UNBOUNDED HISTORIES: HEGEL, FANON, AND GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

Alejandro A. Vallega

Abstract: The following article discusses a certain concrete ethical-historical sensibility that opens, in part, in the work of Hegel and serves as an introduction to two figures of spirit beyond Hegel’s onto-theological thought: namely, Frantz Fanon and Gabriel García Márquez. The discussion seeks to introduce a “thinking sensibility,” i.e., an opening toward the articulate understanding of history in and through its singularities. This figures a space for a way of thinking arising in the concrete unfolding of spirits out of singularities that overwhelm any single or universal call for unity. In terms of history, this concerns not a thinking that gives sense to history through concepts, but a thought that from its specificity and situation unfolds diverse articulations, and hence configurations of the senses of spirit or histories.

The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us ever more unknown, ever less free, ever more solitary.—Gabriel García Márquez

Hegel’s philosophy opens a space for the question of history as a question of human freedom in the sense of an ethical humanity that comes to concrete form through the work of spirit. As such, Hegel’s work not only remains to date a thread in the metaphysical and transcendental understanding of human history, but also underlies many of the critiques that look for the understanding of concrete senses of existence beyond Western onto-theological humanism. The theme of the following discussion is a certain concrete ethical-historical sensibility that opens, in part, in the work of Hegel; and, it will serve as an introduction to two figures of spirit beyond Hegel’s onto-theological thought: namely, Frantz Fanon and Gabriel García Márquez.¹ This discussion seeks to introduce a “thinking sensibility,” i.e., an opening toward the articulate understanding of history in and through its singularities. We seek to introduce a space for a way of thinking arising in the concrete unfolding of spirits out of singularities that overwhelm any single or universal call for unity. In terms of history, this concerns not a thinking that gives sense to history through concepts, but a thought that from its specificity and situation unfolds diverse articulations, and hence configurations of the senses of spirit or histories. The weight of the issue becomes more immediate when we consider spirit and history in terms of alterity.

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in 1982, Gabriel García Márquez explained that the reason behind the misery, abandonment, and solitude that Latin America has experienced for hundreds of years ultimately results from “a lack of conventional means...
to render our lives believable.” In other words, the poverty and oppression of “the other” has as much to do with economic and political interests, as with a certain “aphasia,” a lack of expressions that would make possible the partial recognition of “the other” in her lived specificity. If such is the case, the encounter of Western philosophy and culture with “the other” is not about making room for the foreigner in our discourses: the crucial point for us is not to “re-cognize” “the other,” to define or recover “the other,” through his/her incorporation into our conceptual figurations of existence. Instead, we are speaking of rushing in and leaping into incommensurable languages and difficulties. Here two issues inherent in our task become apparent: the necessary unfolding of another’s expression; and the impossibility of setting out toward contacting another with the certainty of a presupposed discourse of recognition. If this is the case, we are speaking of a thinking that unfolds in a sense of specificity and otherness that overflows and ultimately does not refer to a self-same identity. In this sense, we are speaking of configurations of beings and histories that cannot be determined in reference to the single history of the West. One could go as far as to say that we are speaking of thinking in translations without possible resolution into originals. In this sense the following discussion intends to situate us in a conceptual space between the three author’s registers, without forcing the traditional resolution of differences into one rational or onto-theological discursive consciousness. Thus, in our discussion we will have to develop the discipline of letting the diverse discourses converse out of their singular eventuation, and, most poignantly, without the supposition of a logical, conceptual-teleological, or linguistic unifying principle granting concordance between us, Hegel, Fanon, García Márquez.

Hegel: Overflowing Spirit

In the *Phenomenology* Hegel points us toward a reflexive human consciousness that goes beyond conceptual subjectivism, one which in doing so takes flight toward a historical sense of humanity fundamentally ethical and free. But the *Phenomenology* does not end there. The *Phenomenology* leads us toward a thinking sensibility that from its situatedness in its lived specificity opens spirit to diversified and diversifying unexpected senses of being; a thinking that overflows all ontological figurations based on the idea of resolution into a single and absolute identity. To say it formally, and in contrast to the traditional metaphysical and idealist readings of Hegel: The idealism that sustains Hegel’s thought in the *Phenomenology* slips and ends up opening toward a thought in-difference, an experience that overflows rationalism by opening ontology to the unfolding of senses of being in differences without a teleological recourse to an identity or history that may internalize the differences and in this way resolve them, contain them, and justify them into meaningful presences. I find such overflow already figured in Hegel’s appropriation of Schiller’s *Die Freundschaft* at the end of the *Phenomenology* (in “Absolute Knowledge”), where he writes: “Only from the chalice of this realm of spirits foams forth for Him his own infinitude.” The discussion in this section seeks to begin to articulate this overflow or “foaming forth” of spirit.

