TRANSLATING UNIVERSALITY:
MARXISM IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation explores how Marxism travels across linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical borders by examining the literary and theoretical writings and political practices of José Carlos Mariátegui, José María Arguedas, and Frantz Fanon. I argue that these figures translate Marxism by critically refashioning the doctrine’s universal concepts to account for the historical and material specificity of Latin American and Caribbean conjunctures. Since Marxism can be historicized as an expression of European modernity, the tendency of contemporary scholarship is to provincialize its concepts and construe Marxism as literally and conceptually out-of-place beyond Europe. I maintain, however, that it is precisely the gap between universal concepts and particular realities that occasions the translation of Marxism so that its concepts can become concretely universal and de-provincialized.

The dissertation also considers when Marxism confronts alternative worldviews (i.e. indigenous cosmology, négritude, Jacobinism, humanism) that articulate equally universalist beliefs and values. In these instances of encounter, I contend that Mariátegui, Arguedas, and Fanon engage in another mode of translation that aims to negotiate not between universal concepts and particular realities but between distinct and sometimes competing conceptualizations of the universal as such. The task of the translator is therefore to locate or construct overlapping zones of confluence within which Marxism can align itself with other universalist forms of thought and action without hegemonically subsuming them under its own internal logic and presuppositions. The dissertation concludes with a reflection on the short-circuiting of translation or its absolute rejection in the name of a different paradigm that aims to destroy the old and create the new.
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…we might say that to know really is to think ever less by oneself.

– Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*¹

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Black Skin, White Masks


Bibliography
Introduction

Marxism in Latin America and the Caribbean

Translating Universality

Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx’s individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious ‘orthodox’ Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx’s theses in toto – without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx’s investigations. It is not the ‘belief’ in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to method.

– Georg Lukács, “What is Orthodox Marxism?”\(^2\)

The Bolshevik revolution […] is a revolution against Karl Marx’s *Capital*. In Russia, Marx’s *Capital* was more the book of the bourgeoisie than the proletariat. It was a critical demonstration of the necessity that events must take a certain course in Russia: a bourgeoisie had to develop, the capitalistic era had to get under way and civilization on the Western model be introduced, before the proletariat could even start thinking about its own revolt, its own class demands, its own revolution. But events have overtaken ideology. […] The Bolsheviks are not ‘Marxists’; they have not used the Master’s works to compile a rigid doctrine, made up of dogmatic and unquestionable claims. They are *living out* Marxist thought.

– Antonio Gramsci, “The Revolution Against *Capital*”\(^3\)

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While communism has experienced a resounding comeback in contemporary theoretical debates since the 2008 world economic crash, and Marx and certain thinkers associated with his legacy remain obligatory referents in these debates, Marxism is oftentimes still reduced to a name for that which is irredeemably outdated. In Bruno Bosteels’s words, “[t]he least that may be said today about Marxism is that […] its mere mention has become an unmistakable sign of obsolescence.” Yet the great irony of this kind of thinking is that it reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of what Marxism is at its core, as if it were a doctrinaire school of thought, with a set of rigid beliefs and indisputable claims, and not an experimental form of theory and practice that has inscribed in itself a conception of its own continual transformation in response to the development of new historical and material conditions.

Despite their various differences, Lukács and Gramsci agree on this specific point about Marxism’s nature. The kind of Marxism that treats Marx’s theses as sacred and timeless axioms is not really Marxism at all. Orthodox Marxism, on the contrary, entails a dialectical and materialist method of living out Marxist thought, of contributing to an inner revolution in Marxism itself as part of a broader struggle to intervene in the present. With this more exact

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understanding of Marxist orthodoxy, what appears obsolete today is not so much Marxism as the very discourse surrounding Marxism’s obsolescence.

Gramsci would go on to re-frame this problematic later in life around the question of translation. In the prison notebooks, he states that it is the task of the Marxist theoretician “to ‘translate’ into theoretical language the elements of historical life. It is not reality which should be expected to conform to the abstract schema.”\(^6\) The theoretical claims of Marxism are thus historically determinate translations of concrete reality and not abstract formulas to be applied to any and every historical context. The Bolsheviks led a revolution against not only capital but also Marx’s *Capital* precisely because Russia’s historical reality demanded it. To ignore this demand and to abstract Marx’s theoretical claims from his particular historical reality would be to exchange Marxism for what Gramsci describes as “Byzantinism” or “scholasticism.”\(^7\) Unfortunately, scholastic and Byzantine abstractions are oftentimes what today’s critics confuse for Marxism itself.

Gramsci does not think, however, that Marxist theory produced in response to specific historical conditions cannot travel across space and time and intervene in alternative historical contexts. Rather, his point is that Marxist theory must be re-translated or translated again upon its arrival. The Bolsheviks’ revolution against *Capital* thus represents not an absolute rupture with Marx’s claims but rather an attempt to theoretically and practically translate Marx in response to the Russian conjuncture. The same would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, for the theoretical claims of the Bolsheviks, something that Gramsci learns from Lenin’s self-critical remarks regarding his own party’s failure to expand the revolution beyond Russia: “In 1921

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\(^7\) Ibid.
Vilich [Lenin], in dealing with organizational questions, wrote and said (more or less) this: we have not been able to ‘translate’ our languages into those of Europe.” As the use of inverted commas in this passage suggests, Gramsci’s Lenin is not referring to a narrow, purely linguistic form of translation. Rather, he has in mind a broader notion of theoretical or conceptual translation that would take into account historical and material difference.

In his discussion of Byzantinism and scholasticism, Gramsci formalizes this self-critical lesson passed down from Lenin:

The problem arises of whether a theoretical truth, whose discovery corresponded to a specific practice, can be generalized and considered as universal for a historical epoch. The proof of its universality consists precisely 1. in its becoming a stimulus to know better the concrete reality of a situation that is different from that in which it was discovered […] and 2. in its capacity to incorporate itself in that same reality as if it were originally an expression of it. It is in this incorporation that its real universality lies. […] In short, the principle must always rule that ideas […] are a continually renewed expression of real historical development. […] It can further be deduced that every truth, even if it is universal, […] owes its effectiveness to its being expressed in the language appropriate to specific concrete situations.9

8 Antonio Gramsci, *Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Derek Boothman (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), 306. According to Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, Gramsci is referring to a speech that Lenin gave in 1922 rather than 1921 entitled “Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution.” Gramsci, they maintain, was likely paraphrasing the following statement: “We have not learnt to present our Russian experience to foreigners.” For their own discussion of Lenin and Gramsci on “the labor of translation,” see Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 270 – 276.

Theoretical claims can overcome their particularity and become universal only through a process of translation in which these claims are reformulated in a new language, a language suitable for their new site, and are accordingly converted into expressions of that new site. Even if the theoretical claims are articulated from the beginning as universal truths, they remain abstract until they undergo this dialectical process of concrete universality, a process of incorporating themselves into a context that differs from their initial site of production in such a way that both the claims and the new context undergo a transformation.\(^\text{10}\)

These are some of the basic hypotheses that guide and inform my study of Marxism in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is my contention that at the center of any such inquiry must be a focus on the question of *translating universality*, on the theoretician’s efforts to transform Marxism’s universal claims in response to varying conjunctures. With this focus, my approach to the topic of Marxism in Latin America and the Caribbean seeks to distinguish itself from two opposing tendencies. The first tendency assumes that Marxism is always already universal and that it does not require translation. This tendency has historically materialized itself in Latin America via the uncritical reception and dogmatic application of Marxist theory throughout the region.\(^\text{11}\)

From the above discussion, however, it follows that such an outlook misconstrues the

\(^{10}\) Slavoj Zizek, in his discussion of Mao’s translation of the Marxist revolutionary subject to include the peasantry alongside the proletariat, offers the following insightful account of concrete universality: “The theoretical and political consequences of this shift are properly shattering: they imply no less than a thorough reworking of Marx’s Hegelian notion of the proletarian position as the position of ‘substanceless subjectivity,’ of those who are reduced to the abyss of their subjectivity. *This* is the movement of ‘concrete universality,’ this radical ‘transubstantiation’ through which the original theory has to reinvent itself in a new context: only by way of surviving this transplant can it emerge as effectively universal.” Slavoj Zizek, “Introduction: Mao Tse-Tung, The Marxist Lord of Misrule,” *On Practice and Contradiction* (London: Verso, 2007), 4 [original emphasis].

\(^{11}\) An early example of this anti-Marxist Marxist tendency can be found in the theory and practice of the Italo-Argentine communist Victorio Codovilla, whose Stalinism led him to unquestioningly enforce the Third International’s mandates for all colonial, semi-colonial, and
nature of Marxist universals as timeless axioms, whereas, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, Marxist universals in fact “call for” translation. In other words, it is only in the afterlife of the original, abstractly universal claim that universality is effectively achieved. This translational procedure is a necessary aspect of Marxism itself, an expression of its living, historical character. To dogmatically apply Marxist theory in Latin America or the Caribbean without translation is therefore tantamount to no longer practicing it and to perpetuating a misunderstanding of its nature.

The second tendency from which my project diverges can be read as a critical response to the first tendency that nevertheless reproduces the first tendency’s limits. The second tendency aims to provincialize Marxism, to reveal how Marxism’s universalist language erases cultural difference by generalizing that which only holds true for Europe or, more narrowly, certain (Western) European countries. From this perspective, Marxism is ultimately an inadequate developing countries on a continental scale. A more recent example of this same tendency can be found in the writings of Abimael Guzmán (aka Presidente Gonzalo), the leader of Peru’s Shinning Path; his purely symbolic overtures to Latin American Marxism ultimately fail to cover up what amounts to a singularly rigid application of pseudo-Maoist dogma in the Andes. A summary of Codovilla’s positions and their impact on politics in the region can be found in Néstor Kohan, De Ingenieros al Che: Ensayos sobre el marxismo argentino y latinoamericano (Havana: Instituto Cubano de Investigación Cultural Juan Marinello, 2008), 116 – 128. For Guzmán’s writings, see, for example, Abimael Guzmán Reynoso, Guerra popular en el Perú: el pensamiento Gonzalo (Brussels: Luis Arce Borja, 1989).


13 For this tendency, I have in mind principally the members of the so-called “decolonial” school of thought with whom I engage in all three chapters of this manuscript, although they are not the only thinkers who could be included here. I borrow the notion of provincialization from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s book Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference because I see decolonial theorists deploying their own, slightly more awkward terminology to participate in a similar theoretical enterprise. Walter Mignolo, for instance, argues that the “global designs” of European thought, its universalist premises, obscure the “local histories” from which these premises are derived. This gesture of undermining the allegedly global with
theory for comprehending the irreducible heterogeneity of non-European realities. In the abstract, this viewpoint is of course not incorrect. An unmodified theoretical claim derived from a European context, no matter if it is articulated as universal, will remain, to use Roberto Schwarz’s term, “misplaced” in Latin America and the Caribbean.\(^{14}\) The danger of this kind of thinking, however, is that it can be mobilized to foreclose in advance the possibility of Marxism’s translational modification, of its concrete “reconstruct[ion] on the basis of local contradictions.”\(^{15}\) The provincialization tendency therefore begins to resemble the prior, dogmatic tendency insofar as it subscribes to the same conception of universality, a conception devoid of temporality and becoming. The provincialization tendency is in fact the negative mirror image of the dogmatic tendency, for it denies as false the timeless universals that the dogmatic tendency celebrates as always already valid.

This project offers an altogether different approach. I argue that Marxism begins rather than ends with recognizing the provinciality of its universal claims or, more precisely, with

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\(^{15}\) Ibid., 39.
acknowledging the historically determinate character of its theses and the abstract form of their universality. Yet this is only the beginning, for Marxism aspires towards *deprovincialization*, towards concrete universalization. This alternative understanding of Marxism only becomes thinkable if the terms of the debate are shifted such that universality is no longer viewed as a logical category to be judged as either true or false and is instead understood as a dialectical process that moves from the abstract to the concrete. Throughout the dissertation, I discuss these issues in greater depth, particularly in the first chapter, which addresses how the Peruvian writer and militant José Carlos Mariátegui theorized Marxism as a method of theoretical translation in order to then translate or concretize Marxist universals in light of the specificity of the Peruvian conjuncture.

In his recent study *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror*, Bosteels implicitly addresses these complicated issues when he reviews the debate between Argentine Marxist José Aricó and Bolivian Marxist Álvaro García Linera on the subject of the “*desencuentro*” or “missed encounter” between Marx and Latin America. The Aricó-García Linera debate revolves around their different explanations for why Marx wrote so little about Latin America and why the texts that he did write about the region appear so narrow-minded and divergent from his treatment – during the same period – of other non-Western European contexts (e.g. Poland, Russia, India). With its sweeping treatment of Marx’s influence on Latin American thought and culture, Bosteels’s book should be read as an

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important contribution to tracing various re-articulations of the relationship between Marx and Latin America in the wake of their originary missed encounter.

