

EXORDIO / EXORDIUM: FOR AN AESTHETICS OF LIBERATION OUT OF LATIN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Alejandro A. Vallega (University of Oregon)

This article identifies temporality as a constructed and elemental level of aesthetic experience, and exposes the elemental role of such aesthetic experience in the unfolding of contemporary Latin American liberatory thought. This particularly with regard to the sense of temporality that underlies the unfolding of the development of modernity, a development that occurs throughout the colonization of the Americas in the construction of a rational European ego cogito and its "other." Temporality in the westernizing linear sense figures a projective horizon for the perception and understanding of existence and its coming. The key aim and meaning of all existence under this linear temporality is order and progress. However, ultimately in looking at Latin American thought and experience one finds a distinct sense of history and temporality beyond the possible determination of that sustaining westernizing European thought. In the recognition of distinct temporalities space-times open for re-thinking modernity (understood at large now with the inclusion of distinct Latin American experience and thought) and the accompanying senses of humanity, life, freedom, and philosophical thought's issues and ways of articulating beings.

Es en lo estético adonde se prefiguran las transfiguraciones posibles de la totalidad histórica [It is in the aesthetic where the transfigurations of possible historical totalities are prefigured].
— Aníbal Quijano

Perhaps the best way to begin to engage aesthetics in Latin America is to step into a journey that begins before aesthetics appear as a science of the beautiful in Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* of 1750 and that takes us to landscapes we have not yet seen, as an aesthetics of liberation begins to become evident from and with the Americas. This implies a leap out of history, an anachronic digression, which will mark my discussion to the conclusion of this essay. This anachronic leap introduces a sense of temporality I expose as a distinct

aesthetic sensibility that is skin deep in Latin American or American consciousness and experience.¹ To speak of Latin America or America and of aesthetics is to approach vast themes, traditions, and issues, which cannot be engaged fully in an essay or indeed in a lifetime. My focus in this essay is on the recognition of a liberatory aesthetic level of experience found in Latin American consciousness. On the one hand, in light of this aesthetic level of experience in its distinctness one may begin to undo the tradition of domination and dependence that obscures the positive overlapping of Western traditions and traditions distinct from it. At the same time, this engagement with the aesthetic dimension of experience also makes possible the opening of a space for the affirmation and recognition of other ways of thinking and ways of being that to date have, for the most part been excluded, ignored, and wasted.

When I speak of Latin America and/or of America I am thinking of South and Central America, of the Caribbean, and of Mexico. The Americas (plural) refer also to North America. By aesthetics, I do not mean the traditional study of aesthetic judgment or of the nature of beauty. I am concerned rather with a specific sense of temporality or time and history that orients modern rational instrumental thought within the Western tradition as well as in the colonial and Westernized contexts, such as in the Americas. This is a pre-reflexive sensibility at the aesthetic level, in light of which senses of existence occur through dispositions that open a horizon of possibilities and delimit the conceptual determinations of people's lives and identities at the political, normative, moral, and epistemic levels. As I show below, this pre-reflexive level of experience becomes apparent when one engages the development of the modern Westernizing concept of temporality and history as a unilinear line of rational instrumental and calculative progress; this ultimately has as its end the production and accumulation of wealth and power as the basic and determining way of giving meaning to existence. As shall become clear in what follows, before rational arguments there are experiences and practices at physical and affective levels oriented by distinct senses of temporality which frame the projective horizon for knowledge: this is a fundamental aspect of the limits and possibilities of an

¹ To see the full development of the arguments and themes in the present essay see Alejandro Vallega, *Latin American Philosophy From the Question of Identity to Radical Exteriority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014). I have developed my understanding of aesthetic thought in *Sense and Finitude: Encounters at the Limits of Language, Art, and the Political* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

American aesthetics and, in its broader implications, of American thought. Some of the questions that mark the path of my discussion are: How does such an aesthetic level of experience work? What are its main elements and characteristics? What does this level of experience offer in terms of the development of Latin American aesthetics? What are the implications of such aesthetics for Latin American thought, particularly in terms of developing ways of thinking from the Americas and independent from the hegemonic ideals of the Western tradition and its modernity as the only path towards human understanding?