As is well known, in Hegel the ethical opens with the movement of spirit as self-consciousness, i.e., beyond sheer sense-perception and the relationship of consciousness to nature. This occurs as consciousness engages its other in living flesh. As Hegel explains in
“On Lordship and Bondage,” “A self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it.” Here it is not enough to have an internal consciousness; it is not enough for me to think that “I am.” As the quote indicates, we are speaking of a reflexive self-consciousness in which consciousness recognizes itself, it is “for” itself, appears to itself: and this requires that consciousness encounter itself as an “other” self-consciousness given to it. Furthermore, self-consciousness arises in its opening for other consciousnesses or human beings as the two consciousnesses arise in intense mutual negation. Thus the ethical-historical opening through the unfolding of universal self-consciousness only occurs in the undergoing of specific lived alterity.

At the same time, difference is internalized (Er-innerung) in order to get to universal self-consciousness. Hegel writes, “negativity or diversity, like free being, is also the Self.” We are speaking here of the general movement of consciousness in its unfolding toward absolute spirit, or of the “Aufhebung.” At each turn in the fluid movement of consciousness toward absolute spirit negativity or difference is internalized. First, all affirmation encounters a movement of difference—an externalization of spirit in the form of negation. Then this encounter leads to a second negation, in which the opposition or exteriorization of spirit is internalized and consciousness finds itself in its newborn form. Through this process of internalization (Er-innerung) all negativity and difference ends up being appropriated by the movement of spirit. As the quote above indicates, this is because the difference or negativity is always proper to spirit and a manifestation of it. Given this movement, although recognized, ultimately all differences should be claimed and explained in terms of one central identity and absolute knowledge. But such absolute resolution depends on how we understand the coming to pass of this movement. If we go beyond the section of self-consciousness in the Phenomenology and take up some specific points in the experience of spirit, we see that the internalizing of differences only leads toward a more concrete, specific, and lived sense of universal difference, and particularly in terms of human action. This is why, in his famous course on the Phenomenology Hyppolite refers to Hegel’s thought as a “concrete idealism.”

In the section on Spirit, Hegel writes that self-consciousness has actuality “only in so far as it alienates itself from itself.” This alienation takes the form of works and culture. As Hyppolite indicates throughout his commentary, and as Kojève also emphasizes, spirit occurs for Hegel through the experience of the world, understood through culture and specific human action. For example, when we arrive at the moment of reason in consciousness, reason’s idealism is not sufficient as spirit’s knowledge and requires the undergoing of human action and works. Here is where Hyppolite speaks of “concrete idealism.” As he explains, this is clear in the Phenomenology where the spiritual world is the world of culture and alienation, as figured by the case of the slave’s production of goods, which in its dialectic sense can be the alienation from self that sets him free; and also, as well, as figured by the case of the lacerating function of language in the world of culture. As Hegel writes, “in speech, self-consciousness, qua independent separate individuality, comes as such into existence, so that it exists for others.” Thus, the experience of spirit in light of self-consciousness will lead us toward a more concrete experience of conceptual understanding, one that requires the undergoing of the specificity and differences of human life.
If we now return to the end of the *Phenomenology*, we find a further sense of the specificity of spirit in Hegel’s thought, and a step beyond its idealist articulation in terms of the dialectic of spirit toward the absolute. Immediately before the passage that opened our discussion Hegel writes, “The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits as they are in themselves. . . . Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History; but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the Science of Knowing in the sphere of appearance: the two together, comprehended History, form alike the inwardizing and the Calvary of absolute spirit, the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne, without which he would be lifeless and alone.”

As a transition or introduction to his later works this last quote from Hegel indicates a thought that goes beyond the different moments of consciousness figured in the *Phenomenology*. But to where does this intimation point us? History and its formal sense have been seen in the *Phenomenology* through a language of images, a language that allows us to recall (erinnert) each step of consciousness and to undergo the movement of spirit in it. And yet, absolute knowledge must go beyond this, because if spirit is to think itself in its self-movement, the reflexive space established by representational language as the space for the undergoing of spirit must also be overcome. This is because we are no longer looking for the formal moments and historical contingencies in absolute knowledge. But if not that, what are we talking about? And how are we to speak? I think that it is precisely at this point that we can begin to understand the sentence from Hegel that opened our discussion, a sentence that announces the overflowing of spirit over a cup that can not contain it.