Yet the reader will find no explicit discussion of the theoretical implications of such encounters in Bosteels’s work. Instead, the issue all but disappears when he re-defines the *desencuentro* as “one name among others for the unequal development of capitalism in its global phase” and never returns to the notion’s prior, more focused signification.¹⁷ The drawback of this approach is that it takes for granted a real problem, namely the problem of Marxism’s translation. This in turn leaves Bosteels’s work vulnerable to the criticism that it verges hazardously close, despite its emphasis on “heretical treatments of Marxism,” to the dogmatic tendency, which assumes that Marx(ism)’s reach is always already universal.¹⁸ To avoid this pitfall, my study begins with Mariátegui precisely because he locates the problem of Marxism’s translation at the very center of his theoretical practice, and, to reiterate, I maintain that this

¹⁸ Ibid., 24. Bosteels briefly addresses these issues again during his reading of García Linera in *The Actuality of Communism* and even reframes the two tendencies with which my project diverges: “A methodological corollary of this critique of the alleged Eurocentrism in Marx and Engels’s writings about dependent nations concerns what is supposed to be the Marxist treatment of history. Here, the aim is to avoid the twin extremes of either turning Marx’s account into ‘a historico-philosophical theory whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical’ or else lapsing into ‘a historicism of basically disconnected singularities.’ Especially after 1870, Marx himself insists on the need for a site-specific, circumstantial, and multilinear view of history that – far from being limited to the study of peripheral and dependent countries or to what nowadays might be called alternative modernities – would also apply to Western Europe.” A supra-historical theory and a historicism of disconnected singularities – these positions, I would argue, represent alternative names for the dogmatic and provincialization tendencies respectively. However, what still remains to be explicitly articulated is how translation connects singularities such that Marxist theory can become concrete *and* universal or, in other words, can extend from Western Europe to peripheral countries and vice versa in a way that does not completely erase historical and material difference. See Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, 256. During his reading of García Linera, Bosteels is quoting from García Linera, *De demonios escondidos y momentos de revolución*. 
problem should be a focal point of any inquiry into Marxism’s (missed) encounter with Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Translating Between Alternative Universalities**

Maurice Najman: With concepts like these – nation, humanity, and so on – we are already far removed from orthodox Marxism…

Subcomandante Marcos: Yes, what I’m saying is that that began a long time ago, in the process of translation from Marxist-Leninist university culture to indigenous culture. That translation was actually a transformation. I remember reading that whoever translates poetry is in reality a poet; in this case, the true creators of *zapatismo* were the translators, […] they constructed a new way of seeing the world.

– The Zapatista Dream, An Interview with Subcomandante Marcos

[S]ome of these small groups of critical Marxists […] have been accompanying, chronicling and disseminating this new period of Indianist horizons with the most reflexive insight, thus creating the possibility of a space for communication and mutual enrichment between Indianisms and Marxisms – likely to be the most important emancipatory conceptions of society in Bolivia in the twenty-first century.

– García Linera, “Indianism and Marxism: The Disparity between Two Revolutionary Rationales [Indianismo y Marxismo: El Desencuentro de Dos Razones Revolucionarias]”

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Although I began this introduction by acknowledging that Marxism is oftentimes reduced to a name for that which is irredeemably outdated and obsolete, it should also be noted that this is the case in very particular settings, such as within the theoretical debates of the North American academy. In other locales, from the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas, Mexico to the state buildings of La Paz, Bolivia, Marxism’s untimeliness, its homelessness in times of neoliberal capitalism, makes it a guiding light for some of today’s most exciting and significant political experiments in their struggle to build a radically alternative future. The problem of translating Marxism remains central for these political experiments, but it has also acquired a further dimension of complexity. Along with encountering new historical and material conditions, Marxist theoreticians in Latin America and the Caribbean have begun to realize that they must also attend to a different kind of encounter, an encounter with alternative systems of thought and action that contain their own universalist horizons.²¹


²¹ While I focus on the missed encounter between Marxism and Indianism in what follows, the issue can in fact be construed much more broadly to examine the tensions and intersections between various emancipatory worldviews. Although sometimes exemplifying the provincialization tendency discussed above, Cedric J. Robinson’s Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition could be read as an attempt to address precisely this issue of the missed encounter, this time between Western Marxism and the black radical tradition, as well as various experiments – undertaken particularly by W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Richard Wright – in rearticulating their relationship. The very first lines of the introduction accordingly read: “This study attempts to map the historical and intellectual contours of the encounter of Marxism and Black radicalism, two programs for revolutionary change. I have undertaken this effort in the belief that in its way each represents a significant and immanent mode of social resolution, but that each is a particular and critically different realization of a history.” Cedric J.
Consider, for example, the most influential of today’s political experiments in Latin America (and, arguably, beyond), the Zapatista movement. During a book-length interview with Maurice Najman and Yvon Le Bot, Subcomandante Marcos, the former leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, offers an in-depth prehistory of the movement’s formation, which includes an illuminating account of the armed guerilla organization’s first encounters with the indigenous communities of Chiapas. According to Marcos, the guerilla organization believed that it would assume the leadership role of the armed revolutionary vanguard and “open the eyes” of the “blind” Indians. Yet that is precisely what did not happen. Instead, the militant group, “still within the Marxist-Leninist tradition, […] suddenly found itself before a reality that it could not explain, a reality for which it could not give an account but with which it had to labor.” The group gradually became disillusioned with its vanguardist fantasies as a result of this experience, realizing that its traditional Marxism-Leninism, although flourishing in the urban university culture of Mexico City, left the guerrillas blind in the Lacandon jungle. Marcos characterizes this moment in the movement’s prehistory as one of “cultural clash [choque cultural]” and of “failure [derrota].” From the discussion above, it could be said that the Zapatista Army failed because it entered a new context with an untranslated form of Marxism-Leninism. It could furthermore be said that the organization clashed with local cultural conditions because it dogmatically construed its traditional, or in Marcos’s words, “orthodox”

22 Marcos and Le Bot, 130 [my translation].
23 Ibid., 131 [my translation].
24 Ibid., 127, 131 [my translation].
outlook as always already universal instead of recognizing the need to labor with concrete reality and translate itself accordingly.\textsuperscript{25}

It was at that point of failure, disillusionment, and uncertainty that Marcos met a local Maya Indian that he refers to fondly as “that translator, old Antonio.”\textsuperscript{26} According to Marcos:

When the indigenous communities entered into contact with us, someone appeared that seems like a literary figure, but he was real, he existed. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation, through him, [Antonio,…] began to learn [the indigenous communities’] history of political formation, their consciousness, their historical consciousness. And it became clear that we were not speaking with an indigenous movement that was waiting for a savior but rather with an indigenous movement with a long tradition of struggle, with plenty of experience, a resistant – and also intelligent – indigenous movement for which we functioned simply as its armed branch. […] Antonio’s] fundamental contribution was making intelligible to the Zapatistas the specificity of the indigenous question in the mountains of Southeastern Mexico.\textsuperscript{27}

Marcos thus narrates a process of reeducation facilitated by Antonio’s translated lessons on indigenous thought and politics. Once the Marxist-Leninist teachers became students of their environment, they began to recognize their role not as the vanguard leadership of a disorganized indigenous movement but rather as the armed wing of an indigenous movement that had been practicing its own form of organization for a very long time. This shift from Marxist-Leninist university culture to indigenous culture does not so much represent the complete abandonment of the former for the latter as it represents a radical reformulation or translation of Marxism-

\textsuperscript{25} This notion of orthodoxy should of course be distinguished from Lukáč’s redefinition of orthodoxy as discussed above.
\textsuperscript{26} Marcos and Le Bot, 130 [my translation].
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid [my translation].
Leninism on the basis of a new understanding of indigenous culture and the specificity of their conjuncture.

Yet later in the same interview with Najman and Le Bot, Marcos returns to the subject of his first encounter with Antonio the translator to complicate the issue considerably. “[T]he dream of a guerilla,” Marcos recalls, “was to encounter a peasant, explain politics to him, and win him over. So I begin to speak to him [Antonio] about the history of Mexico, about zapatismo, and he responds to me with the history of [the Maya gods] Votan and Ik’al.” With this recollection, Marcos introduces a *choque* of a different nature. The clash that takes place is not simply between Marxist-Leninist tradition and what, from within that tradition, would appear to be an untraditional historical reality. The encounter between the guerilla and the Indian also precipitates a clash between their respective belief systems or worldviews. To Marcos’s Marxist-Leninist explanation of politics, Antonio responds with his own explanation of Maya cosmology.

What I want to suggest here is that this discordant encounter between worldviews should not be read merely at the level of the particular, as simply a clash of cultural differences. While it certainly exemplifies that as well, the encounter gestures, more importantly, towards a splintering at the level of the universal itself, for both worldviews are precisely that, views of the world that contain certain notions and concepts of universal scope. When Antonio explains Maya cosmology to Marcos, he is in effect translating a distinct mode of universality, a mode that represents an alternative to the guerilla organization’s Marxist-Leninist universalism. The question that this *choque* raises is accordingly to what extent some form of translation or negotiation is possible between alternative universalities.

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28 Ibid., 136 [my translation].
In the above epigraph, Marcos hints at one possible answer to this question. During the process of his organization’s reeducation, an “intermediate group” of Maya Indian translators like Antonio formed.\(^{29}\) They believed in the armed struggle and discussed the ideas of the Zapatista Army with their fellow indigenous community members while also continuing to instruct the guerillas on the history and present concerns of the Maya Indians. Thanks to this intermediate group, translation moved in both directions, enabling communication across belief systems where before there were only choques. It is precisely to this group of indigenous translators that Marcos attributes the creation of zapatismo, momentarily displacing the term’s direct historical allusion to Emilio Zapata’s agrarian movement during the Mexican Revolution in order to name a space of encounter and exchange between Mayan and Marxist belief systems and practices. Zapatismo, then, also names one theoretical experiment with translation between alternative universalities.

From this space of encounter, according to Marcos, the translators create a “new way of seeing the world.” Although it would be tempting to understand this new vision of the world as replacing the old worldviews of Marxism-Leninism and Mayan culture, as creating, in other words, a new universalism to supplant prior universalisms, I think that Marcos is actually gesturing at something more obscure but also more radical. In the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle, which was released around the same time as when Najman and Le Bot interviewed Marcos, it states that “[i]n the world we want, many worlds fit [el mundo que queremos es uno donde quepan muchos mundos].”\(^{30}\) With this powerful image that defies

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 127 [my translation].

formal logic, an image that has become a kind of rallying cry for the movement and its sympathizers, the Zapatistas articulate the space of encounter as a space of meta-universality in which alternative universalities or multiple worlds can coexist without the erasure of their differences. I would argue that the new way of seeing the world created by the indigenous translators is precisely this paradoxical vision of a world in which many worlds fit. Although a world of many worlds does not yet exist, the indigenous translators contribute to its creation by finding ways to fit the worlds of Marxism-Leninism and Maya cosmology in a common space of encounter through the translation and negotiation of their distinct articulations of universality.  

Despite its many differences with the Zapatista movement in terms of its approach and overall political strategy, the Bolivian Movement for Socialism (MAS) has attempted to respond in its own way to the same issue of translation between Marxist and indigenous belief systems. This is particularly true in the case of Álvaro García Linera, a Marxist philosopher and militant who, since 2005, has been serving as the vice president of Bolivia alongside the country’s first indigenous president and the leader of MAS, Evo Morales. García Linera most explicitly addresses the issue of alternative universalities in his essay “Indianism and Marxism: The Disparity between Two Revolutionary Rationales [Indianismo y Marxismo: El Desencuentro de Dos Razones Revolucionarias],” which offers a genealogy of the missed encounter or desencuentro between Marxist and Katarian Indianist worldviews throughout twentieth-century Bolivia.  

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According to García Linera, Bolivia’s reception of Marxism was largely “primitive” rather than “critical.” Instead of translating ideas elaborated elsewhere in accordance with local conditions, Bolivian theorists sought to force local conditions to conform to Marxist doxa. In the following passage, García Linera summarizes these untranslated Marxist notions while offering a critique of the underlying logic that sustains their imposition on Bolivian reality:

Marxism came to form a political culture widespread amongst working-class, salaried and student-sectors, based on the supremacy of the working-class identity over and above other identities and a belief in the progressive role of industrial technology in structuring the economy, in the central role of the state in owning and distributing wealth, in the cultural nationalization of society based on these models, and in the historical and class-based ‘inferiority’ of the country’s predominantly campesino communities. This modernist and teleological narrative of history, generally adapted from economics – and philosophy – textbooks, created a cognitive block and an epistemological impossibility with respect to two realities – Bolivia’s campesino and ethnic issue – that would become the point of departure for another emancipatory project, which, over time, would overcome even Marxist ideology itself.