I. Liberation

The question of aesthetic experience in Latin America has a distinct frame, namely the issue of domination and dependence that identifies the time-space of the Americas from 1492 on.² With this date, one marks an encounter in which a double consciousness begins to appear through the living experiences of violence and intertwining between the indigenous and the European peoples and ways of being. From this history there appears, on the one hand, an America dominated by rationalism and projects of progress borrowed from European and North American thought and sustained by the economic interests of the latter two. On the other hand, the rest of America's traditions and thought remain buried, concealed, and for the most part are thought of as meaningless with regard to the unfolding of the sense of identity of America. This practice of adopting Western patterns of meaning and production, while excluding the immediately present experience of being in the Americas, has a couple of basic implications for aesthetics.

First of all, the exclusion of immediate experience occurs through the adoption of European and later North American culture. As a result, the relationship between the concrete living reality of America in its geography, its people's ways of relating to their space-time situation, and their ways of constituting senses of being in light of their concrete realities are severed from the discourses and ideas that aim to articulate senses of being American. This is because, when one begins from the borrowed ideas of Western culture, the reality one expects to find is not there and the immediate present

² I take this orientation in departure from the work in Latin American philosophy of liberation, in particular, from the work of Enrique Dussel and Aníbal Quijano.

appears as meaningless, irrelevant, or at best on the way to being mere idealized, borrowed cultural standards. In other words, as Augusto Salazar Bondy shows in his 1968 essay "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Philosophic Thought," no originary thinking or articulate sense of existence may occur when one's ideas are severed from one's concrete experience through the eradication of one's culture and the implantation of others' experiences as foundation for one's self-understanding.³

As Salazar Bondy also points out in his essay, this is not an exclusively Latin American issue: its roots are in a system of domination and dependency constituted by the interaction between a few powerful nations with their economic interests and the rest of the nations and peoples around the globe.⁴ The accumulation of economic, military, and political power by a few nations results in the development of a world system made up of a center of power and capital accumulation and the peripheral peoples and lands, which serve as labor, raw materials, and the source of goods to be put to use by the center for its own economic and strategic interest. The emerging geopolitical picture places most of the Americas in the periphery. At the cultural level, this system serves to explain the dependence of most of America on the center. However, the problem ultimately comes from within America, since the reason why the unbalanced system of power works is the split identity of a consciousness that holds itself up to Western ideals and sees its future only in those foreign ways of being. This culturally outward gaze pushes Latin American culture to insist on being what it may never be. Moreover, the picture of a center and a periphery works at local levels, where exploitation and exclusion of the indigenous and black peoples goes on and on. Furthermore, in these times, one must consider the decentralization of power that occurs as nation-states give way to

³ "It is not strange that a community which is disintegrated and lacking in potential should produce a mystified philosophic awareness.... Our thought is defective and inauthentic owing to our society and our culture." Augusto Salazar Bondy, "The Meaning and Problem of Hispanic American Philosophic Thought," in *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century: The Human Condition, Values, and the Search for Identity* (ed.) J. J. E. Gracia and E. Millán-Zaibert (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 381–98, here 395–96. Published in Spanish in *¿Existe una filosofía de nuestra América?* (México: Siglo XXI, 1988 [1968]). An abridged version was published as *Sentido y problema del pensamiento filosófico hispanoamericano*, with an English translation in 1969 (Lawrence, KS: Center of Latin American Studies). This was a lecture given by Salazar Bondy at the University of Kansas.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 395.

economic interests ubiquitously situated beyond the traditional image of world-system theory. As Santiago Castro-Gómez shows in "The Missing Chapter of Empire: Postmodern Reorganization of Coloniality and Post-Fordist Capitalism," these developments do not end the cycle of exclusion and dependency, but only extend it as the manner of extraction of wealth, appropriation, and the dismissal of ways of being takes new forms.⁵

With this sense of the situation facing Latin American aesthetics, it becomes clear that a system of domination and dependence operates through America and from this it follows that the task for Latin American philosophy and aesthetics, if these may be recovered, recognized, and further developed, is that of liberatory thought. Such thinking requires at least two basic movements: on the one hand, the dismantling and undoing of the many forms of structures of power and knowledge that constitute and perpetuate the dominated and dependent consciousness of America. On the other hand, the positive moment is to be found in the affirmation of the excluded and sequestered experiences, lives, ways of being, and articulations of senses of existence of the Americas.