The *Phenomenology* leaves us at the edge of a fluid thought that would not treat or seek an object or movement from a distanced position of knowledge. But if nothing rests to be grasped or explained from a reflexive distance, this does not mean that we are now beyond life, in a kind of metaphysical trance. The fluid movement of thought intimated at the closure of Hegel’s work refers us to a word that unfolds in and from a state of consciousness in which life and knowledge are spirit, and in which, for this very same reason, the word is life. That is to say, Hegel’s work leads us to a point where thought is not only reflexive, but where all reflexivity and senses of being may only occur out of a thought undergone and arisen in its living specificity. In this sense thought figures a certain sensibility in which unfolds our consciousness of living, a consciousness found in the word. At the same time, as Hegel’s paraphrasing of Schiller indicates, such thought overflows the form and content accomplished by the *Phenomenology*'s concrete idealism. How is one to understand then this sensibility of being that is neither universal proposition- formal abstraction, nor pragmatic fact? How to think that overflowing fluidity that is not even an “excess,” but sheer spirit? Curiously, at this point in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel seems to be speechless, since the intimation of the radical opening to a living fluid thought is found in words stolen from a poet.

We may close this section with a few remarks about what we have said thus far on our way toward a sense of the ethical-history beyond spirit and its other. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel proposes that we situate conceptual knowledge, its possibility and sense, in the specificity of life, and as a universal knowledge that is inseparable from ethics and human
freedom. But we can not engage this aspect of Hegel’s thought without recognizing its internal conflict. On the one hand, the knowledge of which we speak does not abandon the appropriative self-sufficiency of spirit figured by the internalization of differences in each movement of consciousness toward a universal absolute identity. Furthermore, given this appropriative manner of internalization of all differences, we should begin to be aware of the possible impossibility of hearing other discourses as other if all otherness is ultimately under one universal principle of identity. As Gadamer reminds us at the end of “Hegel’s Dialectic,” “The path of mankind to universal prosperity is not as much the path to the freedom of all. Just as easily, it could be a path to the unfreedom of all.” This danger is heard in its specific imperialistic connotations when one considers that for Hegel the history of spirit is Western rationalist and Judeo-Christian history. On the other hand, as we have heard, Hegel’s thought leads toward a conceptual sensibility that can situate us precisely in an overflow of all conceptual or historical internalization of alterity under one single and absolute principle of identity. In this sense, the thought that is anticipated by the end of the Phenomenology suggests a thinking from the specificity of difference, since in being situated in the overflowing of spirit thought would begin to unfold ethical and political discourses and community out of its lived specificity. But here we encounter an indication toward a radical shift in thought that we must underline before going on to the next section.

In speaking of otherness in Hegel we are speaking then of “the other of a self-same identity.” However, in recognizing in our discussion a certain overflowing of such structure of identity, we have sought a thought that goes beyond the understanding of otherness or alterity as the other of a certain absolute identity or first principle. This means that (at this point) we are seeking other ways of articulating the senses of being—ways which do not take as the only possible way of thinking identities the relationship between the self-same identity and its other or otherness. In short, the problem is to think otherness (alterity) in departure from the other of the self-same identity. Here we are speaking of thinking in and from alterity and not in terms of an onto-theology and idealism predicated on absolute self-same identity and its other. If this is the case, although it was necessary for us to recognize philosophy’s characteristic way of understanding identity, we are now not necessarily looking for a traditional philosophical thought. But, to go beyond such philosophical thought does not mean not thinking. On the contrary, the point is to open our work beyond that ontology of self-sameness, toward possibilities for thinking and unfolding senses of being through other dynamics and movements of thought.

Fanon: Others beyond Dialectic Spirit

In Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks (Peau noire masques blancs), “the other” is the white man and woman, the colonizer, Western culture. In contrast to what we just saw in the previous section on Hegel, this already announces a radical change in the situation of thought. This is a shift in the very situation from which one begins to think the senses of being of humanity in its ethical possibility, alterity, and toward freedom. Indeed, one of the most powerful aspects of the book is its transposition of the human situation to an experience outside, beyond Hegelian reflexive dialectic, and therefore outside the dominant insistence in situating the sense and sensibility of being human under and in terms
of a central identity that translates all otherness into the discourse of rationalism and the Western Judeo-Christian canon. At the same time, this does not mean that Fanon abandons the ideal of a fundamentally ethical sense of being for “humanity.”