Marxism’s traditional schema of historical development, when dogmatically applied as always already universal, blinded Bolivian Marxists to the potentially revolutionary role of the country’s indigenous and campesino majority and to its collectivist forms of organization and production. Instead of present traces of a possible future, these elements of Bolivian society were viewed as remnants of the past to be overcome by industrial modernization and the consolidation of the nation-state. As García Linera notes, another emancipatory project, Katarist Indianism, would

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33 Ibid., 305 – 310.
34 Ibid., 308.
emerge in response to Bolivian Marxism’s blind spots, placing at the center of its political project the very same realities that were made unintelligible by a unilinear and developmentalist conception of historical time. Although both revolutionary logics would undergo various permutations throughout the twentieth century, García Linera maintains that Bolivian Marxism’s primitive narrative of history represented the unchanging kernel of its perpetual deadlock with Indianism.

Throughout the essay, García Linera nevertheless hints at a possible beyond to primitive Marxism, its narrow view of history, and the desencuentro that it perpetuates. He states, for example, that,

[u]ltimately, a much more thorough understanding of the indigenous and community issue would come from a new, critical Marxism[…] From the end of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century […] this new Marxism sought to reconcile Indianism and Marxism in such a way that the processes of local knowledge-production could be combined with universal ones.  

If this passage were read out of context, it would appear as though it reproduces the old Eurocentric prejudice that construes Marxism as universal while circumscribing indigenous knowledge to the merely local. I believe, however, that this would be a misreading of García Linera, who states later in the same essay that “the most important and influential emancipatory worldview [concepción del mundo] in the country’s current political context is Indianism.”

In the above epigraph, García Linera moreover refers to “this new period of Indianist horizons,” using the same metaphor that elsewhere would famously be mobilized to discuss the “communist

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35 Ibid., 309, 310.
36 Ibid., 317 [my emphasis]. For the original Spanish, see García Linera, “Indianismo y Marxismo,” La potencia plebeya, 388.
horizon."

The essay’s title likewise places Indianism and Marxism side by side as two revolutionary logics, thus implicitly contesting the Eurocentric reduction of Indianism to a particularistic cultural phenomenon that Marxism, qua universal theory, must explain and interpret.

In all of these examples, I read García Linera as gesturing towards the same splintering of the universal discussed above so as to account for a multiplicity of emancipatory worldviews, horizons, or logics. García Linera’s aforementioned description of local forms of knowledge production combining with “universal ones,” in the plural, thus becomes all the more suggestive and relevant. He appears to be alluding not only to the dialectic of the universal and the particular but also, like Marcos, to the coexistence and cooperation of multiple universalities.

For García Linera, critical Marxism is capable of developing a more thorough understanding of indigenous and campesino realities because it has broken with the teleological and modernist narrative of history that legitimated primitive Marxism’s imposition of untranslated ideas within the Bolivian conjuncture. This explains why García Linera states in the above epigraph that critical Marxism creates “the possibility of a space for communication and mutual enrichment between Indianisms and Marxisms.” Without this first internal revolution against Marx’s Capital, as Gramsci would put it, the desencuentro between Indianism and

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37 García Linera, “The Communist Manifesto and Our Present,” Plebian Power, 73. Bosteels discusses García Linera’s notion of the communist horizon in Bosteels, The Actuality of Communism, 225 – 228. For Bosteels, the key reference to the idea of a communist horizon can be found in an interview García Linera did in Pablo Stefanoni, Franklin Ramírez, and Maristella Svampa, Las vías de la emancipación: Conversaciones con Álvaro García Linera (Mexico: Ocean Sur, 2008), 75. Bosteels’s discussion of García Linera on the communist horizon also inspired the title and guiding metaphor of Jodi Dean’s recent book. See Dean, The Communist Horizon, 2, 3. It is worth noting that García Linera’s various references to Indianist horizons have not received the same attention. This is an unfortunate oversight that, it could be said, reproduces the missed encounter between Marxism and Indianism that García Linera and others are trying to overcome in the name of a new articulation of their relationship.

Marxism remains insurmountable. Yet, once Marxism becomes self-critical, once it opens itself up to translation in response to its changing historical and material surroundings, a potential space of encounter emerges in which a different kind of translation may occur, namely the kind that negotiates between alternative articulations of universality. Since García Linera subtly includes himself among the critical Marxists attempting to create such a space of encounter, it is worth noting that he also commonly refers to himself as a “translator,” as someone committed to bridging the divide of the desencuentro precisely through practices of translation.\(^{39}\) The figure of the theoretician as translator thus reappears in the context of yet another contemporary political experiment as a way of thinking through Marxism’s affiliation with alternative, indigenous belief systems that contain their own universalist horizons.

Although much more could be said about both the Zapatista movement and the Bolivian Movement for Socialism, I have discussed them briefly here so as to underline Marxism’s actuality in Latin America as well as the actuality of the problem of Marxism’s translation, which includes the interrelated issue of Marxism’s relationship with alternative universalist modes of thought and action. I address this latter issue throughout the manuscript, but its most thorough treatment can be found in the second chapter. At that moment in the argument, I explore how certain literary works by the Peruvian writer and anthropologist José María Arguedas stage the historical missed encounter between Marxist and indigenous belief systems in Peru as an issue of competing universalist worldviews. Yet I also frame Arguedas’s project as searching for a beyond to the desencuentro, which leads me to discuss his theorization and literary representation of translation practices that negotiate rather than eliminate difference.

\(^{39}\) Pablo Stefanoni discusses García Linera’s self-presentation as a translator in his introduction to Plebian Power. See Pablo Stefanoni, “Álvaro García Linera: Reflections on Two Centuries of Bolivia,” Plebian Power, 1, 2.
The Ends of Translation

The social revolution cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all its superstitions concerning the past. Earlier revolutions relied on memories out of world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to find their own content, the revolutions of the nineteenth century have to let the dead bury the dead.

– Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte

For since we are the outcome of earlier generations, we are also the outcome of their aberrations, passions and errors, and indeed of their crimes; it is not possible wholly to free oneself from this chain. […] The best we can do is to confront our inherited and hereditary nature with our knowledge of it, and through a new, stern discipline combat our inborn heritage and implant in ourselves a new habit, a new instinct, a second nature, so that our first nature withers away.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations

Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving. […] For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man.

– Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth

In certain thinkers there exists a subtle temptation to do away with past and present conditions *tout court* in the name of a radically new future, a future that is so radically new that its relation to the past and present can only be construed as one of rupture. Instead of understanding change as a dialectical overcoming that simultaneously lifts up and abolishes elements of the past and present, or as an eternal return (with difference) of the past and present, this alluring form of thought conceives of change as an absolute interruption that replaces what already exists or has existed with the creation or invention of the new. Brief glimmers of this kind of thinking can be found at work in the writings of intellectuals as philosophically opposed as Marx and Nietzsche. Social revolution should let the dead bury the dead so as to find its own content. Second nature should let first nature wither away as an afterthought of its own affirmation. When such ideas are articulated, *the end of translation* has been reached, that point at which new life can manifest itself only independently from afterlife or perhaps only after afterlife.

The fundamental difficulty facing this kind of thinking is that once the new is announced in such a way it becomes impossible to describe or imagine it, since any attempt to do so would necessarily rely upon words or images laden with past and present significations. The chain of inheritance, as Nietzsche describes it, can never be fully broken. The recognition of this problem led Marx to qualify his more hyperbolic remarks in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

> Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly

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found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.\(^{43}\)

Even if the dead bury the dead, they will forever haunt the dream images of the living brain. New ideas will be ghostly translations that extend the afterlife of the ideas of the dead just as history will be created with elements inherited from history.\(^{44}\) This, it could be said, is the other end of translation, its contribution to inventing the future via a recombinatory process of past and present components.

Although these ends of translation do not necessarily form a dichotomous opposition, they certainly produce a tension when they come into contact with each other. They present two very different notions of change and, in some instances, also hinge on distinct conceptualizations of universality. In the above epigraph, for example, Marx affirms that the new content to be found once the dead are left to the dead for burial will be a universal content of social revolution. This discovery of universal content contrasts greatly with the way Marxist concepts are described in the first section of this introduction as abstractly universal formulations that become concrete only after a process of translation. It may be possible to create a space of encounter for these alternative universalities, as discussed in the second section of this introduction, but it would seem that mutual translation between them would be foreclosed in advance since one of the elements of the encounter articulates its universality as beginning precisely where translation

\(^{43}\) Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” 595.

ends. Rather than attempting to resolve this tension here, I present it as a difficult philosophical and political problem that deserves careful inquiry.

The final chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to just such an inquiry. I examine how Fanon’s writings vacillate between these two tendencies of thinking about translation and universality without ever resolving their tension. I focus in particular on how Fanon, at the very moment when he announces a new direction, does so with the aid of old words and ideas stemming from Hegelian-Marxist and Nietzschean thought. Fanon, although responding to a very different context than Mariátegui or Arguedas, is therefore the appropriate endpoint of this project because he straddles its outer conceptual limit, reaching towards a beyond to translating universality while also at the same time remaining within the paradigm.

Chapter One

José Carlos Mariátegui

Introduction: The Conjunctural Gap and the Detour of Theory

We certainly do not want socialism in Latin America to be a copy or imitation. It should be a heroic creation. We have to give life to Indo-American socialism with our own reality, in our own language.
The moment of the Theory of theoretical practice, that is, the moment in which a ‘theory’ feels the need for the Theory of its own practice – the moment of the Theory of method in the general sense – always occurs post festum, to help it surmount practical or ‘theoretical’ difficulties, resolve problems insoluble for the movement of practice immersed in its activities and therefore theoretically blind, or face up to even deeper crises.

- Louis Althusser

The author of *Capital* never wrote *Dialectics*. Although Marx’s theoretical practice was prolific, he only made “gestures” towards what Althusser describes as a Theory of theoretical practice or a theory of Marx’s method of theorization. For Althusser, this is a common issue among the theoretical sciences. Each science has a determinate raw material, a ‘theory’ or corpus of concepts, and knowledge, which is produced when ‘theory,’ as the means of knowledge production, works on and transforms its raw material. This process can go on relatively uninterrupted until, faced with a problem that becomes insurmountable, a crisis that puts into question the very means of knowledge production, it becomes necessary to examine the method of theoretical practice itself, to offer a theoretical account of the practice of producing knowledge. For Althusser, the growing influence in 1960s France – particularly within the French Communist Party – of humanism, as well as the “theoretical effects of [this] ideology,”

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47 Ibid., 175.
created just such a problem for Marxist theorization. The essays of Althusser’s *For Marx* accordingly address this problem by theorizing the specificity of Marxist theoretical practice, by elaborating a Theory of theoretical practice that would distinguish Marxism from the pervasive ideology of the period.

The particular conjuncture in which the Peruvian theorist and militant José Carlos Mariátegui intervened was of course very different from Althusser’s. After living and studying in France and Italy from 1919 to 1923, during which time Mariátegui became “a convinced and declared Marxist,” he returned to his native Peru where he remained for the rest of his life, writing and organizing until he died in 1930. Yet Mariátegui, like Althusser, was confronted with a problem upon his return that forced him to reevaluate the method of theoretical practice he had learned in Europe. The problem was one of distance, of the gap that separated Mariátegui’s Marxist concepts from his Peruvian surroundings, of the fissure between ‘theory’ and the raw material of the conjuncture.

To ignore this problem, Mariátegui indicates in the above epigraph, would be to resign Marxist theoretical practice in Latin America to the fate of imitating Marxist theoretical practice in Europe, and such copying of Europe would simply perpetuate the very gap that puts Marxist theoretical practice in crisis. In order to truly attend to the problem of distance, Mariátegui calls for the production, “with our own reality,” of a socialism “in our own language.” With this suggestive formulation, Mariátegui envisions his theoretical practice as a *practice of translation*. The second half of this chapter, “Mariátegui’s Practice of Theoretical Translation,” will deal precisely with this issue, with how Mariátegui’s writings from 1923 – 1930 transform Marxist

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48 Ibid., 12 [original emphasis].
‘theory’ in order to “carry it across” (from the Latin *translatus*) the conjunctural gap. Before addressing this topic, however, the first half of this chapter, “Mariátegui’s Theory of Theoretical Practice,” will explore how the writings from that same period theorize Mariátegui’s method of translation, how, like Althusser, Mariátegui contributes to the production of a Theory of Marxist theoretical practice.\(^{51}\)

This focus on the theorization of the method of theorization aspires to advance beyond the now commonplace assertions that Mariátegui “strove to ‘translate’ the Marxism he learned in Europe in terms of its ‘Peruvianization’”\(^ {52}\) or that he sought to achieve a “dialectical synthesis” of “the particular instance (Peru’s social formation) and the universal (Marxist socialism as an emancipatory movement of a world social class).”\(^ {53}\) While these formulations and others like them are by no means incorrect, they oftentimes remain abstract and fail to capture the complexity and intricacy of Mariátegui’s thinking on translation, Marxist socialism, Peruvian reality, and the dialectic between the particular and the universal. A more adequate account of these issues and their implications would shed new light on Mariátegui’s significant contribution to the legacy of thinking the specificity of Marxism.

