

## On Aesthetic Liberation: The Coloniality of Time and Latin American Thought

Alejandro A. Vallega

(University of Oregon)

... The question of Latin American identity is, more than ever before, a historic, open and heterogeneous project, and not only — or perhaps not very much — loyalty to a memory and a past. This history has enabled us to see that in reality we are dealing with many different memories and many different pasts, still without a common and shared course. From this perspective and in this sense, the production of a Latin American identity implies, from the outset, a trajectory of unavoidable destruction of the coloniality of power, and a very specific form of de-colonization and liberation: the non/coloniality of power.

Anibal Quijano

In attempting to follow the dates inscribed in the pages of the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, a book commissioned in the mid-sixteenth century by a European merchant, and painted in Mexico by a *tlacuilo*, an indigenous painter-writer, one experiences a sense of disorientation.<sup>1</sup> The marks that trace the dates and histories under the planetary movements of that ancient native civilization of the Americas are not quite graspable. Not only are the marks not readily understandable to a modern Western reader, they have also been covered over, corrected by Arabic numerals, in an attempt to match the Aztec calendar to the Gregorian system still used by Westerners. The disorientation increases when one realises that the new notations have themselves been corrected, marked over with new Arabic numerals, and with written explanations in Latin, Italian, and Spanish. It is as if time, ever slipping, were at the tip of one's

fingers, only to slip again each time a hand wrote in what is by now a palimpsest. The discomfort evokes something itself difficult to grasp: in committing to that text, in reading that text, one is in a space of multiple temporalities. No translation of the Aztec calendar will produce a solution to the riddle of the overlapping of written and drawn marks, numerals, and letters. Yet, one does stand there, with that irresolvable difference. One stands in a space of untranslatable multiple senses of time, conscious of a seemingly impossible fit, conscious of reading in awareness of multiple temporalities at once, of a sense configured by the overlapping of traditions that do not cancel each other out or leave each other behind in the name of one ultimate goal and sense. One stands at that moment with distinct temporalities, recognising them, placed by them, hence at the limit of history understood as a matter of a single linear temporal development. This dense time-space in which our thoughts arise in multiple temporalities remains the riddle of Latin American existence and the possibility of an originary thought from it, a thought that articulates the distinct existences of Latin America in a manner that also opens philosophy to be rethought in its sense and form. But this very possibility is obscured if one begins to interpret this experience in terms of the linear history of Western rationalist development. Thus, while the *Codex* exposes us to a simultaneous temporality unlike linear history, in order to engage this experience we will first have to expose the mechanisms that limit our engagement. This limit I find in a pre-rational sense of temporality that operates at an aesthetic level: it is this aesthetic limit that I discuss in this essay.

My discussion sets out from the work of Peruvian philosopher Anibal Quijano, and his uncovering of what he calls the system of the coloniality of power and knowledge that develops during the colonization of the Americas in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. This is a system of world power that arises through the construction of a racist economic hierarchy that will sustain the domination of

the West over the rest of the world, and that will feed the dependency of the colonized on the West to date. Together with this dynamic of power a sense of time or sensibility develops that orients and limits thought in terms of a single human History determined by the the modern Western rationalist project of progress. This sensibility becomes a pre-rational aesthetic disposition that accompanies the coloniality of power and knowledge and situates all determinations of existence under the latter. A sense of time appears then as a sensibility that orients and sets a horizon for the development of conceptual knowledge and senses of human life in terms of that ordering of power and knowledge. I will ultimately argue that it is the critical engagement with this pre-rational sense of temporality that is required for a Latin American philosophy of liberation that thinks out of the concrete experiences of Latin American lives, and that in doing so gives leeway for the articulate expression of the distinct lives and peoples gathered under the term Latin America.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the present discussion of the configuration of the modern understanding of temporality will expose a limit, and as such a step towards the transformation of an aesthetic sensibility that underlies and informs reason. It is with this shift that one may open the possibility of the human project of freedom and thought beyond the Western modern philosophical tradition.

My aim here is only to expose the sense of temporality that operates as a fundamental sensibility under the coloniality of power and knowledge: what I will ultimately call *the coloniality of time*. As such, this essay is a critical introduction to a project that remains to be completed. Temporality never occurs outside of life; rather, the orderings of life carry temporalities in and with them, and they enact temporalities. Therefore, ultimately, the overcoming of the coloniality of power and knowledge would require our pondering the concrete reality of distinct lives and peoples. However, without this first analysis of the sensibility or

sense of temporality that serves as the pre-rational predisposition to the configuration and interpretation of experience, the concrete critique would always remain situated by the coloniality of time and its dispositions and limits, dispositions (expectations and projections about human “progress”) that situate all interpretations of existence under the coloniality of power and knowledge.

Throughout the essay, I use *time* to refer to the broadest field/s of experiences of temporalities, while *temporality* refers specifically to the sense of time that arises from the configuration of specific systems of power and knowledge. When I speak of *the concept of time*, I also refer to the result of the development of modernity under the coloniality of power and knowledge. Finally, by pointing to the coloniality of time that one finds in Latin American experiences, the essay leaves open the question of other senses of *time* that simply do not correspond to the modern project, temporalities that have been placed under the term *nature* by the coloniality of power and knowledge, and that remain to be engaged in their interruptive character with respect to humanly conceived temporalities. To think in New York City is not the same as to think in the Lacando jungles in part because the temporalities of cement and the jungle are not the same.

I begin with a discussion of the question of liberation and the sense of being in proximate exteriority, a sensibility in Latin American philosophy of liberation, in order to give a space to hear the full relevance of my conclusion regarding aesthetic liberation in Latin American thought.