But this liberatory call is further complicated by the fact of a living experience and consciousness that, for the most part, is neither purely indigenous nor purely European. Salazar Bondy's critique must be further inflected to recognize the dense overlapping of cultures, lineages, histories, and ways of being and of giving articulation to the unique existence that occur in Latin America. As García Márquez articulated when receiving the Nobel prize for literature in 1982, the challenge for a Latin American aesthetics is that of finding a language for its distinctness and its plural events. In light of his own accomplishment the Colombian author had the presence of mind to point to what remains to be accomplished, the articulation of the American experience from the Americas and on its own terms.

II. Aesthesis

Salazar Bondy's analysis puts much weight on the economic, social, political, and normative structures that frame aesthetic experience, but our point is precisely to situate aesthetic thought in aesthetic experience. In doing so, one finds that aesthetic experience is fun-

⁵ Santiago Castro-Gómez, "The Missing Chapter of Empire: Postmodern Reorganization of Coloniality and Post-Fordist Capitalism," *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 428-48.

damental to the project of liberation at the social, political, normative, conceptual, and ideological levels; both at the level of decolonization of the American mind and in terms of the possible experiences from which originary Latin American aesthetic thought may arise. In order to make this clear, I will refer briefly to two moments in Latin American thought I find crucial to understanding a possible Latin American aesthetic philosophy. I will introduce this by way of a difficulty.

(1) Complicated Liberatory Engagements Beyond the Seeming Paradox Between Creativity and Normativity

In 1967 Julio Cortázar writes a letter to Roberto Fernández Retamar concerning Cortázar's commitments as a "Latin American intellectual."⁶ In his letter Cortázar makes clear his commitment to Latin American revolution and freedom from imperialism. Cortázar explains that for him there is always a present commitment rooted in a profound sense of humanity; however, he is also clear that his task and activity as a writer cannot be limited by any ideology.⁷ As he points out, his commitment is fixed by the same reasons of "esthetic freedom" that lie behind his writing.⁸ Indeed, Cortázar is clear that

⁶ Julio Cortázar, "Situación del intelectual latinoamericano," letter signed Saignon (Vauclus), 10 May 1967, and first published in *Casa de Las Américas*, no. 45 (1967), and republished in *El último round*, Vol. II (México: Siglo XXI, 1980), 265–80.

⁷ "Por otra parte, mi trabajo de escritor continuaría el rumbo que le marca mi manera de ser, y aunque en algún momento pudiera reflejar ese compromiso (como algún cuento que conoces y que ocurre en tu tierra) lo haría por las mismas razones de libertad estética que ahora me están llevando a escribir una novela que ocurre prácticamente fuera del tiempo y del espacio histórico. A riesgo de decepcionar a los catequistas y a los propugnadores del arte al servicio de las masas, sigo siendo ese cronopio que, como lo decía al comienzo, escribe para su regocijo o su sufrimiento personal, sin la menor concesión, sin obligaciones "latinoamericanas" o "socialistas" entendidas como a priori pragmáticos" (Cortázar, "Situación," 274–75). Cortázar repeats this point years later in his interview in the *Paris Review*: "The problem for an engagé writer, as they call them now, is to continue being a writer. If what he writes becomes simply literature with a political content, it can be very mediocre. That's what has happened to a number of writers. So, the problem is one of balance. For me, what I do must always be literature, the highest I can do...to go beyond the possible. But, at the same time, to try to put in a mix of contemporary reality. And that's a very difficult balance." Julio Cortázar, "The Art of Fiction No. 83," *Paris Review*, no. 93 (Fall 1984). [<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/2955/the-art-of-fiction-no-83-julio-cortazar>]