It should be noted that many critics have identified, as I do in this study, the centrality for Mariátegui’s theoretical practice of the gap between Marxist concepts and Peruvian reality.

\(^{51}\) Although beyond the scope of this chapter, which focuses strictly on Mariátegui’s *theoretical* practice, I hope to address in future writing Mariátegui’s *political* practice, his active participation in various political and cultural organizations, as another form of translation. The beginnings of such an analysis can be found in an article that I collectively wrote with Susana Draper and Ana Sabau, particularly in the section that considers Argentine Marxist José Aricó’s theorization of Mariátegui’s contribution to the formation of the Peruvian Socialist Party. See Gavin Arnall, Susana Draper, Ana Sabau, “Aricó como lector de Gramsci,” *Gramsci en las orillas*, ed. Oscar Cabezas (Santiago: La Cebra, forthcoming 2015).


\(^{53}\) Néstor Kohan, *De Ingenieros al Che: Ensayos sobre el marxismo argentino y latinoamericano* (Havana: Instituto Cubano de Investigación Cultural Juan Marinello, 2008), 118.
Contemporary readers thus like to emphasize how Mariátegui “encounters [Marxism’s] limits in the local history,” how he “questions the universality and predictive capacity of European models for understanding human action in the world.” Sara Castro-Klaren even compares Mariátegui to postcolonial critic Dipesh Chakrabarty insofar as they both contribute to provincializing Europe, to undermining supposedly universal laws by resituating them in their determinate particular context. While it is true that Mariátegui interrogates the limits of Marxism’s concepts, this is not the entire story. In fact, these kinds of readings are incapable of recognizing that the fissure between European concepts and “local history” is the beginning, rather than the end, of Mariátegui’s theoretical project. As I will argue below, his theorization of theoretical practice as a kind of translation sets the stage for an overcoming of Marxism’s limits, not by abandoning its concepts for new ones but by deprovincializing them. Mariátegui’s project, as I understand it, also entails a different perspective on the relationship between concepts and universality. Rather than being axiomatically universal or falsely disguised as universal, concepts, for Mariátegui, become universal through theoretical practice. I maintain, in other words, that Mariátegui’s understanding of Marxism and translation implies that universality is a process.

The role of “local history” in Mariátegui’s Marxist project has provoked considerable debate and understandably so, as it is indeed a complicated issue. In the above epigraph, for instance, Mariátegui speaks of creating an Indo-American, rather than Latin American, socialism.

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56 Ibid.
The reader will inevitably ask: which language is “our language”? In Peru, would “our language” be Spanish or Quechua? In Indo-America, would it be an indigenous language or a language of the colonizers? Such ambiguities in Mariátegui’s writings have tempted some critics, such as Walter Mignolo, to conceive of Mariátegui as a border thinker: “It was from that very border between Western and Ameridian cosmologies that Mariátegui’s work emerged.” Socialism “in our language” would thus be bilingual; Indo-American socialism would be a socialism that emerges from the hyphen of Indo-America, the line that connects yet separates the indigenous and the creole.

Jorge Coronado rightly critiques this reading of Mariátegui insofar as it posits “a harmonic point where one tradition can dialogue unproblematically with the other, as if, in this instance, the sheer alterity of the Andean worldview did not make its compatibility with Marxist theory immediately questionable.” But I would go even further than Coronado and reject Mignolo’s suggestion that Ameridian cosmology contributes in the same way as Marxism to Mariátegui’s elaboration of his work. For Mariátegui, indigenous worldviews are largely, if not solely, raw material for theoretical and political practice. Unlike the Zapatistas, with whom Mignolo draws a comparison, Mariátegui does not look towards indigenous worldviews for his ‘theory.’ Ameridian cosmology, in other words, does not furnish Mariátegui with concepts for the production of knowledge.

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59 Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, 140.
The above epigraph and other allusions to indigenous culture must therefore be read alongside this programmatic statement from the opening note of Mariátegui’s *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1928): “I have served my best apprenticeship in Europe and I believe the only salvation for Indo-America lies in European and Western science and thought.”

For Mariátegui, European and Western science and thought, specifically Marxism, makes possible an interpretation of Peruvian reality (including its indigenous worldviews), an interpretation that will contribute to Indo-America’s salvation. In this particular passage, as in Mariátegui’s project in general, indigenous culture is to be interpreted and does not itself contribute to the means of theoretical interpretation.

While Mignolo maintains that the actuality of Mariátegui resides in his approach to indigenous culture, the issue is actually more complicated. Mariátegui’s approach may even distinguish him rather starkly from current experiments – particularly among the Zapatistas – that seek to create a new form of knowledge by translating between Marxism and Ameridian cosmology. This does not mean, however, that Mariátegui’s attention to indigenous culture was not very radical for its time. It was radical, especially, as I will argue below, when one takes into consideration the views of his fellow Marxists. It would therefore be more accurate to avoid a facile comparison between Mariátegui and the Zapatistas and instead recognize how Mariátegui contributed to making a theoretical and political formation like *zapatismo* possible by opening up Marxism, however insufficiently, to

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60 Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays*, xxxiv.

61 As Coronado puts it, “Mariátegui tends to evade the possibility that the indio himself might have, within his own culture and through the tools it provides, a valid and useful way of criticizing imperial structures.” Coronado, 37.

62 “[T]he actuality of Mariátegui today is due to the fact that his thinking moved from local histories to global designs (like Marxism), and not the other way around.” Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 140.
indigenous culture and the problem of translation. This, I would argue, represents a more nuanced assessment of Mariátegui’s actuality.

Given the nature of the problem facing Mariátegui’s Marxism, what I have called the conjunctural gap, it is unsurprising that critics in Latin American cultural studies oftentimes discuss his work when analyzing a broader question of the relationship between European ideas and Latin America. Analyses of this issue remain for the most part confined to the parameters of an old debate, trapped in the rigid dichotomy between selective appropriation and irreducible alterity, transculturation and heterogeneity, or, to put proper names to these tendencies, Angel Rama and Antonio Cornejo Polar. Despite their differences, both sides of this debate typically share what I would characterize as a culturalist bias. Their discussions of Mariátegui are largely instrumental and quickly move to a more general argument about cross-cultural encounters and cultural difference.63 It is accordingly my contention that situating Mariátegui within this debate, or using him as an example for either side of it, actually obscures the true focus of his project, which is not the elaboration of a general theory of cultural encounters but rather the interrogation of Marxism’s specificity and its capacity to contribute to the creation of Indo-American or Peruvian socialism. While my own focus on translation invites comparisons with the different

63 Angel Rama’s principal statement on transculturation, which includes an analysis of Mariátegui, can be found in Angel Rama, Writing across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America, ed. David Frye (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). Antonio Cornejo Polar’s most relevant discussion of Mariátegui and heterogeneity can be found in Antonio Cornejo Polar, “Indigenismo and Heterogeneous Literatures: Their Double Sociocultural Statute,” The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader, eds. Ana del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 100 – 115. These conceptual paradigms continue to be used in order to interpret Mariátegui at the expense of a careful analysis of his own concept of translation. For an excellent contemporary reading of Mariátegui that nevertheless falls for the temptation of transculturation, see John Kraniauskas, “Mariátegui, Benjamin, Chaplin: para reírse del americanismo,” Políticas literarias: poder y acumulación en la literatura y el cine latinoamericanos (Mexico: FLACSO, 2012), 52. From the heterogeneity school of thought, see Coronado, “The Revolutionary Indio: José Carlos Mariátegui’s Indigenismo,” The Andes Imagined: Indigenismo, Society, and Modernity, 25 – 51.
tendencies of this debate, I will argue, particularly in the subsection entitled “A Materialist Theory of Traveling Ideas,” that Mariátegui’s thought diverges substantially from both the transculturation and heterogeneity paradigms. At this point, however, I want to consider an issue more central to Mariátegui’s enterprise, namely how theory can account for itself “by taking itself as its own object.”

Mariátegui’s Theory of Theoretical Practice
I do not think it is possible to apprehend in a theory the entire panorama of the contemporary world. It is not possible, above all, to fix the world’s movement in a theory. We have to explore it and know it, episode by episode, facet by facet. Our judgment and our imagination will always feel behind in relation to the totality of the phenomenon. Therefore, the best method to explain and to translate our time is perhaps a bit journalistic and cinematographic.

- Mariátegui, The Contemporary Scene

Mariátegui begins his first book of theoretical essays, The Contemporary Scene (1925), with a prologue that theorizes the limits of theory, its inability to apprehend the totality of the world. As a materialist, Mariátegui recognizes that the complexity of historical reality always

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64 Althusser, For Marx, 39.
65 José Carlos Mariátegui, La escena contemporánea (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1988), 11 – 12 [my emphasis]. Although Harry Vanden and Marc Becker include the prologue from which this passage is extracted in their expansive José Carlos Mariátegui: An Anthology, the translation has many errors, so I have retranslated the passage from the original. Compare their version and mine with the original text: Mariátegui, An Anthology, 125. When possible, I cite from this anthology and notify the reader if I have modified the translation. If a citation appears in English but refers to the original Spanish text then it is my own translation.
threatens to undermine any particular theorization of it, that historical change makes every theory incomplete, a partial vision. He accordingly calls on theory to be conceptually fluid, to reformulate itself in response to new and changing historical conditions. “The perfect, absolute, abstract idea that is indifferent to the facts, to a changing and mobile reality, is worthless,” Mariátegui writes, whereas “the valuable idea is germinal, concrete, dialectical, operative, rich in possibility and capable of movement.”

In light of this theorization of theory, José Aricó – one of Mariátegui’s most dedicated and innovative interpreters – perceptively redeems the “fragmentarity” of Mariátegui’s writings. These essays are generally short in length and quick to shift in focus; they often feel, in Aricó’s words, “incomplete” and even “essayistic.” While they repeat certain questions and themes, their conclusions are unpredictable and occasionally contradict previously held positions. Rather than disqualifying Mariátegui as a great thinker, however, Aricó maintains that these

67 These positional changes almost always resist periodization, but that has not stopped Mariátegui’s readers from attempting to periodize his work. While I am generally in agreement with the division of his writings into three stages – the pre-European petit-bourgeois stage, the European radicalization stage, and the post-European Peruvian and Marxist stage – I find the further periodization of the post-European stage entirely unconvincing. During the first period (1923 – 1924), Mariátegui’s writings are characterized as cosmopolitan and internationalist. The second period (1925 – 1928) is described as more national in focus and includes the publication of Seven Interpretive Essays and Mariátegui’s participation in various national-popular organizations. The final stage (1929 – 1930) is more orthodox in nature and includes the formation of the Peruvian Socialist Party. Oscar Terán’s Discutir Mariátegui represents perhaps the most systematic presentation of this now commonplace periodization of Mariátegui’s post-Europe period. See Oscar Terán, Discutir Mariátegui (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, 1985). The two major limitations of this periodization are perhaps the limitations of all periodizations. On the one hand, it cannot account for certain continuities and repetitions in Mariátegui’s thought that bridge the historically bounded periods. On the other hand, it erases tensions and contradictions within each period in order to present a more unified shift in thinking between periods. In what follows, I have opted to focus on certain persistent themes and identify tensions within and between texts rather than blur these continuities and contradictions for the sake of facile periodization.
aspects of Mariátegui’s writings represent “a willfully chosen mode of intervening in the facts, thereby preventing the rigidity of doctrine from suffocating the multifaceted nature of the issues.” Mariátegui’s particular form and practice of writing liberates the content of his essays from the strangleholds of abstract orthodoxy. Instead of timeless axioms, his ideas are mobile and concrete hypotheses that continually intervene in the ever-changing present by adapting and responding to the changes in his objects of analysis. Indeed, if theory represents the “translation of [Mariátegui’s] time” then the task of the theorist-translator is virtually infinite; theory entails constant retranslation in response to new historical conditions.

This explains why Mariátegui describes his method of theorization as journalistic and cinematographic. In his own words, journalism constitutes “the episodic, quotidian history of humanity” and cinema, at its most basic, consists of “the movement of images.” Mariátegui’s essays likewise report on everyday events, historical actors, and political and cultural trends and developments from around the world. They sometimes zoom in on a particular detail of a phenomenon and other times pan out to reveal its broader landscape, as though each essay were the individual frame of a film. In this way, aspects of the contemporary scene are translated or carried across into the realm of theory.