Fanon’s book is not written against whites or the West. As Fanon himself explains in reference to Nietzsche, his is not a “reactive” book but rather a call for action. He writes in his introduction, “I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psycho-existential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it.”

In his work Fanon offers a prognosis of an ill society that situates the colored human being in terms of a vicious cycle figured by two fundamental elements: the false idea of superiority of whites, and the complex of inferiority on the part of the men and women of color (which sustains an almost total existential dependency on whiteness). Fanon’s work focuses on the situation of the colored men and women within this existential pathology, and explores their sense of identity in departure from their inferiority complex. The final aim of Fanon’s work is “the desalienation of the negro.” “Desalienation” here indicates the liberation of the colored person in order that he or she can be recognized as a human being. Fanon writes, “what is truly to be done is to set man (l’homme) free.” At issue is the raising of consciousness to an ethical dimension of human freedom. At this point we hear Fanon’s proximity to Hegel, and we are reminded of the primary importance the German philosopher has for him. As is the case for Hegel, it is as a certain state of consciousness that we may arrive at a sense of ethical being and human freedom, specifically in the sense of a consciousness that overcomes its narcissism. For both thinkers humanity depends on being with and for others. However, we should not leap at the conclusion that in speaking of l’homme Fanon’s thought follows Hegel’s idealism.

Fanon explains his intention precisely in contrast to idealism: “Ah, yes, as you can see, by calling on humanity, on the belief in dignity, on love, on charity, it would be easy to prove, or to win the admission, that the black is the equal to the white. But my purpose is quite different: What I want to do is help the black man to free himself of the arsenal of complexes that has been developed by the colonial environment.” Indeed, Fanon distances himself from idealism to the point of indicating in his conclusion that his project is situated from the outset outside the ideal expectations of the universal categorical imperative of Kantian ethics. Fanon’s aim is the uncovering and recognition of the ethical being and freedom fundamental to being human, but this is not an idealist endeavor. Fanon’s way is concrete. He will work out of the specific situatedness of the colored person, and in departure from colonialist consciousness. Through his situated understanding of the pathology of colored consciousness he aims to make a leap toward a state in which a mutual self-recognition with others is possible. In order to understand this leap I will focus the following discussion on how Fanon’s situated analysis uncovers a sense of being that does not fit in the internalizing movement of Hegel’s dialectic.

Fanon writes in his introduction, “Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation.” If, as we saw, in Hegel’s case spirit points toward a conceptual experience that goes beyond an absolute concept that internalizes all differences and makes them part of the absolute that contains them, in Fanon’s work we find in the experience of the person of color senses of being that do not have place within the dialectic of identity that understands otherness as the other of the self-same identity. Fanon writes of his experi-
ence as a colored man in the Western world, “I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things . . . and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects.”27 The problem is that the colored person appears as an object and does not have a sense of being an independent and therefore human consciousness. Given this lack of recognition of the colored man as an independent consciousness among others, Fanon concludes that, “Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the way-side—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man.”28 The point is not to make a general attack against all conceptual understanding of being. Here “ontology” refers to the principle of identity that, as we said above, sustains the philosophical tradition. The problem is that there is a discrepancy between the encounter of consciousnesses that according to Hegel grounds and leads to a possible mutual recognition between self and other self and the specific and situated experiences of being of the colored person in a colonialist culture.