## **I. Life, Liberation, and Sensibility (from Proximate Exteriority)**

In both of Enrique Dussel's major works, the *Ethics of Liberation*<sup>3</sup> and the *Politics of Liberation*,<sup>4</sup> concrete life appears as *the* universal material principle that calls for and grounds all politics and ethics of liberation.<sup>5</sup> In general, life is to be understood as a pulsation and will-to-live. This potency is the source and end purpose by which one understands ethical as well as political power. Therefore, life is the point from which ethics and political power may be reinterpreted by the philosophy of liberation.<sup>6</sup> A brief discussion of how this sense of life is presented in the second volume of the *Politics*, subtitled *Architectonic*, may be helpful to begin to introduce how Dussel sees this primacy and potency of life.

In the third and last chapter of the *Architectonic*, Dussel makes clear that life is the originary potency and ultimate orientation for the politics of liberation: "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."<sup>7</sup> Given this, political thought and praxis have as their task "to produce, reproduce, and develop human life in the community, publicly, and ultimately in the long run in all humanity. That is to say, keeping human life as criteria..."<sup>8</sup> We are speaking here of a politics guided by life as a dynamic occurrence, as the desire to live (as we will see now, a will anterior to all will-to-power as domination).<sup>9</sup> In order for this politics to occur a change in the very concept of political power must occur, and this change happens on the basis of the primacy of life.

Briefly, traditionally the seat of political power is seen as the result of the transference of power from the community (*potentia*) to the representing individual or group, which becomes the sovereign origin of power (*potestas*).<sup>10</sup> This establishes what Dussel sees as a fetishist and perverted version of political power, since the governing body becomes seat and origin of all power.<sup>11</sup> Instead, for Dussel political power remains a question of the life of the people

(*potentia*). If this is the case, the representative figure or body (*potestas*) serves and answers directly to a power that remains with the people, and thus the ruler remains directly informed by the originary potency of the political, namely, the people.<sup>12</sup> This originary *potentia* is the people's concrete life.

In discussing the will-to-live, Dussel makes a crucial differentiation that will reorient the sense of political power in terms of the role of *potestas*, which constitutes the basic change for a politics of liberation. Life, as the will-to-live, figures a will that opens a time-space for all that is desired, and this occurs through a projection or will to put forth, to do something in relation to all that is desired (*poder-poner*).<sup>13</sup> This putting forth may occur in two ways. The positive form occurs as a mediation that in its putting forth or doing something responds to the need to produce, reproduce, and augment life. In its negative sense, this will occurs as a putting of something over others, as domination over others' very pulsating will-to-live.<sup>14</sup> In the latter case, we recognise the origin of political fetishistic power, in the form of a sovereign power over and above the people (*pueblo*). In the first case, we feel the originary pulsation of life that is the originary spring of political power.<sup>15</sup> In short, if one were to speak of true political power, this truth and power may only occur in obedience to the originary pulsating and willing living force of a people and actors (*potentia*) and their requirements. This attentiveness to life translates into the main ontological categories that will orient a politics of liberation. Following the first material principle, each moment of the political task refers to one of the political principles as the affirmation of human life. At the level of *production*, we are speaking of a material principle, the concrete life of each human being as a human being in his/her material and practical production as biological and mental beings. At the level of the formal principle, this life is *reproduced* and continued through institutions and cultural values. In turn, these institutions and cultural

structures require a critical process of *development* responding and corresponding to the concrete needs of peoples (*pueblos*) and individual subjects, and according to the feasibility of the political project.<sup>16</sup> This is the third principle, the principle of feasibility. But how does one engage this sense of life?

In the *Ethics of Liberation*, the material principle of life occurs and is found through *sensibility*. As Dussel explains, life, the universal material principle of all ethics, arises as “a principle of ‘corporeality’ as a ‘sensibility’ that contains the pulsative cultural-valourising (hermeneutic-symbolic) order of all norms, actions, microphysical structures, institutions or systems of ethical being.”<sup>17</sup> Here we find a fundamental aesthetic dimension inseparable from the first material principle or pulsating will for life that directs the ethics and politics of liberation.<sup>18</sup> As Dussel indicates, this sensibility traverses the various levels of liberation in the production, reproduction, and development of life. Furthermore, the basic principles of political thought, the material and formal principles, as well as the principle of feasibility, occur in light of this sensibility. Thus, the very possibility of a politics of liberation will depend on staying attuned to this sensibility, on remaining with such grounding and originary experience. In order to understand this sensibility, I will turn briefly to an earlier work by Dussel in which he sets out the conceptual program for the philosophy of liberation in general: *Philosophy of Liberation* (1975).

### **Aesthetics of Alterity: Being in Proximity in Total Exteriority**

In his *Philosophy of Liberation* (1975), Dussel introduces a fundamental sensibility as a distinct human way of encountering existence, and as the originary experience for a philosophy of liberation. In the section titled “From Phenomenology to Liberation,” one finds that the key to

the liberation sought by the philosophy of liberation is a shift in the way we see the fundamental relations that situate our understanding of the world and ourselves.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the modern Cartesian view of existence, according to Dussel, as human beings we do not begin to find ourselves in the world through a subject-object relationship, i.e., we are not merely thinking entities in confrontation with other such thinking entities (*res cogitans*) and things in nature. This traditional interpretation of human existence Dussel calls *proximic*, a relation towards and between entities.<sup>20</sup> In a beautiful passage, Dussel introduces another way of encountering the world and identity, one distinctly human: “It is a matter, then, of beginning with somebody who is encountered beyond the world of ontology or Being, anterior to the world and its horizon. From proximity — beyond physical closeness, anterior to the truth of Being — we come to the light of day when we appear, when our mother gives us birth. To give birth (maternal act) is to appear (filial act).”<sup>21</sup> The existence of human beings occurs primarily and distinctly as the *proximity* of human to human, which first occurs with the natal event, with the maternal relationship, which is a relationship of alterity (the son or daughter is not the mother, and *vice versa*).<sup>22</sup> This is a relationship in alterity since it occurs as the proximity of other to other. This fundamental human encounter with existence is always a matter of shortening distances, which includes the possibility of rejection by the other, such that we are ultimately speaking of *proximity in exteriority*. In contrast to the relationship of calculation and manipulation, of control and conquering, which humans may have with entities around them, as well as in relation with other humans as entities (slavery, labour under capitalism, for example), in the relationship of human to human one is always situated by the other who is beyond one’s comprehension and manipulation, one’s calculation and control. To mark the impossibility of conquering and submission at the level of fundamental proximity in exteriority, one may speak of a proximity in