69 José Carlos Mariátegui, “Instantáneas,” La novela y la vida (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1987), 139.
70 Mariátegui, “On Explaining Chaplin,” An Anthology, 436. Mariátegui in fact had much to say about journalism and cinema as mediums of artistic and political expression, but I take these two statements as most relevant for a discussion of his own form of writing. For Mariátegui’s reflections on journalism, see, for example, Mariátegui, “Prensa doctrina y prensa de información,” Ideología y política, 175 – 178. Regarding cinema, I take this text, along with his essay on Chaplin, to be one of his most important statements on the medium: José Carlos Mariátegui, “La última película de Francisca Bertini,” Cartas de Italia (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1991), 248.
71 This is, in fact, how Fernando Rivera recommends reading Mariátegui’s The Contemporary Scene in Fernando Rivera, “Mariátegui: La escritura de la travesía,” José Carlos Mariátegui y los
This account of theory’s relationship to the contemporary scene nevertheless remains inadequate without a thorough understanding of Mariátegui’s notion of translation, for it could appear as though theory is nothing more than a passive, superstructural expression of reality, an immaterial, mirror-image reflection of its materially determining object of study. Such a view would locate Mariátegui’s thought among the most rudimentary, economistic, and mechanistic theorizations of the relationship between base and superstructure or actuality and the idea, and Mariátegui does in fact leave himself vulnerable to this kind of misinterpretation. In Seven Interpretive Essays, for example, Mariátegui approvingly states that the Peruvian critic “[Federico] More starts from a premise that is shared by every profound criticism: ‘Literature,’ he writes, ‘is only the translation of a political and social state.’”72 Upholding this basic premise, Mariátegui goes on to assert that Peruvian literature at the turn of the twentieth century “reflected and expressed” the economic, political, and cultural tensions between creole and indigenous peoples in Peru.73

Mariátegui’s use of the terms “translation,” “reflection,” and “expression” interchangeably, along with his favorable inclusion of More’s statement that literature is only the translation of a political and social state, invites confusion regarding his otherwise rather precise and dialectical understanding of the theoretical – or in this case aesthetic – translation of a materially and historically conditioned source text. In what follows, I will attempt to untangle and elaborate upon Mariátegui’s multifaceted notion of translation, which contains at least three interrelated modes, as well as the implications of his notion of translation for the relationship between historical reality and cultural forms.

estudios latinoamericanos, eds. Mabel Moraña and Guido Podestá (Pittsburgh: Instituto Internacional de Literatura Iberoamericana, 2009), 258.

72 Mariátegui, Seven Interpretive Essays, 200.
73 Ibid., 201.
To unpack what a reflective or expressive translation of historical reality might entail, it is worth noting immediately that such a notion of translation does not necessitate a realist aesthetic. As Mariátegui states in a fascinating essay from 1926 entitled “Reality and Fiction”:

Realism in literature moves us away from reality. The realist experience has served solely to demonstrate to us that we can only encounter reality through the roads of fantasy. And this has produced surrealism, which is not only a school or movement of French literature but also a tendency, a path of world literature. […] More than discovering the marvelous for us, [surrealist literature] seems destined to uncover the real.  

Realist and naturalist novels, according to Mariátegui, simply reflect the surface of things, whereas art, when freed from the constraints of verisimilitude, can more fully express the real. As the surrealist Benjamin Péret once quipped, “[t]hey scorn the dream in favor of their reality as if the dream were not one of the most deeply moving aspects of reality.” In this spirit, Mariátegui maintains in an essay from the same year that the proto-surrealism of the Italian writer Luigi Pirandello offers a “faithful and potent artistic translation of the drama of the ‘disenchanted soul.’”

Yet Mariátegui’s argument is not ultimately formalistic; he does not wish to reject realism as such and sharply oppose it to surrealism. On the contrary, much like Bertolt Brecht,

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74 José Carlos Mariátegui, “La realidad y la ficción,” El artista y la época (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1990), 23.
he will go on to call for a new form of realism that completely transcends the opposition between the representation of reality, on the one hand, and fantasy and experimentation on the other.\textsuperscript{77} Evincing the fluidity of his ideas, Mariátegui reformulates and expands his position on surrealism a few years later by arguing that surrealism’s revolutionary poetry contributed to realizing the conditions of possibility for a new kind of realist prose that avoids realism’s tendencies to either glorify or nihilistically portray what already exists.\textsuperscript{78} Mariátegui hails Feodor Gladkov’s \textit{Cement} for embodying this new aesthetic insofar as it captures the sublimity, faith, and heroism of the proletariat “without omitting any of the failures, disappointments, or spiritual tears through which this heroism prevails.”\textsuperscript{79} Mariátegui also asserts more generally that “[p]roletarian literature tends towards realism, as does socialist politics, historiography, and philosophy.”\textsuperscript{80} Mariátegui’s journalistic translation of historical reality, his cinematographic socialist theory, thus moves in the direction of what could be called heroic realism. As Mariátegui asserts in a message to the Lima Worker’s Congress of 1927, “it is necessary to give the vanguard of the proletariat, along with a realist sense of history, a heroic will for creation and realization.”\textsuperscript{81}

When read together, the texts cited above suggest that proletarian literature and socialist theory have a role to play in fomenting a realist sense of history and a heroic will among the vanguard of the proletariat. What Mariátegui is circling around, in other words, is the

\textsuperscript{77} See Mariátegui, “‘Nadja’, de André Breton,” \textit{El artista y la época}, 178. For Brecht’s expanded notion of realism, see Bertolt Brecht, “Against Georg Lukács,” \textit{Aesthetics and Politics} (London: Verso, 2007), 68 – 85. See also Fredric Jameson’s commentary on this essay in Frederic Jameson, “Reflections in Conclusion,” \textit{Aesthetics and Politics}, 205.
\textsuperscript{78} For Mariátegui on the nihilism of bourgeois art, see Mariátegui, “Art, Revolution and Decadence,” \textit{An Anthology}, 424.
\textsuperscript{79} Mariátegui, “Cement and Proletarian Realism,” \textit{An Anthology}, 428.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid [translation modified].
\textsuperscript{81} Mariátegui, “Message to the Workers’ Congress,” \textit{An Anthology}, 185 [translation modified].
(potentially revolutionary) function of aesthetics and theory in society. This would imply that Mariátegui’s reflective or expressive conception of translation does not confine aesthetic or theoretical production to the passive, phenomenal mimicry of the material base. Along these lines, Mariátegui asserts in an article on contemporary theater that “fiction is not anterior or superior to reality as Oscar Wilde maintains; nor is reality anterior or superior to fiction as the realist school believed. The truth is that fiction and reality modify each other reciprocally.”

Not unlike André Breton, Mariátegui depicts fiction and reality, art and life, as communicating vessels bound together in a dialectical relationship. Marx and Engels suggest something very similar in The German Ideology when they describe the “reciprocal action” between “the material production of life,” or a given mode of production, and “all the different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, morality, etc., etc.” In this vein, Mariátegui conceives of literature as a cultural form that intervenes in reality just as it expressively translates aspects of reality, as a reflection of the contemporary scene that holds the capacity to transform what it reflects. If art is a mirror that reflects reality, it can also be a hammer that shapes reality.

82 Mariátegui, “Algunas ideas, autores y escenarios del teatro moderno,” El artista y la época, 186.
83 See André Breton, Communicating Vessels, trans. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).
85 “Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it.” This statement is often attributed to both Brecht and Vladimir Mayakovsky. No matter who originally said it, Leon Trotsky offers a more dialectical response closer to Mariátegui’s own position: “Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes. But at present even the handling of a hammer is taught with the help of a mirror, a sensitive film that records all the movements. […] Of course no one speaks about an exact mirror. No one even thinks of asking the new literature to have a mirror-like impassivity. The deeper literature is, and the more it is imbued with the desire to shape life, the more significantly and dynamically it will be able to ‘picture’
Returning to the essay “Reality and Fiction,” it is worth noting that the transformative capacity of aesthetic production depends on the translation of “a grand fiction that can be its myth and guiding star.”

Indeed, Mariátegui returns to this idea in an essay about the role of aesthetics in society and insists that art absent of myth is decadent whereas revolutionary art always gives expression to myth. Mariátegui’s notion of myth, an oft-discussed aspect of his oeuvre, stems primarily from his reading of George Sorel, who distinguishes myths from utopias insofar as the latter are reformist descriptions of an inexistent harmonious reality whereas the former are “images of battle,” “expressions of a determination to act,” which function as “historical forces” by impelling those beholden to them to pursue total revolution.

Mariátegui similarly maintains that “[m]yth moves man in history. […] History is made by people possessed and illuminated by a higher belief, by a superhuman hope.”

What Diego Rivera’s murals, Henri Frank’s poetry, and the drawings and paintings of George Grosz and Heinrich Zille all share in common, according to Mariátegui, is a capacity to life.” Leon Trotsky, Literature and Revolution, ed. William Keach (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005), 120.


Mariátegui, “Art, Revolution, and Decadence,” An Anthology, 423, 424. This does not mean, however, that all myths are revolutionary. In this article, Mariátegui recognizes that Italian futurism ascribes to the myths of fascism, so myth is a necessary but not sufficient condition of revolutionary art.

See the essays of Robert Paris and Luis Villaverde Alcalá-Galiano included in José Aricó, ed., Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano, 117 – 162.

George Sorel, Reflections on Violence, ed. Jeremy Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 20, 28, 29. Antonio Gramsci famously described the Sorelian myth as a “concrete phantasy [that] acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organize its collective will.” Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 2005), 125, 126. Given that Mariátegui spent time in Italy and was influenced by many of the same thinkers and historical events as the young Gramsci, there has been much speculation about their overlapping ideas and concerns, although it is unlikely that they ever met. A good overview of the two thinkers and their similarities can be found in Aricó, “Introducción,” xi – lvi.

aesthetically translate the modern myths of social revolution. This is what Mariátegui has to say about Rivera’s artwork:

Diego Rivera has expressed in an admirable visual language the myths and symbols of the social revolution. […] What he has painted holds a prodigious force of propaganda that thrills all those who recognize its intention and understand its spirit. In any photograph of Rivera’s paintings, a poor reflection of a fragment of his work, there is at least enough vibration so that one can hear a note of the great distant symphony.

If, as Sorel holds, myths are images of battle present in the psychology of revolutionaries, Mariátegui indicates that Rivera externalizes these myths, translating them into a visual language. Rivera’s aesthetic translation of mythic historical forces, immaterial facets of reality, injects spectators, even those limited by the frame of a photograph, with the thrill and vibration of a revolutionary spirit. Rivera’s art qua translation is a form that issues from the afterlife of the original revolutionary event and contributes to the latter’s renewal and growth. Echoing from a different time and space, the mythic symphony of the Mexican Revolution drives those who gaze upon Rivera’s murals to action. This is another aspect of art’s role in society; it is a medium for the expression and circulation of myth, and, consequently, it stimulates or forges – to extend

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92 Mariátegui, El artista y la época, 97 [my emphasis].
94 Although beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting that Mariátegui modified his views on the Mexican Revolution at various moments in his life. A helpful overview of the entire arc of positions can be found in Silvana G. Ferreyra, “La interpretación de José Carlos Mariátegui sobre la Revolución Mexicana,” Iberoamericana XI, 43 (2011), 41 – 59.
the metaphor of art as a hammer – the spectator’s heroic will. Mariátegui’s reading of Rivera thus constitutes an explicit presentation of the dialectical notion that the expressive or reflective translation of a phenomenon (e.g. myth) through aesthetic production is itself a form of intervention meant to have effects in the realm of political practice.

It should be noted that the expressive or reflective translation of myth is not limited to aesthetic production strictly defined (e.g. literary fiction, representational art). For Mariátegui, other cultural forms, such as Luis Valcárcel’s *indigenista* manifesto *Tempest in the Andes* (1927), capture the mythic spirit of social revolution as well. In the prologue to Valcárcel’s text, Mariátegui asserts that [t]he work he has written is not one of theory or criticism. It is somewhat evangelical, even apocalyptic. One will not find here the exact principles of the revolution that will restore the indigenous race to its place in the history of the nation. But here are its myths.”

Insofar as Mariátegui’s project is theoretical in nature, as the above epigraph attests, the distinction drawn here between theoretico-critical work and cultural vehicles of myth implicitly differentiates Mariátegui’s writings from Valcárcel’s. The latter’s manifesto is more reminiscent of Rivera’s murals insofar as it expressively translates “the myth, the idea of socialist revolution,” present in the psychology of the “new Indian,” those “Spartacuses” of the sierra.

Yet the temporality and audience of Valcárcel’s work gestures towards another mode of translation that differs from the aesthetic mode of expressive or reflective translation. Consider how Mariátegui describes the function of Valcárcel’s manifesto:

> Valcárcel’s endeavor in this work […] is not that of a professor but that of a prophet. He does not propose merely to register those facts that announce or signal the formation of a

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96 Ibid., 81.
new indigenous consciousness, but to translate their intimate historical meaning, thereby helping this indigenous consciousness [...] be revealed to itself. In this case, as in perhaps no other, interpretation becomes creation.\textsuperscript{97}

If Rivera’s murals aesthetically imbue the spectator with the revolutionary sentiment of a past event, thereby re-actualizing it, Valcárcel’s text aims to affect the very subjects of his manifesto, the indigenous insurgents themselves, by prophetically ascribing historical meaning to their acts of resistance, to acts born out of the new indigenous consciousness of myth. This prophetic interpretation of action constitutes an intervention in its own right, for it contributes to the creation of new subjectivities. By coming to know the historical meaning of the actions born of their consciousness, the indigenous insurgents reach self-consciousness. Mariátegui names this prophetically creative and interpretive procedure of subjectivization translation, and its source-text, rather than the myths of social revolution, are the actions provoked by such myths, which, again, are ascribed historical significance as prophetic signs of a future indigenous renaissance. Valcárcel’s text thus engages in both the aesthetic mode of expressive translation (of myth) and the prophetic mode of creative translation (of action).

