice the virtues of frugality and parsimony, people who appear fixated on their past traditions, enjoy too much and consequently never expose themselves to the horizon of accumulation. In contrast, there are those peoples who project themselves onto the future and proceed towards it, going westwards with the sun presiding in slow or no motion over their heads and the certain determination of their gaze fixed on the destination ahead: the promised land of silver and gold. These are the frugal peoples who constantly expand the fruits of today’s labor into all times to come. The former, prodigal peoples, include poets, Amerindian dancers, women, and all sorts of damned and monstrous peoples all over the world condemned by their alleged cultural backwardness if not expelled from their own lands and marked by the color of their skin. The latter, frugal peoples, are the winners, irrespective of any other mark. Everybody knows the tale has no actual referent, we all recognize it as a fable or even a lie that explains little or nothing, and yet it is a lie with remarkable powers of iteration and persuasion. It returns, irrespective of context or content.

Here we have a first intimation of the problem of universality and universals.

Crucially, however, what returns with the tale is the history of the damned. And if we consider the tale of the two sorts as a symptom (due to its repetitive character) rather than a cause, then the inescapable conclusion is that it reveals in fact the universality of monstrous peoples. Monstrous or damned people are an instance of universality in two senses: first, in the sense that their history keeps returning as that which is repressed in a variety of contexts and disciplines. Second, the return of the damned is an example of actuality emerging from impotentiality, like a living dead or a zombie, more universal than an actuality emerging solely from potentiality.

The significance of the notion of an actuality that emerges from impotentiality and not only from potentiality, as well as my use of such characters as zombies and the like in order to speak of the capacity of “monstrous” peoples to act and make history will become clearer later on. For now it will suffice to say that I’m taking the position of what has already been lost or condemned as incapable of knowledge and truth, and that I take this position as a matter of truthfulness and invite you to do the same: to open up the range of what is to include what can not-be “for actuality also emerges from impotentiality” (Bracken 211).

But this is also an ontological question, as suggested at the beginning of this essay, since it involves the problem of creation. Here there are two perspectives we can choose from: either actuality emerges exclusively from potentiality (including chance, probability and the possible) or else actuality can also emerge from impotentiality (including the unknown, the majesty of the gift, the hidden world, the unground, and the challenge of non-humans and ruins that invite us all to stay a bit savage).

If we choose the latter, we avoid condemning the past, including the Amerindian past and the actuality of damned peoples, to a time without history or agency. Rather, we allow ourselves to inhabit those old worlds, their objects and traditions and social relations, all that is thrown out of the object world of late capitalism, and recombine them in order to unlock their potential.

This is neither primitivism nor postmodernism, since our work is not that of nostalgia for the lost object nor it is that of mourning for the absent new. Ours is not the task of destruction—we have been living collapse after collapse for some time now—and it is not the task of subtraction—let’s leave it to others to purify reality, to show its fragmentation and what barely takes place. We seek instead a taking of place through evocation and invocation; the invention of new forms of life—to unleash the creative powers of imagination, language and the planet itself. In other words, construction constitutes our universal task.

The task of creating new ways of life by means of the generative use of imagination, language and the forces of the planet has often been given to the savage magician and the wild shaman, those exiles of history’s Interzone turned into a taboo that we have inherited against our will. However, more often than not, the experience of the savage has either been dismissed as superstitious, as incapable of bringing about something new, or recovered as the “freedom of experimentation” proper of the sort of hybrid subjectivities that theories of globalization and regimes of transnational financial capitalism fantasize about.

I have been saying that what is currently dismissed as wild superstition or recovered as flexible subjectivity, returns to us from the future as a universal and inflexible principle: you must create the means of intellect in common, if there is to be a future. Rather than to stand outside the logic of the game, our job as decolonials and post-apocalyptic constructivists is to play it, or “to track it to its far horizons” as Calder Williams says (31-41). If so, then in its approach to the task of creation and its law the decolonial option is closer to salvagepunk than to primitivism.

3. Law and Evil After the End of the World

What do I mean by salvagepunk (as an ally of decolonialism and as the future of post-crisis Latin Americans and Latinos)? Let me try to explain by means of a story told by Roberto Bolaño. I will use the implications of that story to shed some light on the question of value at the very moment of impotence, which I believe is relevant to an assessment of our current post-crisis situation, or when we are now. Finally, we shall go back to the production of mindless bodies or monsters, to their act of creation out of nothing, and to the need for a proper education (the quest of knowledge) to be defined in terms of unlearning the law of the father and learning from them, Mexican zombies and Brazilian cannibals, “reading the signs they signify” (Gordon & Gordon 120).