As Fanon explains, “The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man.”29 In the section titled “The Negro and Hegel,” he elaborates this problem: “Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions.”30 In a footnote in the same section he writes, “I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work.”31 Concerning the slave, he goes on to indicate in the same note, “In Hegel the slave turns away from the master and turns toward the object [production, culture, etc.]. Here the slave turns toward the master and abandons the object.”32 First of all, what fails is the encounter between the two consciousnesses: The colonizer does not see the colonized as an opposite consciousness, but only sees the laborer’s production. It is precisely this blindness that dupes the white man into believing to be superior to the colored person. At the same time, the colonized does not recognize his labor, but only recognizes himself in and through the image of his master. Fanon explains that this happens even when the white man frees the colored person.33 Even the encounter in which freedom is granted to a slave lacks a certain des-encounter, i.e., it lacks the tension in which the two consciousnesses end up destroying each other and in that passage come to recognize each other. “There is no open conflict between white and black. One day the White master, without conflict, recognized the Negro slave.”34 Without resistance, in the indifference of a consciousness that serves itself of the other without recognizing him as an opposite equal, the possibility of being recognized as a human being vanishes: “it is just this absence of wish, this lack of interest, this indifference, this automatic manner of classifying him, imprisoning him, primitivizing him, decivilizing him, that makes him [the black man] angry.”35 Furthermore, without the tension of a des-encounter (desencuentro), the desire for recognition does not arise.36 This lack of desire is crucial for Fanon’s analysis: The point is precisely not to define the situation of the colored person in terms of the white colonizer, to blame him or her would be useless and would once again put the colored person in a passive position of non-recognition. The leading problem is that the colonized never has enough self-consciousness to have the desire for recognition as an independent and autonomous consciousness, and, therefore,
never recognizes the possibility of being equally productive of culture and meaning as the white person. Ultimately, Fanon’s analysis leads him to a drastic conclusion: the lack of dialectic tension and its result in the absence of a desire for full recognition make the colonized non-existent. Fanon asks rhetorically, “A feeling of inferiority?” His reply: “No, a feeling of nonexistence.” We are ultimately speaking of lives degraded to the point of being inexistente as human beings: The colored person has the value of an object for the other, and the other dazzles his workers with a narcissistic presence. Given this last point, we can see that the non-dialectic specificity of the colored person also figures the impossibility of arriving at an ethical sense of human freedom as figured by Hegel, since, as we saw above, according to him it is through this des-encounter that self-consciousness comes into its ethical openness. But where does this analysis lead beyond indicating a negativity lost to its senses of being?

By pointing to the lived specificity of the colored man and the impossibility of fitting such experiences in Hegel’s dialectic of identity Fanon’s work exposes us to experiences of being that cannot be situated in accordance with the history of being as a history determined by Western idealism and Judeo-Christian thought. Given this separation of the specific experiences Fanon analyzes from the dialectic history of Europe, the experience of humanity that Fanon seeks can not take as its point of reference the concepts of identity that sustain Western and European modern philosophy, specifically the fictitious relationship between a self-same central and unified identity and its “other.” Fanon’s analysis focuses on the specific living situatedness of the colored person, in order to open from those experiences toward a sense of humanity beyond the colonialist neurotic pathology, and as he himself puts it, he does so by “digging through his own flesh to find a meaning.”

Two salient aspects of this analysis are his discussion of the epidermic schemata that situates colored men and women, and the creative leap beyond such immediate historical and existential situation. As Fanon explains, the colored man finds himself locked in his colored body and skin. This epidermic schema is configured through various levels of consciousness, such as, “legends, stories, history, and above all historicity.” However, ethical being and human freedom must transcend the epidermic schemata and their historical facticity: “I am not a prisoner of history. . . . I am part of being to the degree that I go beyond it.” This does not mean that Fanon calls for abandoning lived specificity and memory. Rather, this departure from historical fact only emphasizes Fanon’s dynamic sense of lived specificity, and leads us to his sense of specificity as almost a fundamental temporality. As he explains, “I am a man, and what I have to recapture is the whole past of the world. . . . In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself.” In going beyond the immediate situation, specificity and memory are not abandoned. On the contrary, we are speaking of coming to recognize ourselves, as does Fanon, in a historicity that although harsh, is the situation, space and time of one’s being there (sentido). In other words, when we follow his concrete analysis, we find that Fanon calls us to take flight toward ethical human freedom from the living pulse in which we are situated. We are speaking of taking flight in a decisive manner in departure from one’s specificity. But this is a radical realization, since we are situated in a temporal disposition that is not passive: we can not merely wait and then welcome the sense of being while oblivious to our situation. Fanon writes in his conclusion to Black Skin White Masks, “I
should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* [saut] consists in introducing invention into existence [*l’invention dans l’existence*].” Here Fanon invites us to make a leap out of a situatedness that is not other than time in its transformative overflow of all historical figurations, a leap out of and toward our senses of humanity. Alas, we close this brief and introductory discussion of Fanon with an inviting proposition: The seeking of a word that arises in its situated specificity, beyond the dialectic ordered by a single identity as is the case in Western idealism. In the next and last section I would like to offer a short discussion of an author whose work I find to be a fine example of such leap in lived specificity and difference.