total exteriority, a shortening of distances never bound fully by the other or by a full apprehension of the other. In short, proximity recalls in concrete terms for us our most proximate unfathomable human experiences, and perhaps because they are so proximate, these experiences are always in danger of being forgotten. In the proximity of mother and child, in the touch of lovers, in the shoulder to shoulder struggle of those who fight for justice, we find a basic beginning for being in the world in a way that no longer puts the world in front of us at our disposal and us at arm's length from our sense of existence with others.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, as one ventures into the world, the movement of projection or mediation that situates us will also figure a movement of returning to proximate exteriority.

This sense of exteriority appears at the heart of Dussel's ethical and political thought in his *Philosophy of Liberation* when he writes: "To approach in justice is always a risk because it is to shorten the distance towards a distinct freedom [*una libertad distinta*]."<sup>24</sup> Justice, as all our relationships and senses of existence (from *arche* or beginning to the eschatological moment or the end), happens out of a fundamental human proximity in distinctness, i.e., as we approach the other as other and as we sustain our relationships in the consciousness of the other's distinctness. Here we see the relevance of the danger of rejection that grounds justice. Mother, lover, brother, friend, animal, earth, but also work of art, and culture, these are found in light of concrete relations of proximity sustained by profound exteriority. Life, human life, if it is going to be affirmed and recognised in its dignity and potency, must be engaged through this sensibility and attuned to being in a proximity that is intimate in its total exteriority, a being in alterity.

The sense of proximity in total exteriority is the grounding for the transformations sought by the philosophy of liberation. On it depends the transformation of the concept of *potestas*, and the transfiguration of a community into a people through which such change occurs (here we are

speaking of the transformation of a group of individuals into a people that have an ideological self-understanding). But this sensibility — this sense of being in alterity, this proximity in justice — is never guaranteed. As we just saw, the will-to-live may also take the form of domination, of putting oneself forward over others. When this happens, the will-to-live that asserts life in its diversified and diversifying distinctness is occluded. Indeed, this sensibility is always under attack in the lives of those who have been colonised, those born and living under oppression, exclusion, and history and threat of destruction that is ultimately self-inflicted, as one has become learned in self-inflicting the oppression of the hegemonic systems of power and knowledge. This is what Fanon shows in his analysis of colonialism in *Black Skins, White Masks*, for example. Under the pathology of colonialism, the dominated identifies with the dominator. Fanon concludes: “The black wants to be white.”<sup>25</sup> And, if Fanon’s struggle exemplifies the living desire to live, this occurs in spite of the dominated consciousness, in spite of a community that cannot recognise its exclusion and devastation as more than a natural fact of their existence. Furthermore, as Fanon points out, the objectification of the color person is a matter of bodily configurations; he speaks of an “epidermic” experience.<sup>26</sup> This means that the situation of the dominated is often such that, in having been corporeally habituated to recognise themselves as secondary or insignificant, as expendable living beings, as entities available for use, they have lost the kind of sensibility that allows them to see themselves through encounters of human with human in proximity and distinctness. From this reduction of one’s sense of existence and possibility, we must draw a critical implication for the philosophy of liberation: The colonised consciousness often has lost the sense of being in proximate exteriority from which something like the political turn Dussel is calling for may happen. It is not only that the oppressor considers the peripheral lives nothing; the issue is that those in the periphery identify themselves through

the erasure of their existence, in the abandonment of their lives' potency and dignity. This is made more complex by the fact that the marks of degradation and dismissal of life, the material facts of extreme hunger and suffering, are often mitigated by minimal survival conditions, precisely in a way that will make the dominated fearful and docile.

At this point, the concrete and existential embodied experience of the oppressed, excluded, and exploited marks an aporetic moment for the political transformation sought by Dussel and the philosophy of liberation. To put it in other words: before the political, there is the aesthetic, because normalised bodies severed from the sensibility out of which they may recognise themselves in their distinct lives will not rebel, because their pulsating will-to-live has been replaced with a docile consciousness in the name of "life." Furthermore, as Foucault shows in his genealogy of Western modern instrumental rationalism, with time the refining of bodies at the service of the system becomes more exquisite and leaves no room for other senses of life. When power takes over life, living desire becomes the function of the production and preservation of power within the system.<sup>27</sup>

Given Dussel's emphasis on life as the source of the politics and ethics of liberation, and the primary importance of the sensibility or sense of being in proximate exteriority that informs every configuration of senses of existence and humanity, sensibility appears as the limit of politics. We are speaking of a sense of existence in alterity that informs and touches all normative and conceptual determinations in their direction and sense. It is here that aesthetic experience appears as a basic and necessary element for the politics and ethics of liberation. The life sensibility upon which philosophy of liberation is founded and finds its transformative possibility is a life in the flesh, in corporeal, existential, and affective dispositions situated at the limit of fact and reason. The sense of proximity in alterity, and even the fact that such proximity

always happens in a communal context with its stories, tells us that institutions and the gathering of communities into a people's political consciousness depend on other levels of experience in life; and it is out of and in light of these other pre-conceptual levels that the potency of arguments may be found and given form. Without articulate sensibility, and the opening in and to alterity in concrete and ephemeral experiences, a politics of liberation cannot occur. Here, aesthetic experience, that is the dispositions and sensibilities that inform and direct the development of rational arguments, the construction of institutions, and the calculation of feasibility, appears as a turning point, a definitive field of struggle from which depend the politics of liberation. We are speaking of recovering and constantly struggling for the dispositions and sensibilities of being in proximate exteriority, of living with life's distinctness, as the basis for developing political identities as individuals and as members of a people (*pueblo*).