In Roberto Bolaño’s *The Colonel’s Son* the protagonist tells the story of a monster B-movie as if it were his “autobiography or a summary of my days in this bitch of a planet” (Bolaño 211). Crucially, he describes it as a revolutionary film not because it was consequential and achieved truth and change here and now, but on the contrary, because it was inconsequential, just like every Occupy or indignant protest we’ve hearing about in the last two or three years. An yet, just like these acts of collective uprising and creation, every frame of the film “was infused with and gave off a revolutionary atmosphere” without making it explicit as a totality, only as a invisible fragment, “I mean as if it was *Jurassic Park* and no one ever even mentioned the fucking reptiles, but their presence was inescapable and unbearably oppressive” (211).

What is the film about? Well, it is about zombies. The protagonist, a young boy, turns up accompanied by his girlfriend Julie at the secret military installation where his father the Colonel works. As it happens in all B-movies, Julie wanders off and gets lost in the labyrinth of the underground compound. Innocently, she walks through a door she never should have opened and on the other side there is a zombie that chases after her, corners her and bites her. The whole scene is quite sexual and suggestive. The colonel’s son saves her and they escape into a typically post-apocalyptic deserted landscape. This is a devastated neighborhood in a U.S. megalopolis that is only slightly different from a desolate Latin American slum (think inner-city Baltimore in *The Wire*, downtown Detroit or New Orleans post-Katrina). Julie’s transformation has begun but the colonel’s son loves her and stands by her. As they escape they come up against a band of Mexicans and a black guy who end up turned into zombies by Julie. Only the young boy is spared. Mexican zombies chase them as if this were a Robert Rodriguez grindhouse, and when all hope seems lost the colonel kicks down the door and blows away the Mexican zombies with his ray gun. “Here I am, Dad”, says the young son of Colonel Reynolds (Bolaño 220).

Only that’s not the end. After the nightmare is over, young Reynolds takes a walk through the underground passageways, thinking over his father’s offer of an adventure trip to Alaska. He hears howls and shouts, and looking for their source he discovers a series of glass cells in what seems a large lab facility. There he finds the Mexicans, a group of army scientists experimenting on the black guy, and Julie. He frees them all and they take on the soldiers who have been alerted by the sounds of alarms. Colonel Reynolds rushes down to save his son once more. With the soldiers turned into zombies the battle becomes chaotic and the facility goes into shutdown. Colonel Reynolds appears, unarmed, telling his son he loves him and gesturing towards an escape route. “Follow me. Hurry up. Soon the doors will shut automatically”, he tells his son and Julie. “All he

gets in response is the sad gaze of his son, who at this moment, and perhaps for the first time, *knows* more than his father. The father at one end of the passage. The son at the other end. And suddenly the doors shut and they ‘re separated forever’ (Bolaño 222). In the final scene, Julie and Young Reynolds hold hands and walk towards the fire that has broken behind them.

What does the son come to know better than his father? We’re never told. Perhaps he realizes that his father would continue experimenting on the savages, and that while he was worrying about the threat to his and Julie’s life, the Mexicans’ knives, the soldier’s guns, the zombie menace, he lost sight of the one behind the threat all along. Only at the moment of ruin it becomes clear what is of true value, even beyond the Law of his Father. In Bolaño’s story, the Law of the Father, Colonel Reynolds, is that of filiation and sacrifice for those who are familiar to us as well as the exchangeability of all others vis-à-vis the possible gains—in this case the Mexicans, the black guy, even Julia, all of them monstrous others to be experimented upon. Therein lies the radicalism of the boy’s revolution: his is the ultimate revolt, for he turns against family and nature opting instead for what is radically foreign (nothingness, the zombies, death). Put otherwise, he leaves the terroristic violence that is characteristic of B-movies (and B-movie revolutions) to something else one might call “revolutionary horrorism”, after Calder Williams (225).