**Gabriel García Márquez and the Words of a Stupendously Unbounded Reality**

Few of us today fail to have at least a general idea concerning that apparently incredible world that began to open half a century ago with the so-called boom of Latin American literature, and particularly through such works as *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by Gabriel García Márquez. As these writers came to be known, they were identified as a movement named “magic realism,” given the events and orderings that often occur in those works. At the same time, the same works, often written in Paris and other cities in Europe, gave voice and presence to what is today a strong part of Latin America’s identity. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, closes with a line that takes us back to García Márquez’s Nobel Prize speech: “the races [*estirpes*] condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on the earth.” It is precisely against this last sentence of the book that we may place the last words of his speech: “the races condemned to one hundred years of solitude will have, at last and forever, a second opportunity on earth.” But in what way do these races find their opportunity in García Márquez’s work? We find an indication in a statement almost as incredible, or at least as difficult to accept, as the stories Márquez tells in his books. In his interview with his friend Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza in *The Scent of Guayaba*, when asked about his stories, García Márquez replies, “There isn’t one line in my books not based on reality.” I do not doubt that this reply may cause us to grin precociously or that it may sound like mere hubris. And yet, this sentence is crucial to understanding in what way, according to García Márquez, the solitary races may be heard and recognize in their specific ways of being. The key to this recognition is a conception of language as an articulate word that arises in its specific reality.

In the same interview the author explains, “the discovery that allowed me to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was simply that of a reality, our reality, observed without the limitations imposed to them by rationalists and Stalinists in order to make their understanding easier.” Beginning from a reality that is “ours” is fundamental for the author, and this is because of the character of such reality. As he tells Apuleyo, “Our reality is unbounded (desmesurada) and often offers us writers very serious problems, that of the insufficiency of words.” In other words, it is the lack of conventional means to make oneself heard that condemns Latin America to its solitude, and this lack is imposed by experiences or a lived specificity that require a certain language that we do not have at hand. As the citation above indicates, to a large extent this lack occurs because reality does not fit within the delineations and fields of experience acceptable to rationalism, that is, to the ordering of the Western rationalist discursive tradition. García Márquez insists on this throughout his interview.
and Nobel speech. That for him Latin American reality is “desmesurada,” means literally incommensurable, beyond measure; it means that this reality can not be explained or for this matter internalized through a rational principle of identity (dialectical or quantitative). Furthermore, if García Márquez begins to unfold such reality, this articulation and reality must also figure outside the parameters of a rationally explainable European history, be it as a logical or rational movement of spirit or as its factual process. This is because reality in Latin America occurs in an overflow of ideals based on a single principle of identity, such as the ones that sustain Western philosophy and its rational ordering and logic. In simple terms, one can recall that, since 1492, Latin America exists in a double history that makes impossible the claim of one distinct identity. Such overflowing experiences we find figured in the encounters and “des-encounters” that sustain the so called “estirpe” (race) of the Buendiases in One Hundred Years of Solitude; or, to take another familiar example, this overflowing is evident when one looks to the impossible spaces, the unlikely catalogue of beings, and the infinite relationships in Jorge Luis Borges’s stories, that impossible space from which Foucault with laughter sets out to question the epistemic structures of knowledge in the West in The Order of Things (Les Mots et les choses).

As García Márquez points out, this overflowing reality is not a senseless chaos, a negativity lost to nonsense for being “incommensurable” in relation to a logical dialectic that may allow us to situate identity. As he explains concerning what he finds in Latin American reality, “Within the greatest seeming arbitrariness there are laws. One can take off the rational vine leaf, with the condition of not falling into chaos, into total irrationalism.” This is to say that Latin America in its lived specificity has sense and order, although these may not fit or refer to the requirements of a rationalist Western cannon. García Márquez recalls in his acceptance speech that when the railroad of Panama was constructed under European tutelage, the European agreement included the strict measure that the railroads could not be built from iron because of its cost, so that given its location the material of choice was gold. The author also reminds Apuleyo of those deluges in Central America that escape the word rain in a European context, and of those people who by means of prayers take away warms from animals’ ears. The point is not the strangeness of reality in general, but the singularity and sense of a specific reality. Furthermore, for García Márquez the way that reality is engaged is crucial, i.e., through concrete imagination rather than through the volatile production of fantastic rational images and their empty ideals. As García Márquez explains, “With time I discovered . . . that one can not invent or imagine what ever one wants, because one risks telling lies. . . . I think that imagination is but an instrument of elaboration of reality. But at the end, the source of creation is always reality. And fantasy, that is invention pure and simple, à la Walt Disney, without any footing in reality, is the most detestable that there can be.” The function of imagination is crucial: the author understands it as an instrument that works out of its specific lived situatedness, and beyond rationalism, in order not to abandon sense and order in their specificity. We are not speaking of imagination as the making of images that may be invented or as the rationalist function that may provide projections of order. Also, we are not speaking of confusing literary fiction with reality. For García Márquez literature and language occur in departure from a necessity imposed by their lived specificity, and from that incommensurable but concrete experience weave senses of being. As he indicates in his discussion
with Apuleyo, language unfolds a necessity imposed by its lived specificity, i.e., as a word arisen with its specific situatedness.56