Although both of these modes of translation bare some resemblance to how Mariátegui theorizes his own theoretical practice of translation, he does, on occasion, subtly differentiate theoretical translation from other modes of translation. As already mentioned above, Mariátegui insists that a properly theoretical and critical work furnishes the principles of revolution rather than circulates its myths. What constitutes the theoretical, as opposed to the aesthetic or the prophetic, is clarified in a 1926 essay entitled “Freudianism in Contemporary Literature.”

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 80 [my emphasis].
According to Mariátegui, Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis paradoxically does not precede Freudian literature but rather is coeval with it:

Freud had not been anything but the agent, the instrument of a revelation that had to find someone who could rationally and scientifically express it, but the feeling of this revelation already existed in our civilization. [...] The function of genius seems to be, precisely, that of formulating a thought, of translating the intuition, of an epoch.98

If, for Mariátegui, Pirandello and Marcel Proust aesthetically express the revelation of Freudianism without the direct influence of Freudian psychoanalysis, Freud converts the revelation into a theory.99 Translation can thus name (1) the aesthetic expression or reflection of historical reality, (2) the prophetic creation or interpretation of historical reality, and (3) the rational or scientific, which is to say theoretical, formulation of historical reality.

The theoretical mode of translation, defined in this way, raises the question of the relationship between theory and ideology, which Mariátegui appropriately elaborates upon in another article on psychoanalysis:

Marx’s term ‘ideology’ is simply a name that serves to designate the deformations of social and political thought produced by repressed motives. This term translates the idea of the Freudians when they speak of rationalization, of substitution, of transference, of displacement, of sublimation. The economic interpretation of history is not anything more than a generalized psychoanalysis of the social and political spirit.100

The translatus of psychoanalysis from the psychic to the economic realm enables Mariátegui to conceptualize the inscription of a social trauma, a general antagonism, at the center of the

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99 Ibid., 36 – 42.
100 Mariátegui, “Freudianism and Marxism,” An Anthology, 220.
contemporary scene. This inscription, moreover, sets off ideological defense mechanisms, which “idealize and mask” economic interest and necessity. One possible definition of theory would accordingly be the analysis and working through of a trauma, individual or collective, as well as its ideological after-effects.

Although described as realist, rational, and scientific, Mariátegui does not envision his theoretical production as a detached, objective analysis. His translation of the contemporary scene entails fidelity not only to the historical and material conditions of a given situation but also to the ideas and passions of the socialist revolution. In the above-cited prologue to The Contemporary Scene, Mariátegui accordingly recognizes that his “vision of the epoch is not very objective or anastigmatic. I am not an indifferent spectator of the human drama. On the contrary, I am a man with an affiliation and a faith. This book has no more value than that of being a document loyal to the spirit and sensibility of my generation.” Mariátegui will subsequently develop a positive notion of ideology as well and will even describe socialist theory as “an ideological discipline.” Mariátegui, in other words, largely avoids the epistemologically tenuous distinction between scientific theory and ideology by recognizing that all knowledge under capitalism, even scientific knowledge, expresses some form of class interest.

101 Ibid., 219.
102 Mariátegui, La escena contemporánea, 12.
103 José Carlos Mariátegui, “La Ciencia de la Revolución,” Defensa del Marxismo (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1988), 128. In Masses, Classes, Ideas, Étienne Balibar shows how this vacillation on the nature of ideology was present in Marx’s own work, from his negative depiction of ideology as an illusion/inversion in The German Ideology to his brief positive description of ideology in A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy as a “form in which men become conscious of this [class] conflict and fight it out.” See Étienne Balibar, Masses, Classes, and Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx (New York: Routledge, 1994), 87 – 102.
104 Jacques Rancière critiques his former instructor Althusser on precisely this point, and it marks a fundamental distinction between Mariátegui and Althusser, the latter of whom rigidly opposed science to ideology in works like For Marx and Reading Capital. See Jacques Rancière, “On the
In the introductory note to *Seven Interpretive Essays*, Mariátegui reiterates the views expressed in the prologue to *The Contemporary Scene* while clarifying the political implications of the class basis of all knowledge under capitalism: “All this work is but a contribution to Socialist criticism of the problems and history of Peru. [...] Once again I repeat that I am not an impartial, objective critic. My judgments are nourished by my ideals, my sentiments, my passions. I have an avowed and resolute ambition: to assist in the creation of Peruvian socialism.”

In both texts, Mariátegui contends that his theoretical and critical essays, as ideologically motivated translations produced out of and in response to particular historical and material conditions, are meant to contribute to the actualization of the spirit and sensibility of his generation or – what, for Mariátegui, is the same thing – the emergence and creation of Peruvian socialism. In this way, theory maintains a relationship of supplementarity with art, literature, and other cultural forms that spur the heroic will of the proletariat, for the theoretical translation of the contemporary scene does not merely expresses the source text (i.e. historical reality) in a new form. In a dialectical or perhaps Borgesian gesture, it also aims to transform the future of its precursor, to revolutionize its own material conditions of possibility, by formulating the principles necessary to carry out socialist revolution.

It is therefore fitting that Mariátegui, in an article focusing on socialism, would recall Lenin’s formulation that “[w]ithout revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.”

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105 Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays*, xxxiv.
In the majority of the texts that develop his theory of theoretical practice, Mariátegui circles around an absent center; there is something said without being said, remaining invisible because it is everywhere. This something, which constitutes and organizes all of Mariátegui’s ideas, is Marxism. The following section will accordingly address Mariátegui’s conceptualization of Marxism and its role in the theory and practice of socialism.

**Marxism: Method, Dogma, Compass**

Now what is known as ‘Marxism’ in France is, indeed, an altogether peculiar product – so much so that Marx once said to Lafargue: ‘Ce qu’il y a de certain c’est que moi, je ne suis pas marxiste.’

– Friedrich Engels

As a result of his experience collaborating with the French socialists Jules Guesde and Paul Lafargue during the drafting of the 1880 political program of the French Workers’ Party, Marx was compelled to distance himself from his fellow “Marxists.” After an initial agreement on the tenants of the party platform, Guesde dismissed the minimal economic and political demands as reformist, which led Marx to accuse his French comrades of “revolutionary phrase-mongering.”

Read within this context, it would be an exaggeration to interpret Engels’s anecdote above as proof of Marx’s opposition to the emergence, from his theoretical writings

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and political activities, of something called Marxism.\textsuperscript{110} The anecdote nevertheless raises some major conceptual issues with a long and polemical history.\textsuperscript{111} What is Marxism? What is the relationship between Marxism and Marx’s oeuvre? What must be preserved and what can be discarded for someone to be considered a Marxist? How does Marxism persist yet change as it travels across space and time and are there any limits to its potential reach?

There have been many attempts to define Marxism throughout its history, from a “guide to action” and a “worldview” to a philosophy and a science (dialectical materialism and historical materialism, respectively).\textsuperscript{112} Although Mariátegui’s terminological designations are sometimes imprecise, his most definitive statements define Marxism as a \textit{method}.\textsuperscript{113} Consider the following passage from the already cited message to the 1927 Lima Worker’s Congress, a

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{111} For a helpful genealogy of the term Marxism, see the entry “Marxisme” in Gérard Bensussan and Georges Labica, \textit{Dictionnaire critique du marxisme} (France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), 713 – 715.
\textsuperscript{113} On this point, I diverge from the Peruvian historian Alberto Flores Galindo whose generally careful analysis of Mariátegui nevertheless diverges from its rigor when he states – with very little textual evidence – that, for Mariátegui, Marxism is “above all an attitude, a lifestyle, a way of confronting the world.” See Alberto Flores Galindo, \textit{La agonía de Mariátegui: La polémica con la Komintern} (Peru: DESCO, 1980), 54. Although my reading of Mariátegui’s Marxism equally diverges from Aníbal Quijano’s, he serves as a counterbalance to Galindo in his recognition of the absolute centrality of the question of method. See Aníbal Quijano, \textit{Introducción a Mariátegui} (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2002), 63 – 72.
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message whose aim was to mobilize class solidarity in times of ideological sectarianism and
dogmatism:

Marxism, about which everyone speaks but very few know or above all comprehend, is a
fundamentally dialectical method. It is a method that is completely based in reality, on
the facts. It is not, as some erroneously suppose, a body of principles with rigid
consequences, the same for all historical climates and social latitudes. Marx extracted his
method from the bowels of history. Marxism, in every country, in every people, operates
and acts on the environment, on the milieu, without neglecting any of its modalities. […]
The Russian Communists, the British Laborists, the German Socialists, etc., all equally
claim Marx.\footnote{Mariátegui, “Message to the Workers’ Congress,” \textit{An Anthology}, 182 [translation modified].}

Marxism is not to be mistaken for a set of suprahistorical or metaphysical principles that would
be strictly and universally applicable to all social and historical contexts. Its geographic reach,
its capacity to illuminate diverse realities, does not entail the erasure of difference; it presupposes,
on the contrary, an unwavering attention to the definite modalities of a given milieu.

If Russian Communists, British Laborists, and German Socialists find common ground in
their claim to Marx, it is because, for Mariátegui, they all utilize Marxism as the dialectical
method of their theoretical and political practice. It is implied in the above passage that the same
applies, \textit{mutatis mutandis}, for Peruvian socialism. While Mariátegui typically describes
socialism as “a theory and movement,” as well as a new social order that would supersede the
contemporary material and spiritual conditions of capitalism, he defines it in one important
instance as “a \textit{method} and a doctrine, a system of ideas and a praxis.”\footnote{For Mariátegui, in other
\textit{Freudianism and Marxism}, \textit{An Anthology}, 212. One instance of Mariátegui referring to}

words, socialism’s method is Marxism, or, to be more precise, Marxism is the means of theoretical production that works on and molds a determinate raw material, the social conditions of a particular conjuncture, to produce socialist doctrine. This doctrinal product was described above as a theoretical (i.e. realist, rational/scientific, and ideologically motivated) translation of the contemporary scene, so Mariátegui’s notion of Marxism could be reconceptualized as a method of theoretical translation.

Given that Marx’s ideas are the product of the dialectical method, they too, for Mariátegui, are translations of Marx’s contemporary scene and are therefore just as historically determinate as the ideas elaborated by future Marxists. In an essay from the 1928-1929 “Defense of Marxism” series, a series that was published in the famous journal Amauta and that aimed to defend Marxism from its most outspoken critics, Mariátegui contends that it is incorrect to assume that Marxism “relies on the data and premises of Marx’s economic studies because the theses and debates of all its congresses are nothing but the continual reintroduction of economic and political problems according to the new aspects of reality.” Mariátegui thus holds that true Marxists will invariably diverge from Marx’s theoretical translations because of the historical specificity of their source-text. For this reason, Mariátegui claims in an earlier article on Miguel de Unamuno that,

Marx is not present, in spirit, in all his supposed disciples and heirs. Those who have followed him have not been the pedantic, Germanic professors of the theory of surplus value, incapable of adding anything to the doctrine, dedicated only to limiting it, to

socialism as a future social order can be found in La escena contemporánea: “Socialism, so criticized and denounced as materialist, is finally…a renaissance of spiritual and moral values, oppressed by capitalist organization and methods.” Mariátegui, “Historia e ideas de la revolución rusa: Trotsky,” La escena contemporánea, 94. The final quotation comes from Mariátegui, “Reply to Luis Alberto Sánchez,” An Anthology, 175.

stereotyping it. Rather, those who follow Marx have been the revolutionaries, branded as heretics, like Georges Sorel, […] who have dared to enrich and develop the consequences of the Marxist idea.\footnote{117}

Instead of mindlessly repeating Marx’s ideas, a true Marxist repeats Marx at a more fundamental level by developing the consequences of the Marxist idea, by utilizing, in other words, the dialectical method as the means of theoretical production for the comprehension and translation of one’s own historically determinate circumstances.\footnote{118}

Along with Sorel, Lenin serves for Mariátegui as the foremost representative of this endeavor to radically repeat Marx. In another article from the “Defense of Marxism” series, Mariátegui takes a detour from his discussion of French literature to argue that “Lenin proves to us in political practice, with the irrefutable testimony of a revolution, that Marxism is the only means of following and surpassing Marx.”\footnote{119} Lenin’s fidelity to Marxism propels him to lead not only a revolution against capital but also, in Antonio Gramsci’s precise formulation, a “revolution against Capital.”\footnote{120} Lenin, in other words, surpasses the theses of Marx’s Capital by utilizing the very same method that produced them in order to theoretically translate a very different historical scene.