Bolaño’s B-movie hero is a Sartrean hero, foreign even to himself, like Orestes in *The Flies* when he says to his father Zeus: “Outside nature, against nature, without excuse, beyond remedy except what remedy I find within myself. But I shall not return under your law; I am doomed to have no other law but mine” (Sartre 152; Kristeva 159-165). And like Orestes, Bolaño’s Young Reynolds is a hero without sin but not without evil. What kind of evil is this? It is not banal evil; is not even the lesser evil one would use against absolute evil. “Instead it is the necessity of evil assumed in total lucidity, the latter being the only thing capable of limiting it and engaging it in the violence of freedom. The other evil, on the contrary, is more pernicious: the kind that stops pointing out evil, evil that suspends the evil that it is” (Kristeva 162).

My alliance of principles, the priority of truthfulness and creation over truth and filiation, is, similarly, a Nova Law without sin but not without evil, bringing forth the gap between will and its negation that is full of positive capacities. Truthfulness is a matter of playing games, like Socrates did with whomever engaged him in conversation, like the narrator of Bolaño’s tale does with the reader. Truthfulness is on the side of heresy not orthodoxy (of *homo ludens* but not *homo economicus*). In this sense, it opposes absolute value, for instance, the general equivalent of the free market, or the values of morality and authenticity. In turn, creation, for instance literary creation (as exemplified by Bolaño) has more to do with the inauthenticity of characters (like Young Reynolds, Julie and the Mexican zombies, all of them B-movie clichés) who assert themselves in order to unmask the bad faith of the pretenders to conventional authenticity that populate the films, TV screens, mall windows, and political stages of our society of spectacle.

What would justify the universality of this first allied principle of ethical decolonization and poetic salvagepunk? My answer is the following: the fact that after the designation of all objects in terms of their exchange value, or money, the question that remains is precisely that of the value of objects once dismissed as ahistorical or inauthentic but now visible in the very moment of their

ruin—after monetary or functional devaluation. This question re-introduces magic into our everyday objects or “technology.” If money disappears, as in the case of the ongoing “economic crisis”, then what becomes of the value of our objects?

The question of value in the technological era returns over and against the attempt to reduce it to a question of exchange-value, or money; that is, against the law of general equivalence. The global crisis of confidence, which is what the current economic crisis is all about, reveals the need to re-think the excessive nature of objects and technology over money, their excess-value, in relation to nature and the powers of creation. This exercise is most significant in the case of those objects and subjects who have been displaced or exiled and set on the path of nature, tradition, past history and the non-human—peasants, Amerindians, Afroamericans and Afro-Latin Americans, women, Mexican zombies and so on. And since that locus has been inherited by their descendants against their will, a location imposed upon them as a law determining whether they can or cannot speak, whether they can or cannot produce knowledge (Mendieta 263), it matters most to them—to Latinos and Latinas in the U.S. for instance.

Their particular position within the given maps of production and circulation becomes a privileged place to reconsider the question of the excess-value of objects in the era of post-apocalyptic technology and devaluation. Such is the universal question and the point of the work of construction: not simply to roam the junkyards of the world to see what can be disassembled and sold back to the industrial suppliers, but to see what values can be generated outside of the vicious circularity of production and accumulation. I dream of salvagepunk Latinos (Mendieta 264; Calder Williams 41).

4. The Law of the Damned

At stake is the creation of priceless times and priceless nature, over and against the production of mindless bodies. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx refers to nature as the “body without organs of man”, which means that (inorganic) nature is in excess of human embodiment just as much as the human body and its capacities are an extension—not the culmination—of (inorganic) nature (Marx 389-90). The paradoxical implication is that there is nothing “natural” or authentic about the human body insofar as the latter is from the very outset constructed or stitched together from inorganic matter using the means of intellect, just as in the case of *Frankenstein’s* monster, even if it then appears as the very site of the capacity to create such means. Or lack thereof, should one chose to believe the tale of the two sorts.

This assertion goes beyond the fantasies of cyberpunk genre, by pointing out that we are always creating anew our surrounding environments from the leftovers of what was once very new, and that such constructed environments react back upon us. Psychoanalysis, which in the spirit of Frantz Fanon could be claimed as one of the first post-European sciences, makes a similar point when it makes “drive” in general, and “death drive” in particular, that is, the urge to return to inorganic nature that is present in lucid evil and violence, the key tools/names for an appropriate understanding of the (excessive) relationship between the will and its objects. This post-Fanonian

horror psychiatry is underlined by the recognition that “life” as such, and particularly human life, may be no more than an accident, some sort of collateral effect, an excess or an unexpected occurrence, a lab experiment gone wrong but one that once it took place, persisted, or rather, resisted. Extraordinary occurrences in life are neither supernatural nor uncanny, what is uncanny is life itself, or rather, the resistance of life. Life, the time of our life, is resistance.