We are speaking here of aesthetics in a radical sense: as the experience of liberation and configuration of consciousness in the undergoing of bodily life, a development of living consciousness not yet discursive or institutional. Here I understand aesthetics in a sense much broader than the traditional study of aesthetic judgment, or the nature of beauty. *Aesthesis* here concerns the liberation and configuration of consciousness in the concrete and ephemeral passing of life in its corporeal mental-affective occurrences. This is a level of understanding not yet determined by conceptual knowledge, i.e., rationality, conceptual structures, or the construction of institutions. At the same time, this is not a call to irrationality but rather a call to attend to the fact that life sensed by eye-mind, heart-mind happens as the ground for conceptual knowledge. Indeed, this is the level of sensibility and understanding one finds articulated in painting, music, poetry, popular art, rituals, oral traditions, etc. And yet, this very field of sensibility has been

always under attack through the unfolding of Western modern instrumental rationalism and its coloniality of power and knowledge. At this delicate level of aesthetic understanding and oppression, the structures of coloniality (the system of oppression and dismissal of life) operate in various ways, effectively removing, severing, aesthetic experience from the question of the coloniality of power and knowledge. One finds this operation in the identification of art with “the beautiful” and its theories (resulting in the erasure of the vital transformative character of life’s alterity that informs the very origination of works of art, and situating the works within materialist history and/or a transcendental realm only accessible to Western rationality). We may also consider the inverse, the equating of art with the irrational, and thereby severing life from art and *vice versa*. One also finds this separation in the common belief that art belongs in museums (a place in which art is never created), instead of leading us to see art in the living manifestation of distinct peoples.<sup>28</sup> It has been the naiveté of Marxist materialism to believe that art is a matter of markets, history, and institutions, thus handing decisive power over to market value. In so doing, it displaces the corporeal sense of life, its pre-conceptual dispositions, and abandons the source of the possible unfolding of liberating consciousness. Finally, we have come to think of bodily experience as removed from mind, and therefore secondary to the material sensibilities that inform a politics of liberation, in short, reading bodily experience as a-political.<sup>29</sup> As a result, we have lost the possibility of seeing aesthetic experience as the liberating expression of consciousness, as the perpetual challenge to operative orderings of life under structures of power such as the one figured by the coloniality of power and knowledge. Today we find ourselves isolated in our bodies, wonderers under the dazzling lights of the markets, like entities feeding on empty desires and dreams. We fail to recognise our aesthetic experiences as occupying the time-space that must constantly be recovered for the sake of the expression, transformation, and

opening to potentiality of our communities. We are speaking of a transformative movement that may occur through an aesthetic sensibility from which a people's consciousness towards dignity and equality may arise. This aesthetic sensibility, this sense of being in proximate exteriority, must be an essential and active part of a philosophy of liberation that makes its claim out of lived experience. The loss of this sense of being in proximate exteriority and the pre-rational sense of time or the sensibility that sustains it will occupy the rest of my discussion.

## **II. Aesthetic Coloniality, or the Coloniality of Time**

As we will see now by focusing on the work of Peruvian philosopher Anibal Quijano, the turning away from being proximate in total exteriority—the occlusion of this sensibility fundamental to the thought of liberation—occurs as the result of the development of certain orderings and lineages that become systems of domination by sustaining a certain ordering of life under specific rules of circulation and production, systems of power over other beings.<sup>30</sup> As we will see, these systems of domination are sustained by a kind of disposition, a sense of temporality that operates as an aesthetic sensibility. As we will see in what follows this sensibility arises from these orderings of power and knowledge, and, pre-rationally frames, directs, and limits any possible self-understanding and human knowledge in terms of them.

### **The Coloniality of Power and Knowledge**

In “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification,” Anibal Quijano exposes the economy of global power, which had its origin in the colonization of America and

which continues to thrive today as the project of globalization.<sup>31</sup> He calls this system of oppression, exploitation, and exclusion, the *coloniality of power and knowledge*, a system that underlies the development of modern Western identity in terms of the rational mind (*ego cogito*). The two basic elements at the heart of the system are the idea of one economic system that subsumes all previous ones (capitalism), and the notion of a natural racial difference that ranks the capacities, functions, potential, and role of the world's peoples in terms of their racial-geopolitical origins.<sup>32</sup> Together, these two elements order the world and create a new human division. As Quijano shows, in the development of the Americas after the arrival of Columbus, and under the new developing orderings of the church and European economic interests, peoples of color, those who are descendants of Europeans, and the Europeans themselves, each come to have a specific place/function in the constructed hierarchy. A difference in kind of human being is created through a series of systems of differentiation: by physically giving a place in the city to each "racial" group; by their work functions; and by their wage assignments (servant, slave, etc.). This series of racist and economic-capitalist allocations results in a social placement, and in turn, the social placements give an epistemic place to those under such ordering. Together with the latter placement, a certain potential and level of mental development and intelligence come to be assigned according to the racial, economical, and social situations. As a result, Negroes and indigenous peoples, become the other of reason and of the project of white and mestizo modernity in Latin America. This appropriative and destructive configuration of "the other" is crucial to the configuration of Western identity in its European and later North American forms of domination (this is the other side of modernity, the violent side Walter Mignolo fittingly calls the dark side of modernity). Given the new separation, the European mind may now distinguish itself from its "other," an "other" that has never been in a dialectic relation of power with the

West. Having constructed the other of Western rationalism, Europe and later North America may recognise themselves by contrast: they see themselves as the origin and the inheritors of reason, and as angels of the project of freedom, equality, and justice that accompanies their version of the enlightenment, which is a matter of calculative instrumental reasoning.