⁸ Cortázar, "Situación," 275.

his commitment does not arise from a desire to follow a Marxist ideology or nationalism, but from his life.⁹ Cortázar reminds Fernández Retamar, "as I have told you and proven many times, I am ignorant about political philosophy, and I did not come to feel myself a writer of the left as the result of an intellectual process, rather through the same mechanism that makes me write as I write or live as I live, a state in which intuition, participation in a magical manner in the rhythm of men and things, decide my path without giving or demanding explanations."¹⁰ This is a response I hold fundamental to the understanding of aesthetics as a possible path for liberatory thought and action. The moment the imagination is put to service for any ideology, one loses the possibility of the liberatory and critical thought afforded by originary aesthetic sensibilities and acts. But this response leaves a seeming abyss, a break between the imagination in aesthetic experiences, the awareness and consciousness of one's situation, and the needs of a reality that, as is the case in Latin America, requires political and social action. Even if one points out that the freedom of imagination sustains a humanity that may always be the origin of challenges and transformative propositions, still there seems to be an irreparable break between originary creativity and normative needs. The overcoming of this seeming break depends on Cortázar's sense of a magical intuitive sense and on the engagement of a rhythm, a temporality in which one may think and write.

The seeming aporia results from not staying with aesthetic experience at the existential or lived level. As Cortázar himself points out in his letter, his commitment and his writing arise out of a single concern with the present situation of America and humanity in general. But as the author points out in the passage quoted above, this commitment is born of a sensibility, of an intuition and involvement with the rhythm of existence. When one begins to think from the sensibilities and dispositions that orient the very interpretation of reality, one finds that imagination is not opposed to reality, but that writers such as Cortázar and García Márquez make the leaps they make in an articulation of existence at its profound and originary levels. This is why García Márquez could famously claim in his discussion with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza that he never wrote a word that he did not find in Latin American reality.¹¹ In order to begin to

⁹ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 272–73.

¹¹ Gabriel García Márquez and Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, *The Fragrance of Guava: Conversations with Gabriel García Márquez* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1998).

understand this sense of aesthesis, I turn briefly to two Latin American thinkers, Enrique Dussel and Aníbal Quijano, specifically their contributions to the issue of the aesthetic character of reality.

(2) Spatiality and Liberation

The basic concern behind Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation is the affirmation of life.¹² This concern leads him to state that in spite of the suffering, violence, domination, and exploitation of the Americas, there must be another way of thinking, another way of developing life than the one developed from the beginning of the colonization of the Americas to date.¹³ Dussel shares Salazar Bondy's vision of a system of power that excludes, uses, and kills in the name of the accumulation of capital and power. This is a rationalist, calculative instrumental thought that in its implications for human and all other life is irrational.

At the center of Dussel's philosophy is a distinction that rationalist predatory thinking has forgotten. To be human is not the same as to be an object. These are two modalities of being that have distinct characteristics. Particularly in the case of entities, a proxemic relationship occurs in which each thing may stand next to another while

¹² In both of Enrique Dussel's major works, *Ethics of Liberation* and the two published volumes of *Politics of Liberation*, concrete life appears as the universal material principle that calls for and grounds all politics and ethics of liberation. See Enrique Dussel, *Ethics of Liberation: In the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*, (ed.) A. A. Vallega, (tr.) E. Mendieta, C. P. Bustillo, Y. Angulo, and N. Maldonado-Torres (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), originally published as *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (Madrid: Trotta, 1998); Enrique Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical Global History*, (tr) T. Cooper (Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 2011), originally published as *Política de la liberación: historia mundial y crítica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007); and Enrique Dussel, *Política de la Liberación: arquitectónica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2009). In the latter book, Dussel writes: "Life is the absolute condition, furthermore: it is the content of politics; and because of this it is equally its ultimate objective, the objective of its ends, strategies, tactics, means, structures, and institutions" (439; my translation). The same work is introduced by a detailed discussion of the will to live in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger (*Ibid.*, 46–65).