What does it mean to say “the time of our life is resistance”? It means that the dis-adjustment, the crookedness or disarticulation of our time, of our world (the time of our life) becomes a demand that, in turn, justifies our passage to action. As in the case of Socrates, who defended there was truth even if it was not for him, not in his lifetime. Or as in the case of the Colonel’s son whose love without sin but not without evil was so different from the love and the law of his father the Colonel because he never believed, not for a second, in mindless bodies. Herein lies our problem: how to move from the question of dis-adjusted time (naturalized in the tale of the two sorts that produces mindless bodies on the one hand and winners on the other) to the ethico-political question of injustice (that is, the fact that the city is corrupt and hence, damn that fate, we *must* do justice even if this entails doing evil)? This also means to consider the cannibalistic heterogeneity of our knowledge as colonized mindless bodies, that is, our inheritance (for instance, the many voices of liberation and communism, including that of Marx, in their problematic relation to the epistemologies of the south) and the possibility of creation out of impotence.

To speak of “the many voices of Marx” is to refer both to the variety of media (technological, archival, ruined) and the multiplicity of identities, interruptions and fragmentations that affect his presence to us as marked with the sign of a lucid evil. Let us call this “Marx in Latin America” (I could just as well have said “Asia” or “Africa”, or “the South”)¹ if only to invoke a dispersion of proper names, a pack of demons: José Carlos Mariátegui, first and foremost (as the father who lays down the law for us to betray it) and behind him, above him, the Amerindian (here of course, all hell breaks loose for any proper Marxism and/or any settler Latin-Americanism), Luis Emilio Recabarren, Julio Antonio Mella, Emiliano Zapata, Flora Tristán, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, Darcy Ribeiro, Paulo Freire, Oswald De Andrade, Enrique Dussel, Ernesto Laclau, Aníbal Quijano, Sylvia Rivera, Suely Rolnik and so on. But also a dispersion of concepts: anthropophagy, transculturation, *creolité*, dependency, liberation, hybridity and so forth, all the way to salvagepunk.

What does “Marx in Latin America” have to tell us? Latin Americans in the 21st century, the new age of decadent empire, calling for a de-colonial operation of salvage and construction in philosophy and the humanities in order to justify a passage to action? To begin with, let us notice that to acknowledge Marx’s heterogeneous and evil inheritance is in itself an example of ethico-poetic and political performance. Phrases such as “the world is crooked,” “a specter stalks the land,” “our age has been dishonored”, “this is the new age of decadent empire” or “the sadness of a generation without masters” are instances of poetic and ethico-political inflection. Whoever utters such phrases opposes him/herself to that which has gone astray from the right path, that is, from this or that spirit of the law (“el derecho”) and the law of the father. The opposition here is that between “the state of our situation,” damn that fate, and what is right (whatever that is). Secondly, that inflection is there even if one curses having inherited the language that opposes the state of our

situation to what is right. Is not that precisely our predicament? Having cursed “Marx in Latin America,” having cursed the fate that would have caused us to be born to set right a time that walks crooked, we seek a language that may justify our passage to action. We must understand correctly this double injunction: we do not curse so much the corrupt new world order, this lawless world order, but rather, this unjust effect of law and (dis)order, namely, the fate that would have destined us, Latin Americans, to turn the world back over to the law. Why us? Why Venezuela? Why the Zapatistas? Damn that fate! We swear against this unending misfortune that places us as the vehicle of correction, revenge, punishment, this punishment of having to punish: ser un ángel exterminador, being an exterminating angel.