With the construction of new identities appear two kinds of subjects, the thinking entity (*res cogitans*) and its other, which is also a potential thinking entity with respect to the degree of intelligence and development allotted to it. Here the relationship of proximity in total exteriority, the uncanny element of the encounter of human to human recognised by Dussel as the basis for liberation, has been replaced by the relationship between two kinds of entities: one able to comprehend and conquer by virtue of ratio, calculation, i.e., a way of thinking that allows for the measurement, manipulation, reproduction, and ultimately total control of natural as well as human existence. Along with this master narrative of instrumental rationalism appears its “other,” the native, uncivilised, underdeveloped, mythical peoples. With this differentiation, one finds not a mutual uncanny sense of *each-other* in encounters between these groups, an analogical relation of proximity in total exteriority. Rather the relation between these groups is defined in terms of an asymmetrical relation of power and domination over others. As we will see now, this asymmetry is sustained by a specific sensibility grounded on the temporality that accompanies the ordering of existence under the coloniality of power and knowledge. This is where temporality becomes evident as an aesthetic disposition and sensibility that orients all determinations of self and beings, i.e., in pre-rationally situating the ways and horizons within which experience and knowledge come to be understood and developed.

### **The Coloniality of Time as the Aesthetic Sensibility of Domination**

Together with the centrality of the European mind (*ego cogito*), an egocentrism appears that reduces rationality to a self-recognition that even in its most critical moments will affirm and remain committed to the centrality, single originality, and determining power of Western thought over all senses of being human and all ways of understanding existence. As Quijano explains, “In effect, all of the experiences, histories, resources, and cultural products ended up in one global cultural order revolving around European or Western hegemony.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, with this egocentric moment a new temporality appears: “The Europeans generated a new temporal perspective of history and relocated colonised populations, along with their respective histories and cultures, in the past of a historical trajectory whose culmination was European.”<sup>34</sup> This sense of temporality means that history, as what we must learn and as that which holds our future belongs to the Western nations and their economic project. The march of Western history alone, in its conception of a world History, holds the development of humanity’s knowledge and the potential for human freedom. This concept of History is dependent on a specific line of temporality: the past is what has been left behind or what remains to be rewritten by the most advanced Western thought of the present; and with this, the future belongs to that Western present, as does the destiny of humanity. This sense of temporality becomes the horizon for world knowledge. In other words, as we experience it today, this temporality becomes the organising criterion assumed to be the ground of human consciousness: consciousness is its present knowledge (that which is acceptable and useful to the Western modern project) and the potential for the production of future knowledge on the basis of the present. This specific sense of temporality manifests itself in dichotomous categories well known to Western intellectuals and their academies: Eastern/Western; primitive/civilised, magic-mythic/scientific, irrational/rational, traditional/modern.<sup>35</sup> In short, with the development of the coloniality of

power and knowledge, a sense of temporality appears that creates a certain disposition and through it provides the limits and horizons for all human knowledge. The experience of existence is now situated in the present as understood by the project of calculative production and manipulation prevalent in Western rationalism, and its version of reason and the Enlightenment.<sup>36</sup>

Here the present of modern Western consciousness (*ego cogito*) becomes *the* axis of time and therefore the ultimate criterion of all judgment. In other words, it is this specific time with its specific configurations of consciousness that defines the limits and possibilities of all human understanding and existence. The time of this consciousness becomes an intuition, a sensibility that situates thought and any possible human knowledge. This means that even before experience may count as phenomenon or knowledge, even before thought begins to be formulated, it will be put under the yoke of this single present. Invisibly, this temporality figures a sensibility that situates *a priori* all possible human experience and knowledge pre-rationally within a single epistemic frame of knowledge.<sup>37</sup> Time then functions as a sensibility that gives direction and limits, as the horizon that will sustain and affirm the coloniality of power and knowledge. It unfolds as the coloniality of time that will orient Western modern philosophy and the Latin American appropriations of the modern project. Given my space restrictions, I will now outline some of the main configurations of the coloniality of time I have presented, leaving the association of them with specific Latin American philosophers and movements up to the reader.

As Quijano himself points out, the appearance of this temporality has been primarily equated, not with the coloniality of power and knowledge, but with the Enlightenment's secularization of knowledge and the project of freedom of the French Revolution. The secular turn marks the overcoming of the return to the past that defines knowledge in the Middle Ages,

which figures the opening of temporality to the knowledge that may be acquired by reason in terms of its present limits.<sup>38</sup> In terms of our discussion, this is the moment in which the coloniality of time takes explicit form in modern Western thought. From this point onwards, the coloniality of time will appear in many configurations throughout the history of Western philosophy and throughout the philosophies grounded on Western philosophy. Let us consider three basic forms of the coloniality of time that I have in mind. In Kant, the coloniality of time is explicit: time appears as the intuited time of rational consciousness, and as such, time is the basic intuition that situates consciousness with respect to the configuration of empirical perceptions. Thus, time underlies all cognitive possibilities and is the criterion and sensibility that frames all knowledge. Eventually this sensibility or limit given by the single version of temporality to the ordering of knowledge according to Western rationalism becomes an almost invisible part of thought. That is, *it seems* to disappear in Hegel when time becomes the movement of history. With Hegel, we have another form of the coloniality of time: time enters the realm of particular forms of thought and of the singular.<sup>39</sup> However, Hegel understands history as the movement of Western history that is the manifestation of the unfolding of the knowledge of the Western rational mind. Thus, the coloniality of time that arises from the coloniality of power and knowledge and the egocentrism of Western modern thought remains unquestioned yet operative at the center of all possible knowledge. In other words, the sensibility that frames the direction and horizon of the project becomes invisible and yet still operates as the limit and horizon of knowledge. Now singularities belong to the great unfolding of the history of spirit (the project of progress that dismisses and subsumes other cultures and histories, and that relegates human lives to the past by virtue of its single-minded progress of spirit). Lastly, time reappears as the now, the “event,” in the form of a present charged with the future of human and all other existence: a

task that remains on the shoulders of Western European and North American rationalism. It will still be this present that will be emphasised in the work of deconstruction later on, as well as in what today has come to be called “new materialism.”