¹³ "It appears possible to philosophize in the periphery...only if the discourse of the philosophy of the center is not imitated, only if another discourse is discovered. To be different, this discourse must have another point of departure, must think other themes, must come to distinctive conclusions by a different method." Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, (tr.) A. Martinez and C. Morkovsky (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985), 173. Published in Spanish as *Filosofía de la liberación* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011).

being independent of it.¹⁴ Moreover, things are there outside us and may be measured and manipulated, reproduced, and ultimately created. In the case of human identity, objective understanding does not work. Human identities are a matter of proximity, of a closeness that goes to the core of one's consciousness. Indeed, it is the other that situates one's consciousness as an individual. Only in being with others and in the proximity of the face-to-face, or human-to-human, does one recognize one's distinct being. Unlike objects, humans are always already shot through with alterity and only in light of alterity do they have a claim to their identities. As clearly demonstrated by human cruelty throughout history, this is not an imperative that makes impossible the objectification and commodification of others: from the thinking of being as one totality over against all that one is not to the mentality of war and the bottom-line thinking of today's economically driven mentality, one sees that the proximity of the human to human may fall by the wayside. However, Dussel's point, following Heidegger and Levinas, is also a fact. And this fact offers a powerful alternative to the consciousness of domination and exploitation.

Dussel's argument appeals to aesthetic experience in that the distinction he recognizes is not made by a rational subject who after thinking/doubting, after recognizing him/herself as a rational subject, chooses to engage others or enter into contract with them. Rather, the insight is phenomenological at a pre-reflexive level. What offends me about the homeless is the encounter, the face-to-face, human-to-human sensibility, which I experience regardless of my choices, ideology, or sense of moral or intellectual rational superiority. The encounter with the other happens in me and it happens in my skin. It is the discomfort of being, and not an argument, that makes me ethical, or, inversely, what makes me the exterminator, the one who seeks to clean the world of that which is filth, unproductive, not quite human. One must wonder about the extent to which it is a drive to escape this aesthetic moment of ethical existential depth and uncertainty (the sensibility or "*sentido*" in the encounter in the flesh) that drives the development of extermination camps, genocides, exclusion, and exploitation. This is an uncomfortable thought for all, since it suggests the pertinence of aesthetic sensibility at the

¹⁴ In Chapter Two of his *Philosophy of Liberation* Dussel makes the distinction between the recognition of the difference between objects (proxemic) and that of another human being (proximity). See "From Phenomenology to Liberation," sections 2.1.1.1, 2.1.1.2 and 2.1.2.1.

level of the possibility as well as the violation of what one deems to be human.

Dussel's insight opens a path for the recognition of aesthetic experience as fundamental in the way one comes to understand oneself, politics, economics, and existence at the level of rational and normative inter-subjectivity. This opening must be all the more frightening if one considers that rationality in our times seems to have been usurped by calculative instrumental thinking and by a project of progress that establishes as the ground for the human the objective practical character of existence: "the bottom line." But Dussel's insight remains a challenge, beautifully expressed in a single line: "To approach in justice is always a risk because it is to shorten the distance towards a distinct freedom [*una libertad distinta*]." ¹⁵ Human experience bears the possibility of identity by virtue of a continuous exposure to the possibility of being rejected, of being decentered, of finding oneself not in control or power. The challenge is to retain our humanity by remaining with such moments of exposure, moments in which, as in the throw of a dice, one's existence is in play, as one gives configuration to senses of existence in light of others, in community with being in profound originary distinctness. This is not an empty leap into solitude, but the moment of finding oneself in sense and purpose, as it occurs with mother and child, in the shoulder-to-shoulder of everyday struggle, in the touch of lovers; these are moments known to us, in our skin, and yet abandoned in the name of rationality and the practical reality of the world, totalizing claims that suspend one's exposure and sensibility (the latter in the sense of being there in a pre-linguistic proximity, in the encounter of senses of being in alterity).