This misfortune is unending because it is nothing other than ourselves; our-self, as a collective, as commons. Our very self, our subjectivity is out-of-joint in respect to the (new) global order, even though we are part of it. In this respect, we are “part of no-part” of the world order, the ever-returning savage, Mexican zombies, “victims” in Enrique Dussel’s parlance but without Levinasian messianism. To do away once and for all with such messianisms, we must acknowledge that our inheritance (being born to undo the wrong of history) has nothing to do with onto-theology or the specificity of a subject position, but rather, to the fact that our very existence bears witness to an original (or to be precise, pre-original) crime, the crime of the other: the pre-originality of and repetitive compulsion to engage in (global) primitive accumulation. And even though the truth of that event can never present itself, even though it can only be presumed, reconstructed as horrorshow, we are no less responsible (beginning at birth), even if it is only the responsibility to do justice in respect of a crime that no one can admit except, as Jacques Derrida says, “in a self-confession that confesses the other, as if that amounted to the same” (94).²

We damn the fate that has placed us in the position of an exterminating angel (if you like it, a radical version of Walter Benjamin’s angel, salvaging tradition and constructing it anew from within a western system of meanings), immersed in implacable enmity in order to do the work of the law, as if we were cursing the law itself that makes of us the righter of wrongs. Enter Fanon here (*Marx qui genuit Mariátegui qui genuit Fanon qui genuit Derrida*): if law stems from vengeance, that of Orestes or the colonel’s son for instance, if violence is inscribed within the law, as the violent horror that dissipates revolutionary terror, then the condition of enmity between native and invader, and all that comes with it (including armed struggle) is a necessity if we are to dream of a justice that one day would finally be removed from the fatality of violence. To rise up against the repetition of primitive accumulation, which is never too far from the fragile modernity that we have inherited from our fathers and forefathers is a necessity. We must denounce the return of accumulation by dispossession as a perverse obsessive repetition that takes the form of a fantasy of revolutionary violent terror (in Iraq, Colombia or Lybia, but also in inner-city Baltimore and the Mexican-American border). It is a fantasy in the sense that it allows us to approach what we desire without ever getting any closer to it (thus, the father says: rebel, protest, yes, but not in my backyard!).

Instead, we require revolutionary horror. Bolaño’s story helps us making sense of this distinction: terror is about the threat to life but horror is about the threat to knowledge. For instance, when you suddenly realize that your loving father was behind the experiment that turned

your girlfriend into a zombie monster all along. According to the story, in that moment the son knows more than the father perhaps for the first time (Bolaño 222). Like the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the colonel's son and Julie chose to incinerate themselves, a metaphor of returning to death, from which both Shelley's creature and Julie were born.

Fire can be seen as a method of purification, particularly in Christian lore and in philosophical tales in which the course of the sun is used as an allegory for the movement of history, travelling from East to West and somehow stopping in its tracks to bring enlightenment only to the West while it incinerates powerless Amerindians and Africans (Bracken 183; Hegel 81-103). But this is not the case in Bolaño's story. In it, the descent underground and the passage through fire function in the same way they do in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In both cases the core message concerns things of which to let go, of how certain attachments destroy even the future; "it is instructive of what creates hell on earth" (Gordon & Gordon 118).

I believe this is precisely the role of Latin American Studies, placed here under the mark of salvagepunk and decolonization, in the comprehensive university of the 21st century. A society such as ours, "weighed down by the sediment of evaded responsibilities" and closed epistemologies, accepts few opportunities to see itself. Both value and the future are being burnt in the ongoing financial conflagration, but also books, at least in Arizona where Latinos have been banned from telling their stories to each other or read such dangerous writings as *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare. Given these events, or the fact of global warming, "will biblical methods of purifying cities of iniquity [with fire] be our lot?" (Gordon & Gordon 118)

I don't think so. Salvagepunk Latinos and dreaming Amerindians (the Aztec, the Inca, but also the Aymará of today's Bolivia and the peoples of southern Mexico) teach us that from where they stand the global conflagration already took place, only that it wasn't apocalyptic enough. Now we all find ourselves in exactly the same position, specially the young. This being the case, the role of Latin American, and Latino or Ethnic Studies in the comprehensive university nowadays is parallel to that of "the heresy of Renaissance humanists in the face of medieval Christian theological absolutism and the different form of heresy enunciated by people and intellectuals of color in the 1960s [in this country] in the face of secular and religious colonialism, racialism and patriarchalism" (Maldonado-Torres 203).