**Conclusion: Remedios la Bella that Rises to Heaven**

If Fanon invites a leap toward a sense of humanity and freedom found in the creative specificity of a lived word, Gabriel García Márquez’s works figure that experience. Both authors agree on the need to unfold senses of being in departure from the lived specificity in which they arise, and as a result of this in their works they lead us beyond the Western rationalist and onto-theological delimitation of senses of humanity and freedom. Without doubt Fanon and García Márquez invite us to enter territories of which we have little knowledge and to encounter issues we cannot control, and for which we cannot simply propose solutions at a distance or a single historical horizon.57 In the case of García Márquez I think that it is impossible to define life in its specificity as the other of a single rationalist principle of identity and with a view toward such identification of origins. But this does not mean that we must forgo the possibility of engaging the sense of that lived specificity: a lived specificity that in García Márquez even slips between God’s fingers. Some of you may recall that in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Remedios la Bella ends up rising to heaven. As García Márquez tells in the interview, such levity is not easy to accomplish:

No, she did not rise. I was desperate for making her rise. One day, thinking about the problem, I went out in the patio of my house. There was much wind. A very large and beautiful black woman that came to wash our clothes was trying to hang sheets on a line. She could not, the wind kept taking them away. Then I had the illumination. . . . Remedios la Bella needs sheets in order to rise to heaven. In this case, the sheets were the element offered by reality. When I returned to the type writer, Remedios la Bella rose, rose and rose without difficulty. And there was no God that could stop her.58

This story gives us an example of the specific relation between story and reality in García Márquez. Furthermore, as a point of distinction between the three authors we have been discussing, the story makes us understand a certain lightness in the situated and overflowing word of a spirit stupendous and immeasurable in its time. I find in such experience or time a specificity that is not translatable into philosophical discourses of identity, and that precisely because of this, may offer us a site for thinking the other in departure from the other of the self. It has been my intention throughout our discussion to lead us to such space of des-encounter and to give you a sense of an experience of thought and of senses of being in translation, i.e., in the impossibility of translating our being in difference into a single absolute identity or discourse of a Spirit and “its” history. Perhaps in such des-encounters we might begin to encounter histories in their unbounded realities and play. I am referring to our “being there” exposed in that which does not belong to us, in that which does not own us and that we do not need to internalize completely—to own, in order to understand each other and find spacings toward our senses of being in their specificities, differences, and stupendous histories.

*CSU/Stanislaus*
Notes

1. A version of this text was delivered as a conference at the Collegium Phaenomenologicum in 2005. I have tried to keep the candid tone of the exchange and the atmosphere in which, and for which, I wrote the original piece.


3. All references to the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* come from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), and will be indicated as “*Phenomenology*” followed by the paragraph number. In this case: *Phenomenology*, ¶808.

4. Ibid., ¶177.

5. “Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case” (ibid., ¶187).

6. Ibid., ¶805.

7. Ibid., ¶808.


12. Ibid., ¶808.

13. Ibid., ¶788; ¶805.

14. “Spirit is this movement of the Self which empties itself of itself and sinks itself into its substance,” ibid., ¶804.


16. We are speaking inversely of an exclusion of the other through the internalization of all difference through sovereign representation.


18. This is a point Rodolphe Gasché made at the meeting of the International Hermeneutisch Symposium in Freiburg, 2005.

19. “I said in my introduction that man is a yes. I will never stop reiterating that... Man’s behavior is not only reactionary. And there is always resentment in a reaction. Nietzsche had already pointed that out in *The Will to Power*.” All references refer to *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), and will be noted by page number only. In this case, p. 222. All references to the French edition come from *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), the page number will follow after the English translation’s pagination. “And, through a private problem, we see the outline of the problem of Action. Placed in this world, in a situation, ‘embarked,’ as Pascal would have it,” pp. 229–230; “he who looks into my eyes for anything but a perpetual question will have to lose his sight; neither recognition nor hate,” p. 29.