(3) Another Aspect of Aesthesis and Domination

The second thinker who leads one to consider the aesthetic character of domination, dependency, and a possible undoing of it, is Aníbal Quijano. In his work on the coloniality of power and knowledge, the Peruvian thinker shows how the system of objective rationalist progress in question develops. Ultimately from his analysis one sees that the underpinnings of it may be found again at a pre-reflexive level, namely through a distinct sense of temporality that comes to order all possible projections and possibilities for knowledge. ¹⁶

¹⁵ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 17, 30.

¹⁶ Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, (ed.) M.

Quijano's decolonial work follows along the lines of Dussel's thought in that both begin from the issue of domination and liberation. Quijano offers in his work a kind of genealogy of modernity. As the Peruvian thinker explains, the world picture that holds European and later North American thought in its grip and the accompanying project of progress as central to all humanity results from the construction of a system of power and knowledge developed through the colonization of the Americas. This system continues to change thereafter, from capitalism to colonialism, neoliberalism, and globalism today: thus the system remains in operation. According to Quijano, with the colonization of the Americas, new identities are shaped around a single project of control of wealth and production at a world level. Along with what will become capitalism through the development of the Atlantic trade, appear two kinds of races: the white European and the darker other (African, Asian, indigenous, mestizo, etc.). This division mirrors and results from the difference between the conqueror and the conquered in the Americas, but the violence is submerged, as the difference becomes naturalized. The European *ego cogito* arises then out of this division, as it becomes a consciousness that recognizes itself over against its (genitive) other. The difference is constructed through the very construction of the cities and social hierarchies of the Americas (as Santiago Castro-Gómez shows clearly in his work, for example, *La hybris del punto cero*, *The Hubris of the Zero Point*).¹⁷ People's identities arise through their placement in the city, the kind of labor they must do, the difference in wages or absence of them, the training required for their labor, and ultimately, in a pernicious twist, they are separated by their supposed mental capacity as recognized in light of the labor and training required.

Moraña, E. Dussel, and C. A. Jáuregui (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 181–224. Published in Spanish as “Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina,” in *La Colonialidad del Saber, Eurocentrismo y Ciencias Sociales*, (ed.) E. Lander (Buenos Aires: Consejo Americano de Ciencias Sociales, 2000), 201–246. For further reading on the concept of the colonality of power and knowledge, see Quijano, “Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad,” *Perú Indígena*, vol.13, no. 29 (1992): 11–20.

¹⁷ Santiago Castro-Gómez, *La hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750–1816)* (Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, 2005).

III. Temporality as Aesthetic Sensibility

The arising of the *ego cogito* has a history that leads from the *ego conquiro* to Descartes' crystallization of it with his famous "*cogito ergo sum*."¹⁸ By the time the European mind discovers itself, it has been built on a racial and economic system that justifies its place on top of humanity and as the judge of all that is. The often astonishing egocentrism of Western thinking, or its incapacity to hear or understand any other ways of knowledge or being, follows, as illustrated through the history of colonialism to date with respect to the so called underdeveloped, or emerging nations. But the point is that with this totalizing view of existence as part and parcel of Western rationalism and its instrumental project of progress in terms of the control and production of all meaning and value, there is a sense of temporality that sustains and directs all knowledge. Given that Westernizing instrumental rationalism is taken to be the apogee of all humanity, the present belongs to it. Moreover, the future becomes the white man's burden. While all other ways of thinking become a matter of the past: ways of being, thinking, and senses of existence that have been surpassed and which at best may offer fragmentary material that may be used by the most advanced minds. This sense of temporality becomes understood as the natural course of history and history becomes a matter of progress, as defined by this movement of rationalist instrumental progress. This naturalized sense of history and of the linear movement of time is well illustrated by the series of binary categories that also makes evident the epistemic prejudice that is inseparable from it: "East-West, primitive-civilized, magic/mythic-scientific, irrational-rational, traditional-modern...."¹⁹ One finds in aesthetics, echoes of the same prejudices in such categories as art vs. crafts, language vs. dialects, and contemporary vs. avant-garde.