As we have seen, in his work Quijano shows that, behind the colonization of the Americas and the development of Western rationalism from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the present, one finds the coloniality of power and knowledge shaping the intellectual tradition. At the physical level, this is manifested as military, economic, and social domination, at the conceptual level this occurs as the creation and perpetuation of systems of thought that perpetuate the dominating structures and justify them.<sup>40</sup> But behind these levels lies an almost invisible sensibility, that is, the disposition and directionality that orients human reason towards the repetition of these structures of power, a pre-rational disposition that situates the very limits and horizons within which one will unfold conceptual knowledge and the attempts at a critique of the already active practices, orderings, and lineages that sustain power and its perpetuation. Given the way temporality is wedded to rational consciousness’ project and limits, time operates as a sensibility that situates thought practically *a priori*. At this point, a project of a philosophy of liberation or of any philosophy that may think beyond the coloniality of power and knowledge seems impossible. No matter what the content of the thought, no matter how critical, its status and validity as thought/knowledge will be situated *a priori* by a sensibility that puts it under the judgment of the coloniality of power and knowledge. Therefore, any philosophical critical project seems fated to repeat the inscription under this order. This is because the new categories developed will be respondent to a necessity situated with respect to the sense of temporality and sensibility that puts all configurations and affirmations of life under the coloniality of power and knowledge.<sup>41</sup> It is precisely this temporality or sensibility that must be not only exposed but also

overturned in order to begin to gain an opening for a philosophy of liberation. Only through an aesthetic liberation may any political or ethical liberation be possible. This will mean engaging the distinct temporalities of Latin American existence, rather than tacitly situating any configuration of subjectivity or situating any people and their histories and lineages under the economy of instrumental rationalism. That is, there must be a break with the coloniality of time that gives rise to the configurations that bury histories and peoples of Latin America under instrumental rationalism.

### **Epilogue: *Una Realidad Desmesurada* / Unbridled Reality**

In this brief epilogue, I wish to at least introduce the turn in the understanding of temporality I find crucial both to the unfolding of Latin American thought and to the liberation of philosophy in general from the coloniality of power and knowledge. This turn leads us back into aesthetic experience, now in its positive sense.

The overlapping of temporalities that situates one's reading of such documents as the *Codex Telleriano-Remensis* points to a sense of temporality and history beyond Western linear history and its onto-theological instrumental teleology. This issue of simultaneous temporalities appears in Anibal Quijano's essay "Modernity, Identity, and Utopia in Latin America."<sup>42</sup> In this piece, Quijano goes on to develop the issue of temporality with respect to Latin America's distinctive and concrete reality. Through his analysis, Quijano engages a sense of temporality that exposes us to a sensibility that goes well beyond the coloniality of time and its perpetual cycle of production of subjects and meanings.

As Quijano writes about the senses of temporality in Latin American concrete experience, “It is a question of a different history of time, and of a time different from history. This is what a linear perspective and, worse, a unilinear perspective of time, or a unidirectional perspective of history (such as the ‘master narrative’ of the dominant version of European-North American rationalism), cannot manage to incorporate into its own way of producing or giving ‘reason’ meaning within its cognitive matrix.”<sup>43</sup> The reference to a “different history of time” points to the genealogy we saw above, which concludes in the understanding of Western temporality not as rationally intuited but as a sensibility that results in specific orderings of power and knowledge. In terms of “a time different from history,” when one considers concrete Latin American existence, one finds a directionality and disposition towards all senses of beings that is not compatible or reducible to the single sense of time and history under the coloniality of time. If European-North American temporality expresses the ordering of production under instrumental reason, Latin American temporality expresses the multiple directionality of a time-space in which no single order is possible, this is because of a simultaneity that sustains a time-space of concrete and contradictory polyvalences. Thus, Latin America may participate in the single line history of Western thought, but it does so by remaining excessive to it. The simultaneity of time comes from a simultaneity of traditions, histories, lineages, and orders that configure unbridled realities, realities that find their direction through dispositions towards the creation of concepts and meaning out of a sensibility oriented by multiplicity and encounters of asymmetrical temporalities.

In closing his discussion of temporalities in Latin America, Quijano points to the work of Garcia Márquez, Alejo Carpentier, and José María Arguedas. These authors are able to think beyond philosophy as figured by the coloniality of power and knowledge because they think

with, and give articulation to, the concrete, overlapping, encroaching and disseminating encounters that compose Latin American realities.<sup>44</sup> In doing so, they are unlike philosophers that seek to liberate themselves in the name of the traditional idea of history, thus repeating the European-North American lineages and sensibilities that are sustained by and are the expression of the coloniality of knowledge. Not only the above-mentioned writers, but also figures such as Borges, Cortazar, Bolaño, Juan Jose Saer, Luis Sepúlveda, and so many others, expose us to the *ana*-chronic existence of a humanity whose sensibility occurs as a being exposed in intimate proximity in total exteriority to the dense experiences of being human, and to the challenges and unfathomable possibilities that such naked life brings to us today. One can also think of contributions to the visual arts, such as Diego Rivera's murals, or the work of Kuitka. Moreover, I must at least emphasise in passing that I believe that one falls short of the fecundity of Latin American experience if only literature and not also the popular oral traditions and songs, as well as the so-called popular arts, are made the center of the unfolding articulation of temporal simultaneities.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, simultaneous temporalities occur not only in art that depicts but in the very practices of life: in making a meal, smoking a cigar, riding a horse into the nearest town with electric light, etc.