21. Ibid., p. 38.
22. "[V]eritablement il s'agit de lâcher l'homme." Ibid., p. 9; French, p. 6.
23. I should add that Fanon’s encounter with Hegel occurs through the lectures of Hyppolite and Kojève in France and the influence of Aimer Césaire.
27. Ibid., p. 109.
28. Ibid., p. 110.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., pp. 216–217.
31. Ibid., p. 220.
32. Ibid., p. 221.
33. Ibid., p. 217.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., p. 32.
36. In *Subjects of Desire*, Judith Butler argues that desire is fundamental to the movement of spirit and not subject to it. However, she also indicates that desire only occurs in concrete figurations. Indeed, she writes, “True subjectivities come to flourish only in communities that provide for reciprocal recognition, for we do not come to ourselves through work alone.” Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 58; see also p. 46. By contrast, as I mentioned above, in his study, *Hegel and the Other*, Philip J. Kain misses Fanon’s point by explaining that Hegel’s dialectic happens in terms of Kantian transcendental ethics. Philip J. Kain, *Hegel and the Other* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), pp. 52–56.
37. Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, p. 139.
38. I might add a narcissism that also figures non-existence at the level of self-consciousness expected by both Fanon and Hegel.
39. See John Russon on the concrete sense of the dialectic: *The Self and Its Body in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 72–75; and, in *Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology*, chapter 15, “Absolute Knowing.” (Reading Hegel’s Phenomenology [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004], pp. 221–228.) In both cases Russon points to the necessity of a concrete determination in the dialectical movement, i.e., not only transcendental.
41. “There are times when the black man is locked into his body.” Ibid., p. 225.
42. Ibid., p. 112.
43. Ibid., p. 229.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid. We should keep in mind at this point that for Fanon euphoria is nothing more than a form of blind desperation. “I do not trust fervor. Every time it has burst out somewhere it has brought
fire, famine, misery. . . . And contempt for man. Fervor is the weapon of choice of the impotent.”


47. Gabriel García Márquez, The Solitude of Latin America (Nobel Lecture, 1982).


49. I must make clear that I am not confusing literature with philosophy. The way I understand their relation and difference would require another work. Suffice it to say here that for me their difference is not formal but specific, i.e., thought depends on the intensity and focus of the text, and not on the external form. But this is a point Aristotle already makes at the very beginning of his Poetics.

50. Márquez and Mendoza, El Olor, p. 86.

51. Ibid., p. 87.

52. Speaking of those “desmesurada realidad” in his lecture the author says, “And if these difficulties . . . hinder us, it is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world, exalted in the contemplation of their own cultures, should have found themselves without a valid means to interpret us. It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick that they use for themselves.” Nobel Lecture; cf., Márquez and Mendoza, El Olor, p. 51.

53. Márquez and Mendoza, El Olor, p. 44.

54. Ibid., p. 44.

55. “I believe that they have a great deal in common (Chagall, by the way, while a Soviet plenipotentiary, never joined the Communist party) and I might want to add Zora Neale Hurston into the pot. All three absorbed their local folk cultures into their work in ways that produced a strikingly new autonomous aesthetic. They were, and still are in Márquez’s case, all ethnographers from the inside. The realist form is clearly unsuitable to depict a culture where fable, superstition, and religion interact in wondrous ways, as it suggests an order in the community that doesn’t exist. Through Chagall, through Márquez, through Hurston, we get, if you like, the indigenous mind rather than the colonizing mind of the dominant culture. Their strength works against the merely picturesque: no more quaint old market vendors, instead, levitating figures and talking animals in a Cubist world. Chagall was undoubtedly the first magic realist.” Robin Cembalest, “Portrait of an Artist: How Chagall—‘the Little Jew from Vitebsk’—Became an Art Star.” Nextbooks, A New Read on Jewish Culture, available at http://www.nextbook.org/cultural/feature.html?id=510.

56. When Apuleyo observes that, “In One Hundred Years of Solitude the language has a brightness, a richness and profusion that is not found in your previous books,” García Márquez replies, “That is because I had not needed it before.” Márquez and Mendoza, El Olor, p. 87.

57. In the same interview we have been discussing, and with more direct relation to political, economic and social issues, García Márquez explains, “My conviction is that we have to invent our own solutions, in which we take as much advantage as possible of what those other continents have managed through long and hard histories, but without trying to copy them mechanically.” Ibid., p. 147.

58. Ibid., p. 53.