With the underlining of this linear sense of temporality and history, one finds a pre-reflexive level of experience, an aesthetic sensibility that organizes and directs all attempts to give articulation to identities and meanings. Whatever is meaningful depends on its place within the single timeline. This means that the very recognition of forms of knowledge, as well as the projection of ways of knowing, remains under the requirement of the movement or progress of the single timeline. This is something one sees clearly today in the way

¹⁸ "Before the *ego cogito* there is an *ego conquiro*" (Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 3).

¹⁹ Quijano, "Coloniality of Power," 190.

technology in its most developed form becomes a matter of life or death for the Westernized mind. The point here, though, is that temporality in this linear version becomes the directive and horizon for all knowledge and senses of being and it does so as a sensibility out of which rational conceptual determinations may be given. Thus, the call for change at a conceptual or categorical level, as well as at an ideological and even at a normative level, will always be subject to this aesthetic sense of existence that operates underneath the rational. To put it in terms of liberation from domination, mind and body remain under the dominant paradigm as long as the sense of temporality that organizes life remains wedded to that single interpretation of temporality and history: this is the coloniality of time that underlies the coloniality of power and knowledge.

IV. Aesthetic Geographies of Liberation

It is a question of a different history of time,
and of a time different from history.²⁰

— Aníbal Quijano

Quijano's analysis of Latin American reality offers another sense of time and history. As we have just seen, in his analysis he exposes the history of the temporality and historical movement that is taken to be natural at a pre-reflexive level by those captivated by the Westernizing rationalist instrumental project. Along with this, one also finds another sense of temporality and history, namely Latin American consciousness and concrete experience. Latin American reality is subtended not by a single historical line, but rather, by simultaneous temporalities or forms of consciousness and practices. Quijano takes an example from José Carlos Mariátegui, who in his *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* points out that the modes of exchange and production that are assumed by capitalist and Marxist analysis to be a matter of the past are elements that continue to operate in Latin America and indeed constitute central elements of Latin American reality.²¹ Bartering, serfdom, slavery, and agriculture are not

²⁰ Aníbal Quijano, "Modernity, Identity and Utopia in Latin America," *Boundary 2*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1993): 140–55, here, 150. Reprinted in *The Postmodern Debate in Latin America*, (ed.) J. Beverley, J. Oviedo, and M. Aronna (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 201–216. Published in Spanish as *Modernidad, Identidad y Utopía en América Latina* (Quito, Ecuador: El Conejo, 1990).

²¹ José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* (El Paso, TX: University of Texas Press, 1971).

ways of life left behind in the past, but rather they overlap to constitute Latin American life. This overlapping may also be found in terms of the undoing of the binary that limits Westernizing epistemologies. In Latin America, the mythical and the scientific coexist, as do the primitive and the modern, coexisting inseparably from the contemporary. This sense of reality involves another sensibility than the one determined by the single linear image of reality. The Latin American sense of reality also involves a sensibility distinct from an *ego cogito* and a subjectivity driven by objective rationalism and the project of the accumulation of wealth and power as progress.

Quijano himself recognizes that this sensibility is articulated not by the human sciences or philosophy, but rather by the writers and artists who engage Latin American reality in its mythological, or I would say cosmological character. For Quijano the writing of Gabriel García Márquez captures this temporality.²² It is not difficult to see how García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, operates as the articulation of a consciousness made up of overlapping temporalities, of linear as well as circular (indigenous?) ways of undergoing the times of existence. The overlapping of indigenous and Westernized ways of being is also evident in José María Arguedas's writing, from his use of Spanish and Quechua in his earlier works to his later focus on indigenous life as the focus and content of his writings.²³ Of course the writing of Alejo Carpentier is an evident example: in "Journey to the Seed" in the short story collection entitled, *The War of Time*, Carpentier writes the story of a great estate backwards, from its end to its beginning, and in doing so exposes the movement of a consciousness that recognizes itself through a directly anachronistic and profoundly revelatory return forward.²⁴ In the plastic arts, one may also think of the painting of Diego Rivera, with the overlaying of visions of reality from Italian fresco, to cubism, to indigenous Mexican art. As Ticio Escobar points out, the masks of the Guaraní every year repeat rituals that incorporate and transform the prod-

²² "It was no accident that it was not a sociologist but a novelist, Gabriel García Márquez, who, by good fortune or coincidence, found the road to this revelation, for which he won the Nobel Prize. For by what mode, if not the aesthetic-mythic, can an account be given of the simultaneity of all historical times in the same time? And what but mythic time can be this time of all times? Paradoxically, this strange way of revealing the untranslatable identity of a history proves to be a kind of rationality, which makes the specificity of *that* universe intelligible" (Quijano, "Modernity, Identity and Utopia," 150).