Perhaps one of the most accurate expressions for these disseminating living events was the one Garcia Márquez gave in his Nobel Prize speech of 1982, when he called Latin American reality "una realidad desmesurada," that is, an unbridled reality, beyond measure. As Garcia Márquez explained to the academy, the prize he was being awarded was due to a reality and sensibility that remains beyond the sense of reality of European-North American instrumental temporal consciousness. What makes this reality "desmesurada" is precisely its shattering of the traditional conception of time that sustains the narrative of a single human history through the

development of rationalism in the Western world. The Prize then would remind us of a forgotten story, the moment of the violent encounter in which Europeans and natives are translated into a history that insists in writing itself as the boundary of reality although always already surpassed by the concrete simultaneity of temporalities. In recognizing this excess the very granting of the Nobel Prize to Garcia Márquez exposes European-North American narratives to their own limits and to the possibility of other modernities, as it brings to our awareness the fact that today the unbridled Latin American reality is not only a Latin American fact, but also a fundamental element in the project of a modernity beyond borders and beyond undisturbed self-unfolding lineages and traditions.

The implications of this transformation in our understanding of temporality are broad. With the sense of simultaneous temporalities, one finds openings for rethinking modernity in its broadest sense: In terms of the histories and lineages, the orderings/temporalities that are sequestered or suppressed within modernity in the name of the history of Western rationalism and its exclusive History, as well as in terms of the uncovering of simultaneous temporalities that are seen as exterior to modernity and reason. In turning to the history discarded by the Western tradition and to the multiple temporalities at play in modern thought, one finds in this new *ana-*chronic sensibility a call for new ways of understanding “philosophy,” and with this opening a renewed challenge in terms of human freedom and the ethical response of reason to life, as well as for new strategies of liberation throughout world philosophies. But if this is the case, we also are left with new questions that bring the philosophy of liberation to face one of its limits and along with this, possible new articulations of the project of liberation: To what extent are the philosophy of liberation and the theories of coloniality and de-coloniality dependent on the concepts of history and natural/historical temporality that we have seen belong to the West?

What would be the paths of liberation in light of the *ana-chronic sensibility* we have encountered at the heart of Latin American existence?

---

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Codex Telleriano-Remensis*, ed. Eloise Quiñones Keber (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Charles Scott and Omar Rivera for our exchanges concerning issues of temporality and liberation, and for the insights I have gained from their work.

<sup>3</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*. Quinta edición (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2005). From here on when cited EL followed by page number.

<sup>4</sup> *The Politics* is divided in three volumes. The first part has been translated into English under the title, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical World History* (Enrique Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical World History* Tr. Cooper (SCM Press, 2010); this was originally published as *Política de la liberación: Historia mundial y crítica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007)). This volume discusses the history of political thought, and does so in a subversive or transformative manner by resituating that history beyond the Western Ancient/Modern tradition. The second volume is titled *Política de la liberación: Arquitectónica* (Enrique Dussel, *Política de la liberación: Arquitectónica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2009)). Here Dussel takes up the task of identifying and articulating the minimal basic principles required for organizing and developing a political thought from below, and for this reason it is called “ontological.” Volume Three has not been published, and it should serves as a destructive critique of the previous ontological structures, the destruction occurs as the principles and fields of action outlined in the abstract meet directly with

---

concrete living situations. Each of the three volumes serves a transformative moment towards the construction of new political categories and systems.

<sup>5</sup> EL, 140.

<sup>6</sup> The work is introduced by a detailed discussion of the will to live in Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. Enrique Dussel, *Política de la liberación: Arquitectónica* (Madrid: Trotta, 2009.) I will cite this work as PLA, followed by the page number. PLA, 46-65.

<sup>7</sup> “La vida es la condición absoluta, pero aún más; es el contenido de la política; y es por ello igualmente su objetivo último, cotidiano, el de sus fines, estrategias, tácticas, medios, estructuras, instituciones” (PLA, 439).

<sup>8</sup> “... producir, reproducir y desarrollar la vida humana en comunidad, públicamente, en última instancia de toda la humanidad, en el largo plazo. Es decir, teniendo a la misma vida humana como criterio...” (PLA, 439).

<sup>9</sup> Dussel explains the sense of production, reproduction, and development of life in Tesis 11 of his *Ética de liberación*. See EL, 622.

<sup>10</sup> PLA, 58.

<sup>11</sup> One finds clear examples of this in modern political theory in Hobbes as well as Machiavelli.

<sup>12</sup> “Al poder político segundo, como mediación, institucionalizado, por medios de representantes, le llamaremos la potestas” (PLA, 61). The moment the system at work becomes oppressive and exploitative, the government loses power, until a change or total collapse occurs.

<sup>13</sup> PLA, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The three principles central to the work are the material principle (which attends to the concrete fact of the lives of the excluded, oppressed, and exploited); the formal principle (which concerns the practical aspect of power, that is, the legitimatization of the power of the people (*pueblo*) through concrete, rational, and normative procedures carried out through the development of institutions). The third principle is the principle of feasibility (the limits, real and material, that mark what may be done, and the development of new means). We are speaking of recognizing the possibilities of a project according to the empirical situation, and of fitting all actions to the parameters of human life in its specific circumstances. See PLA, 470.

<sup>17</sup> EL, 140.

<sup>18</sup> As Dussel often indicates, the political and the ethical may overlap, but they are not the same, since reducing them to a same concept-activity would make both fields of human experience impotent: as their difference of concern and practical requirements would be cancelled and with this also their critical interaction or tension.