\footnote{117} Mariátegui, “‘La agonía del cristianismo’ de Don Miguel de Unamuno,” Signos y obras (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1985), 119.

\footnote{118} This reading is inspired by Slavoj Zizek’s call to repeat Lenin in the Kierkegaardian sense, that is, “to retrieve the same impulse in today’s constellation, […] repeating, in the present worldwide conditions, the Leninst gesture of reinventing the revolutionary project in the conditions of imperialism and colonialism.” I would, however, reframe Zizek’s assertion in light of Mariátegui’s thinking on Marxism and say that Lenin was simply repeating Marx, in the same Kierkegaardian sense. See Slavoj Zizek, “Introduction: Between the Two Revolutions,” Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917 (London: Verso, 2002), 11.


This account of Lenin’s Marxism resonates with Georg Lukács’s famous discussion of orthodoxy, during which he explains that an orthodox Marxist can reject every one of Marx’s theses as long as he remains faithful to the Marxist method.\footnote{“Let us assume for the sake of argument that recent research had disproved once and for all every one of Marx’s individual theses. Even if this were to be proved, every serious ‘orthodox’ Marxist would still be able to accept all such modern findings without reservation and hence dismiss all of Marx’s theses \textit{in toto} – without having to renounce his orthodoxy for a single moment. Orthodox Marxism, therefore, does not imply the uncritical acceptance of the results of Marx’s investigations. It is not the ‘belief’ in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book. On the contrary, orthodoxy refers exclusively to \textit{method.”} Georg Lukács, \textit{History and Class Consciousness: Studies in marxist Dialectics}, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Boston: MIT Press, 1971), 1. David Sobrevilla and Harry Vanden both briefly mention this passage when discussing Mariátegui; however, they do not develop how it resonates with Mariátegui’s work beyond the obvious mention of Marxism as a method. See David Sobrevilla, \textit{El marxismo de Mariátegui y su apicación a los 7 ensayos} (Lima: Universidad de Lima, 2005), 182. See also Harry Vanden, \textit{National Marxism in Latin America: José Carlos Mariátegui’s Thought and Praxis} (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1986), 17, 18.} Before advancing his account of Lenin’s Marxism, Mariátegui offers an uncannily similar, if counterintuitive, characterization of dogma in response to French journalist Emmanuel Berl and other intellectuals who feared that committing to Marxism would proscribe intellectual freedom:

Without a doubt, [Henri] Massis is correct […] when he affirms that there is only the possibility of progress and liberty within dogma. The assertion is false in how it refers to Massis’s dogma, which stopped being susceptible a long time ago to development, petrified into eternal formulas, and became alien to social and ideological becoming, but it acquires validity if it is applied to a social movement in process. […] Dogma, if that is what you wish to call it, expanding the acceptance of the term, did not impede Lenin from being one of the greatest revolutionaries and one of the greatest statesmen. […] Dogma is not an itinerary but a compass on the journey.\footnote{Mariátegui, “The Process of Contemporary French Literature,” \textit{An Anthology}, 179, 180 [translation modified].}
To describe Lenin’s orthodox Marxism as dogma requires redefining the term, for Marxism is not a set of eternal formulas mindlessly upheld but rather a compass that points Lenin in the direction of revolutionary transformation without providing a pre-determined, abstractly universal route. The coordinates of the compass may be universal, an issue that I will explore below, but the terrain is always particular, concrete.

Mariátegui will go on to frame Sorel as an adherent of Marxist dogma insofar as he is “true to a superior discipline of class and method. […] Sorel managed an original continuation of Marxism, because he began by accepting all the premises of Marxism.”¹²³ This passage raises some important questions: What are the premises of the dialectical method or, to extend the Mariátegui’s metaphor, the universal coordinates of the compass? How are these premises different from metaphysical axioms or first principles? In an important article entitled “Modern Philosophy and Marxism,” which was also included in Amauta’s “Defense of Marxism” series, Mariátegui states that “Historical Materialism recognizes three springs as its source: classical German philosophy, English political economy, and French socialism. This is precisely Lenin’s concept.”¹²⁴ Mariátegui, using Marxism and Historical Materialism interchangeably in this essay, is alluding to Lenin’s canonical article “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism,” in which Lenin argues that Marxism “furnishes the answers to questions already raised” by these three sources and is therefore “the direct and immediate continuation of the teachings of the greatest representatives of philosophy, political economy, and socialism.”¹²⁵

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¹²³ Ibid, 180.
¹²⁵ Marxism’s development of its sources, according to Lenin, includes (1) the development of a philosophy of dialectical materialism that designates a given mode of production as the base of a determinate political and ideological superstructure, (2) an economic labor theory of value that accounts for the production and extraction of surplus-value, the concentration and centralization of capital, and the socialization of labor, thereby revealing how the development of capitalism
These component parts of Marxism, as theorized by Lenin, serve as the points of departure for an analysis of what Mariátegui refers to as the premises of the dialectical method.  

*Marxism’s Philosophical Premise and the Historicity of Method*

As one of a number of critical responses to Henri de Man’s *Beyond Marxism*, a text that represents Marx’s thought as “a child of the nineteenth century” synthesizing “the causal materialism of Darwin and the teleological idealism of Hegel,” Mariátegui’s “Modern Philosophy and Marxism” aims to clarify Marxism’s relationship to philosophy.  

The article opens with a reference to Paul Valéry’s famous statement, “[a]nd it was Kant who begot Hegel, who begot Marx, who begot…,” which Mariátegui modifies by asserting that “Kant and Hegel precede and engender first Marx, and later, Lenin (whom we now add) in the same way that capitalism precedes and gives rise to socialism.”  

Rather than a linear sequence of elements, Mariátegui divides the thinkers into pairs and associates the transition from idealism to Marxism with the transition from capitalism to socialism. He thereby suggests that the movement from leads to its own undoing and the foundation of a socialist alternative, and (3) a political doctrine that recognizes class struggle as the motor of historical development and the proletariat as the revolutionary subject of history capable of ushering in a new, classless society. V. I. Lenin, “The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism,” *The Lenin Anthology*, 640 [original emphasis].

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126 Because we both take Lenin’s “Three Sources” as the point of departure for an investigation of the component parts of Mariátegui’s Marxism, Sobrevilla’s treatment of the issue is structurally similar to my own. Although generally in agreement with his discussion of Marxism’s philosophical premise, which he refers to as a characteristic of the Marxist method, I attempt, following Mariátegui, to ground Marxism’s relationship with philosophy in a consideration of the former’s historicity. My treatment of the economic and political premises of Marxism, on the other hand, diverges significantly with Sobrevilla’s analysis, since I focus on Lenin’s contributions to their revision and reformulation, which in Sobrevilla’s manuscript appears only as an afterthought and is therefore quickly skipped over. See Sobrevilla, 179 – 207.


128 Ibid., 193.
Kant and Hegel to Marx and Lenin is a revolutionary and dialectical movement of generation and opposition, of continuation and supersession.

To elaborate on the properly dialectical nature of this movement, Mariátegui paraphrases Marx’s famous explanation, in the 1873 Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital*, of his materialist overturning of Hegel’s idealist mystification of the dialectic, an overturning that places the dialectic back on its feet. Just as Marx states in the same afterword to *Capital* that “[m]y dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it,” Mariátegui contends that “Marx’s materialist conception is born, dialectically, as the antithesis of Hegel’s idealist conception.” Marx’s dialectical method is therefore a very peculiar continuation of classical German philosophy, as Lenin would have it, a continuation unlike what Mariátegui describes as Sorel’s continuation of Marxism. While Sorel’s rupture with certain ideas associated with Marxism is the result of his fidelity to the Marxist dialectical method, Marx’s rupture with Hegel’s Idea entails not fidelity to the idealist dialectic but rather the formation of an antithetical, materialist alternative. It could accordingly be said that a materialist conception is the philosophical premise of Marxism, which is dialectically born out of classical German philosophy’s idealism.

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129 Ibid.
130 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Press, 1992), 102, 103. Mariátegui, “Modern Philosophy and Marxism,” *An Anthology*, 194 [emphasis added]. Here is Marx’s passage again, this time placed in context alongside the section of the passage that Mariátegui paraphrases: “My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of the ‘Idea’, is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought. [...] The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel’s hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.” Marx, *Capital*, 102, 103.
Mariátegui’s analogy between the historical generation of Marx and Lenin and the historical generation of socialism recalls my discussion above of the reciprocal relationship between base and superstructure or, as Gramsci describes it, the materialist principle that “ideas are not born of other ideas, philosophies of other philosophies; they are a continually renewed expression of real historical development.”\(^{131}\) In another article from the “Defense of Marxism” series entitled “Materialist Idealism,” Mariátegui develops his own account of Gramsci’s materialist principle. He begins by stating that “[i]dealist philosophy, historically, is the philosophy of liberal society and the bourgeois order.”\(^{132}\) The correspondence between philosophy and economic and political society, superstructure and base, is thus historically determined rather than logically necessary, and attending to this historical correspondence is what separates a materialist from an idealist account of ideas and their formation.

Mariátegui then goes on to assert that the crisis of liberal bourgeois society also corresponds historically with the crisis of idealist philosophy, and this dual crisis creates the conditions of possibility for Marxism’s dialectical emergence:

Marxism, as philosophical speculation, takes on the work of capitalist thought at the point where capitalist thought abandons its forward march and begins its retreat, vacillating before its extreme consequences, a vacillation that precisely corresponds, on the economic and political plane, to a crisis of the liberal bourgeois system.\(^{133}\)


\(^{133}\) Ibid., 224 [translation modified]. Harry Vanden and Marc Becker translate *especulación filosófica* as “philosophical reflection,” likely to distinguish the above passage from Mariátegui’s claim that “[t]he ethical function of socialism […] should be sought not in grandiloquent Decalogues, nor in *philosophic speculations* [*especulaciones filosóficas*] that by no means constitute a necessity in Marxist theorizing, but in the creation of a producers’ moral for the very process of anticapitalist struggle.” Mariátegui, “Ethics and Socialism,” *An Anthology*, 201 [author’s emphasis]. I prefer the translation closest to the original, however, because it conveys
Instead of ideas giving birth to other ideas independent of historical and material conditions, capitalism, idealism, socialism, and Marxism represent, as Karl Korsch put it, “four moments of a single historical process.” For Korsch, to describe the conditions of Marxism’s emergence in this way entails nothing less than “the application of the materialist conception of history to the materialist conception of history itself.” In other words, if Marxism is, in Mariátegui’s words, “a method of historical interpretation of modern society” then the essay “Materialist Idealism” provides a properly Marxist account of Marxism, an interpretation of Marxism’s own historical and material conditions of possibility. Mariátegui historicizes the very method of historicization, a procedure that itself exemplifies Marxism’s philosophical premise, its dialectical materialist conception.

The description of Marxism as “philosophical speculation” nevertheless begs the question of the relationship between Marxism and philosophy. This issue has fomented much debate, for theorists have conceptualized Marxism as a new kind of philosophy (Gramsci), as a new practice of philosophy (Althusser), and as the withering away of philosophy by scientific socialism (Korsch). One of Mariátegui’s theoretical foes, the American writer Max Eastman, goes further than Korsch and argues in The Science of the Revolution that Marx and Marxism never

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134 As Karl Korsch states, “[t]his dialectical approach enables us to grasp the four different trends we have mentioned – the revolutionary movement of the bourgeoisie, idealist philosophy from Kant to Hegel, the revolutionary class movement of the proletariat, and the materialist philosophy of Marxism – as four moments of a single historical process.” Karl Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 44.
135 Ibid., 102.
escaped Hegel’s grip and that philosophy as such only stands in the way of science.\textsuperscript{138} While Eastman’s “scientism,” his “mystical conviction that everything, absolutely everything, is reducible to science,” is unconvincing to Mariátegui, the other tendencies listed above do not fully capture the latter’s position either.

Unlike many Marxists, including Lenin, Mariátegui did not theorize dialectical materialism as the philosophy of Marxism. In fact, to my knowledge, the phrase “dialectical materialism” does not appear in Mariátegui’s work. Although Marx’s materialist conception is the antithesis of Hegel’s idealist conception, Mariátegui maintains in “Modern Philosophy and Marxism” that Marx did not produce an antithetical philosophical system:

Marx never proposed the elaboration of a philosophical system of historical interpretation to serve as an instrument for carrying out his political and revolutionary ideas. […] Historical materialism is precisely not metaphysical or philosophical materialism, nor is it a philosophy of history left behind by scientific progress. Marx had no reason to create anything more than a method of historical interpretation of modern society.\textsuperscript{139} Marxism is “in part philosophical” because it contains a philosophical premise, which speculates that the contemporary scene becomes comprehensible only when viewed through a dialectical and materialist lens.\textsuperscript{140} As a component part of the means of theoretical production, this premise precedes and structures Marxism’s observation and interpretation of modern society, its translation of the contemporary scene. Yet the dialectical nature of this interpretation/translation bars it from coagulating into an enclosed philosophical system (i.e. philosophical materialism).