²³ Quijano, "Modernity, Identity and Utopia," 152.

²⁴ Alejo Carpentier, "Viaje a la semilla," in *La Guerra del tiempo* (Buenos Aires: Alianza S.A., 1993). The story was originally written in 1944.

ucts of Western consumption (Burger King wrappers) into part of the masks that enact the engagement of the human with the fathomless expanse of being.²⁵ Once the path is opened, the examples are many, and certainly one of them must be Jorge Luis Borges' vision of a universe in which temporalities overlap and disseminate to make up not a landscape of science fiction but rather the articulation of Latin American experience and modernity in general. It is not by accident that Foucault should begin *Le mots et les choses* by referring to the fit of laughter caused by Borges' seemingly unthinkable catalogue of beings.²⁶

If one takes seriously Quijano's opening towards a reading of Latin American consciousness and reality through the experiences of simultaneous temporalities, the epistemic binary prejudices mentioned above collapse. Moreover, in engaging reality through such play of ways of being, what seemed exclusive becomes dynamic and a possible dialogue opens for differences that otherwise would seem insurmountable. But this happens out of a shift of sensibility, out of the developing of expectations, out of one's attunement with a reality that cannot be limited to rationalist instrumental thinking, to the treatment of all beings as objects, to the calculation of existence in terms of such an objective view, or to the project of a progress fixed on the production of wealth and power as the valuing elements in an unavoidable and totalizing exclusive and linear movement of being. In such attunement, being does not hold together but rather disseminates to such an extent that even the claim to "simultaneous" temporalities must be amended so that we can speak of asymmetric simultaneity. This is because in the overlapping of experiences and ways of being, in the concrete arising of senses of being, the time-space in which consciousness arises, the temporalizing movement cannot be beholden to a single unity of time or history. Therefore, out of the sensibility found in the dynamic temporalizing and spacing of Latin American realities, one finds configurations of beings, concrete experiences, and possibilities in a fecund movement of distinct and yet interlaced experiences, memories, histories, hopes, desires, and their articulations in forms that remain beyond Westernizing comprehension.

In this account of an aesthetics of liberation, I have tried to make the aesthetic sense of reality that emerges from closely considering

²⁵ Ticio Escobar, *El mito del arte y el mito del pueblo* (Santiago: Metales Pesados, 2008).

²⁶ Michel Foucault, Michel, *Les mots et les choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 7; translated as *The Order of Things* (New York: Random House, 1970), xv.

Latin American thought and experience more explicit. It is an aesthetic sense of reality which presents a great challenge and fecund possibilities for aesthetics in general, as well as for the philosophies of liberation and decolonial projects in particular, both those on their way and those yet to come. In his short story "La noche boca arriba," Julio Cortázar tells an episode in two simultaneous asymmetric times.²⁷ After a motorcycle accident, a man loses his life on an operating table while dreaming he is being sacrificed in an ancient ritual; while he is being sacrificed in an ancient ritual, he dreams of riding in a strange city of broad avenues with green and red lights on a giant buzzing metal insect. The monstrous character of the story is not located in either dimension of reality presented in the narrative, but in the experience of being and living with such a fecund and unbridled sense of time and life. This radical sense of fecund and unbridled distinct existence figures, exposes one to an incisive moment in the aesthetic sensibility that opens underneath and ahead of the Americas in their continuing path towards self-articulation and liberation.

avallega@uoregon.edu

²⁷ Julio Cortázar, "La noche boca arriba," in *Final del juego, Cuentos Completos, Vol. I* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 2005), 386–92.