Renaissance and early modern humanists "defended the value and autonomy of 'Man' and his creations against a view that reduced human beings to the status of sinful creatures. This heresy is the foundation of the *studia humanitas*, or the humanities, which gradually became a fundamental part" of the modern comprehensive, secular university (Maldonado-Torres 203). Distinctly, people of color throughout the last five centuries, and especially in the twentieth century, pointed out that secularism and the free market were not simply generic concepts but concrete realities of exclusion. From at least the nineteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century a new heresy was advocated in the name of "higher law" and "human rights"; contrary to the Renaissance revolution this one did not seek to defend the autonomy of "the human" since those in struggle found themselves in a position "even below humanity", reduced to mere brutes of labor, commodities and mindless bodies.

The lesson of “the other” was the lesson of liberation, a grammar that resonates in Dante’s poem as well as in the many voices of Marx, Hegel or Frantz Fanon, or Cornel West and Enrique Dussel. Latin American and Latino or Ethnic Studies were the result of these voices’ attempt to express, for good or bad, real social struggles. But they have been housed in the modern university “an institution of at least seven to eight hundred years of existence that for the most part of its history has been not only complicit with but an actual participant in the colonization” and alleged purification of knowledges and peoples (Maldonado-Torres 202). No wonder Latin American and Latino or Ethnic Studies are seen by some as some sort of “bastard” field of learning, “more like the result of an undesired concession with political motives than as a legitimate advance in the sophistication of knowledge produced by the university” (Maldonado-Torres 202). In this respect, the role of Latin American Studies and Ethnic Studies is to respond for the first time in history perhaps to a challenge from below and from the other to transform itself. But even then, after the 1960s, the risk was to engage with the voice of the other in some sort of sentimental embrace.

Today, as we take the next step, the role of Latin American Studies and Latino or Ethnic Studies changes as well. Now our problem can be rephrased: how can we affirm the condition of enmity, with us as inheritors of the native, of the crime committed on the other by the invader, the father, the colonel, without falling—yet again—for the sentimental romance of alterity? As we seek for a voice of autochthonous resistance (*Mariátegui qui genuit Fanon*) and make of the bastard and the exterminating angel the very figure of history, how not to succumb to another quest romance, or even worst, to another theodicy?

To do this we must recognize that one does not leave one’s own self behind that easily, that we are all inheritors of a destiny, even if we curse that destiny. Put otherwise, this means that the apocalyptic revelation that has visited us young Latinos, women and other peoples of color for a very long time and is now visiting the young of Europe, that the refrain “there is no future” (it wasn’t just Sid Vicious singing a swan song, but the very mode of capitalist persistence) has come to mean there’s no exit either. But also, crucially, that this is not a homogeneous condition for this is a globe in which portions of it are designated not of this world. This is what it means to move from the terroristic violence of this world to violence against the horror of such a world. Embrace such parts of the world and their bastard knowledges and languages because they are now your own.

Unlike the previous generations of heretics and revolutionaries we see less inevitability to the processes of emancipation. We know [like Fanon and others] that oftentimes those who initiate the work of creation and liberation become the greatest impediments to its persistence; look at the Arab Spring, look at Latin America. Those who lead us to the Promise Land “are not necessarily the best equipped to govern us there. It may be best that they do not enter” (Gordon & Gordon 119). It might be best to shut the door behind them and be separated forever.

It is within that heterogeneous inheritance that we are fated to do justice; even if our fate is, to quote Henry Louis Gates Jr., “to rehearse the agonisms of a culture that may never earn the title of postcolonial” (267). Indeed, to know more than the father, to create our own means of intellect in common, may be the task of Latin American and Latino or Ethnic Studies under the mark of salvagepunk and decolonization today. We need heresies and revolutions in the name of post-human

rights, the rights of the planet and the rights of future generations. We need to become heretics because today, more than ever, the future seems to be of little concern for an age that valorizes the young but in which they are ultimately envied “to the point of hatred” (Gordon & Gordon 119). That future seems to have become irrelevant in an age of greed, which, according to its own logic cannot even see what is “ours” or common, but only what is “mine” (Gordon & Gordon 119).

Notes

¹ My reference here is twofold: first to a tradition, the Tricontinental inheritance. I refer to the as yet unwritten history of the Comintern’s relation to anti-colonial critique up to the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1920, the post-War national liberation movements and, specially, the legacy of Bandung and the Tricontinental, as the inheritance of such contemporary movements of global resistance as the World Social Forum (WSF). Second, to the project of the “epistemologies of the south” being developed by sociologist and legal theorist Boaventura de Sousa Santos.

² I have borrowed freely from Chapter 1 of Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* in these paragraphs.

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