<sup>19</sup> Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación*, Capítulo 2, “De la fenomenología a la liberación.” (FL)

<sup>20</sup> FL, 2.1.1.1, 2.1.1.2, 2.1.2.1.

<sup>21</sup> FL, 17, 29-30.

<sup>22</sup> FL, 2.1.1.2.

<sup>23</sup> FL, 19, 33.

<sup>24</sup> PL, 17, 30.

---

<sup>25</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove University Press, 1967), 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>27</sup> Here, taking pause from Dussel's project, and echoing Blanchot and Nancy, one would require a differentiation of the idea of work behind the idea of a living desire for life that occurs as "production" and "augmentation" of life.

<sup>28</sup> To cite one powerful example, one may consider the dynamic and transformative elements in the masks used by the Guaraní people of Paraguay in their rituals. See Ticio Escobar, *El mito del arte y el mito del pueblo* (Santiago, Chile: Editorial Metales Pesados, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> As a result, the philosophy of liberation itself remains always in danger of being reduced to a crude pragmatism, to facts and what they require, since aesthetic experience and its transformative radicalness seem divorced from political effectiveness.

<sup>30</sup> Although the issue of Eurocentrism and colonialism are central to this discussion, the point is to recognise issues within Latin American thought.

<sup>31</sup> Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification," in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 181. I will refer to this article as CP followed by the page number.

<sup>32</sup> See CP, 182: "a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others."

<sup>33</sup> CP, 189.

---

<sup>34</sup> CP, 190. See also Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 2003) and *The Idea of Latin America* (London: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> CP, 190.

<sup>36</sup> This change of temporality that underlies all understanding of being is clearly and perhaps most dramatically articulated by Cervantes in the first modern novel, *Don Quijote*. See Anibal Quijano, "Of Don Quixote and Windmills in Latin America," *Estudios Avanzados* 21 (55), 2007.

<sup>37</sup> In terms of the imposition of a single order and its conceptual structures, one may think of Kant's aesthetics in the *Critique of Judgment*. Kant affirms that aesthetic judgment ultimately is an affirmation of life, an experience of the universal that grounds cognitive knowledge (conceptual knowledge). This occurs as the aesthetic judgment is a reflexive judgment, which is not determined by the rules of cognition (conceptual knowledge). It is the correlation between imagination and understanding that is the feeling of the beautiful, i.e., where imagination is free from cognition or the rules of reason. But the question is: Must aesthetic experience be understood in relation to rational cognition in all cases? Is the question of the rational mind with its conceptual categories in relation to aesthetic judgment, feeling, and taste not a very specific question of the modern Western mind? Does the experience of self-knowledge of a Guarani dancer wearing his traditional mask in a ritual even involve the issue of the relation of rational knowledge or cognition understood in those terms to aesthetic judgment? In such experience as the latter, Kant's insights seem forced, as they insist on putting the mask and the ritual in relation to the rational cognition behind scientific knowledge. I should add that this does not mean that Kant's insights are not of great importance for understanding many issues in aesthetic experience, but there is a limit that does not belong to that thought.

---

<sup>38</sup>Anibal Quijano, “Modernity, Identity and Utopia in Latin America,” *Boundary 2* 20:3, 1993. Reprinted in *The Postmodern Debate in Latin America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); MIU, 141-44. I will cite this article as MIU, followed by the page number.

<sup>39</sup> At this point it would be too general to claim a simple linear temporality in the movement of Spirit, since the labor of Spirit happens at different levels in simultaneous moments or stages. However, this simultaneity remains oriented by the time/consciousness of the coloniality of power and knowledge and its temporality. In other words, stages may appear to be simultaneous, but they mark specific stages in an evolution defined by the progress of rationalism, where stages are assigned places according to the advancements of modern Western European reason and its limits.

<sup>40</sup> I have written on this elsewhere, calling it “the coloniality of thought,” with respect to the various expectations and requirements that underlie what may be understood as philosophical knowledge.

<sup>41</sup> I believe this is the limit that Giorgio Agamben has found and underlined in his work with respect to life under the coloniality of power and knowledge, when he speaks of life as a naked life under the operation of the sovereign exception. Vide Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Tr. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> MIU, 201-16.

<sup>43</sup> MIU, 150.

<sup>44</sup> “Is not the writing of José Maria Arguedas an expression, an instance of this utopia? He had to choose between Spanish, the dominant language, and Quechua, the dominated language,

---

to express the needs of the dominated population, to communicate. He chose to write in the dominant language, contriving in the process, however, to achieve the transmission of some expressive possibilities of the dominated language. His was a program of linguistic subversion, really something like the creation of a new literary language.... This method led Arguedas to another discovery. What sort of narrative would be the most effective for representing, as he wanted to, the magmatic constitution of a new society, a new culture ... where the masses of immigrants from the sierra gathered in a world agitated by the tense dialogue between the dominant and dominated cultures? Once again he had to opt for a narrative structured, derived from the dominator, the novel, but with the condition that the world of the subaltern caught up in this somber conflict would be the real content of the product. This is a program of narrative subversion, a subversion of historical paradigms of historical becoming and agency...” (MIU, 152).

<sup>45</sup> In terms of the concepts of the popular and art, see Ticio Escobar, *El mito del arte y el mito del pueblo: Cuestiones sobre arte popular* (Santiago, Chile: Metales Pesados, 2008). The proximity of written and oral tradition is clear in the writing of Arguedas, as well as in the origins of Nicanor Parra’s *Anti-poemas*. The latter are originated by Parra’s realization of the need for a poetry that speaks the language of the market place, thus, he assumes the spoken language of his time and by doing so interrupts what has become a written epic tradition of the kind written by Pablo Neruda.