\textsuperscript{139} Mariátegui, “Modern Philosophy and Marxism,” \textit{An Anthology}, 194.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
and its materialist premise safeguards against the conversion of historical tendencies into abstractly universal and timeless laws (i.e., a philosophy of history).

Along with these distinctions, Mariátegui summons what we might call Marxism’s actuality or relative immutability in order to differentiate the dialectical method from its precursors:

Marxist criticism studies capitalist society concretely. As long as capitalism has not been transformed definitively, Marx’s canon remains valid. Socialism or, rather, the struggle to transform the social order from capitalist to collectivist, keeps this critique alive, continues it, confirms it, corrects it. […] The fate of the scientific or philosophical theories [Marx] used as elements of his theoretical work, surpassing and transcending them, do not in any way compromise the validity and relevance of his idea. It is radically different from the mutable fortunes of the scientific and philosophical ideas that accompany or immediately precede them in time.¹⁴¹

Unlike the ideas of nineteenth century philosophy and science, which were generally discarded and replaced with new hypotheses in Mariátegui’s time, Marx’s canon or idea – the dialectical method and the premises under which it operates – preserves its relevance and remains actual.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 194, 195 [translation modified]. This passage exemplifies how a small liberty in translation can greatly obscure the meaning of the original. Whereas the Spanish alludes to Marx’s idea, in the singular, suggesting that Mariátegui is talking about Marx’s method, in the Vanden and Becker translation it is rendered in the plural, which could lead the reader to believe that Mariátegui is talking about his concrete socialist theses rather than the dialectical method. Compare my translation and theirs with the original: Mariátegui, “La filosofía moderna y el marxismo,” Defensa del Marxismo, 41.
within capitalism’s lifespan.\textsuperscript{142} Under capitalism, the coordinates of the Marxist compass remain universal, but they are not, for this same reason, timeless.

Along with providing an account of Marxism’s historical and material conditions of possibility, Mariátegui thus defines Marxism’s historical limits and suggests that the eclipse of Marxism’s actuality corresponds with the definitive transformation of capitalism. The dialectical method and its premises are no less historically determinate than the socialist theory it produces and for that reason are distinct from axioms or first principles. Marxism’s historical and material bounds are nevertheless different from those of socialist theory. Whereas socialist theory, due to its attention to the definite modalities of a given situation, is limited in scope to the particular milieu out of which it emerges, Mariátegui holds that Marxism is an adequate method of historical interpretation within any conjuncture subject to the basic forces of capital. What I would call the translatability of Marxism, the adequacy of the dialectical method, depends on this stipulation.

There is nevertheless an ambiguity in the above passage, for the definitive transformation of capitalism could refer simultaneously to capitalism’s ultimate supersession and to its evolution, to the instantiation of a post-capitalist order and to capitalism’s entry into a new phase of its existence. Mariátegui also states that the struggle for the formation of a collectivist social order not only continues and confirms the dialectical method but furthermore “corrects it.” This suggests that what Mariátegui describes as the “active, living Marxism of today” may need to evolve with capitalism, that the coordinates of the compass may need to be recalibrated as

\textsuperscript{142} Sobrevilla helpfully discusses how Mariátegui’s use of the word “canon” is synonymous with method and should not be confused with Benedetto Croce’s exploration of “Marx’s canon.” See Sobrevilla, 180, 181.
conditions change, that the dialectical method may itself need to be translated.\footnote{Mariátegui, “Henri de Man and the \textit{Crisis of Marxism},” \textit{An Anthology}, 190.} Lukács gestures at this idea when he claims that the Marxist method “can be developed, expanded, and deepened only along the lines laid down by its founders.”\footnote{Lukács, 1.} Given that Lukács and Mariátegui are both writing within the general context of the Russian Revolution, these statements appear clearly motivated by Lenin’s contribution to periodizing capitalism’s development and theorizing its highest, imperial stage.

Indeed, Mariátegui goes so far as to posit that “the Russian Revolution constitutes the dominant accomplishment of contemporary socialism. It is to this accomplishment, of which the historical reach cannot yet be measured, that one must go in order to find the new stage of Marxism.”\footnote{Mariátegui, “Henri de Man and the \textit{Crisis of Marxism},” \textit{An Anthology}, 190.} The implications of this point are developed in the programmatic principles of the Peruvian Socialist Party, principles that Mariátegui drafted with a number of comrades in 1928. The program states that no country can evade “the international character of the contemporary economy” of capitalism, which has reached its “imperialist stage.”\footnote{Mariátegui, “Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party,” \textit{An Anthology}, 237, 238.} It asserts, accordingly, that “Marxism-Leninism is the revolutionary method of the stage of imperialism and of monopolies. The Socialist Party of Peru adopts it as its method of struggle.”\footnote{Ibid.,238.} If Lenin demonstrates that it is only through Marxism that one can both follow and supersede Marx, this passage suggests that Marxism, the dialectical method itself, may undergo a transformation during its lifetime, that its very premises may be “developed, expanded, and deepened,” such that Marxism would be translated into Marxism-Leninism. While for Mariátegui this transformation does not appear to
affect the method’s philosophical premise, its materialist conception, the next subsection will consider how it impacts Marxism’s economic and political premises.

*Marxism’s Economic and Political Premises and Lenin’s Contributions*

Mariátegui most clearly articulates Marxism’s economic premise in yet another “Defense of Marxism” essay entitled “The Position of British Socialism”: “Marx and his school, from Lenin to Hilferding, maintain that the evolution of capitalism leads to the material and spiritual conditions of a socialist order.”148 This point, of course, presupposes Marx’s discussion throughout his *magnum opus* of the ever-greater accumulation, concentration, and centralization of capital and the socialization of labor, processes that eventually “become incompatible with their capitalist integument” and burst it asunder, thereby opening the path to a socialist alternative.149 Mariátegui turns to the economic premise of Marxism in order to respond to Henri de Man and other “neo-revisionists” who view England’s specific historical context, namely the coexistence of an advanced capitalist economy and a generally conservative and empiricist labor movement, as a counterexample to the idea that capitalism produces its own gravediggers.150 For Mariátegui, however, a careful analysis of the situation in England shows that Marxism’s economic premise remains intact insofar as the economic conditions propel the British labor movement towards socialism despite its theoretical reservations regarding socialist doctrine.151

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149 Marx, *Capital*, 929.
151 This characterization of England goes back to Engels’s *The Peasant War in Germany*, which contrasts the German workers from their English counterparts insofar as “the indifference towards all theory […] is one of the main reasons why the English working-class movement crawls along so slowly in spite of the splendid organization of the individual unions.” Lenin
Mariátegui warns his reader that this assessment of the British conjuncture does not reduce historical development to mechanical determinism, which would ignore the political premise of Marxism or the role of the proletariat as revolutionary subject:

[England] marches, empirically and doctrinally, towards socialism by way of capitalism and its institutions. This is absolutely not meant to imply that socialism is possible before the proletariat acquires consciousness of its historical mission and organizes and disciplines itself politically. The political, intellectual, premise is no less indispensable than the economic premise.”

Opposed to economic fatalism, Mariátegui asserts that the emergence of socialism in Britain depends on the dialectical interplay of objective and subjective forms of determination, on the reciprocal action of economic development and political consciousness.

Read without recourse to Mariátegui’s other writings on historical development, it may seem as though a kind of positivism, a belief in the inevitability of social progress, is implicit in his depiction of Marxism. Interestingly, when not tasked with defending Marxism, Mariátegui appears freer to critique its founder on precisely these grounds. In an early, 1923 lecture at the González Prada Popular University, Mariátegui unapologetically asserts the following:

The ideologues of the Social Revolution, Marx and Bakunin, Engels and Kropotkin, lived in the apogee of capitalist civilization and of historicist and positivist philosophy. Consequently, they could not foresee that the rise of the proletariat would have to be produced by virtue of the decadence of Western civilization. The proletariat was destined to create a new type of civilization and culture. […] Socialism was going to find that it cites this passage in What is to be Done? to emphasize the role of revolutionary theory in constructing a revolutionary movement, an issue of particular importance, as discussed above, for Mariátegui. See Lenin, “What is to be Done?,” 21.

had to govern not in an epoch of plenitude, wealth, and overabundance but rather in an epoch of poverty, misery, and scarcity.\textsuperscript{153} Mariátegui explains Marx’s shortsighted assessment of historical development, perhaps a kind of theoretical lapsus, by offering \textit{in nuce} a materialist account of the historical conditions that determined, within Marx’s conjuncture, what was visible and invisible, knowable and unknowable.\textsuperscript{154} If capitalism’s development prepares the conditions of possibility for socialism, Mariátegui suggests in this passage that capitalism’s trajectory cannot be characterized as merely a direct path of steady progress, that capitalism may stimulate a socialist alternative not because of its massive production of social wealth but rather because of its destructive expenditure of this wealth and the disproportionate effect of this expenditure on the working class.

Mariátegui’s article “Two Conceptions of Life,” which was first published in \textit{Mundial} in 1925 and then reprinted in \textit{Amauta} while Mariátegui was writing his essays for the “Defense of Marxism” series, forefronts the first World War as the historical event that reveals this aspect of capitalism’s development.\textsuperscript{155} The war, according to Mariátegui, sends the entire world into an economic and political crisis that shatters the positivist perspective that had formerly united

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{153} Mariátegui, “The World Crisis and the Peruvian Proletariat,” \textit{An Anthology}, 302, 303 [translation modified].

\textsuperscript{154} On the conditions of possibility of the visible and the invisible within Marx’s problematic, as well as his lapsuses, see Louis Althusser, \textit{Reading Capital}, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2006), 19 – 34.

\textsuperscript{155} This text serves as an excellent counterexample to the neat periodization of Mariátegui’s thought. Although first published during what Terán describes as Mariátegui’s national stage, “Two Conceptions of Life” is very much an internationalist text that diagnoses a prewar and postwar condition, so it could easily be included in what Terán characterizes as Mariátegui’s prior, cosmopolitan stage. Mariátegui then republished the text in 1930, right in the middle of his supposedly orthodox stage. As any reader of the text will quickly notice, its theses are anything but orthodox, and, as I will demonstrate below, many of the texts from the final years of Mariátegui’s life defy orthodoxy. As I discussed above, in place of a totalizing periodization of Mariátegui’s thought, I have opted to follow certain persistent themes and track how they develop and transform over time.
\end{footnotes}
prewar conservatives and revolutionaries alike. It therefore marks a rupture with the epistemological limits of Marx’s conjuncture and catalyzes a redistribution of the knowable: “Bolsheviks and fascists did not seem like the pre-war revolutionaries and conservatives. They lacked the old superstition of progress. […T]he war had shown humanity that events beyond the foresight of Science and contrary to the interests of Civilization could still occur.”156 The lesson of the war, in other words, is that history offers no guarantees and that historical development is not reducible to a linear progressivism of ever-increasing material wealth. On the contrary, capitalism’s wars destroy social wealth and represent the opposite of social progress. The imperative of the Bolsheviks when faced with these catastrophic conditions is to heroically intervene in the present rather than passively wait for a sign or guarantee that may never arrive.157

Mariátegui addresses the implications of this new, postwar conception of life for Marxism’s premises in an article from the “Defense of Marxism” series entitled “Marxist Determinism.” Denouncing the postwar social democrats for their reformist, prewar conception of life, Mariátegui attenuates his critical analysis of Marx’s positivism to emphasize the continuity between the author of Capital and the Russian Revolution:

Marxism, where it has shown itself to be revolutionary – that is, where it has been Marxist – has never obeyed a passive and rigid determinism. The reformists resisted revolution during the postwar agitation for the most rudimentary economic determinist reasons […] To the majority of its critics, the Russian Revolution appears, on the other hand, as a rationalist, romantic, anti-historical effort of utopian fanatics. All caliber of reformists primarily rebuked the revolutionaries’ tendency to force history, censuring the

156 Mariátegui, “Peru’s Principal Problem,” An Anthology, 140 [translation modified].
157 See Zizek’s discussion of Lenin’s lesson in Zizek, Revolution at the Gates, 8, 9.
tactics of the Third International’s parties as ‘Blanquist’ and ‘putschist.’ Marx could only conceive or propose realistic politics, and he therefore carried to extremes his demonstration that the processes of the capitalist economy leads to socialism to the extent that they are fully and energetically realized. But he always understood the spiritual and intellectual capacity of the proletariat to create a new order through class struggle as a necessary condition. […] The voluntarist character of socialism is, in truth, no less evident – even if less understood by its critics – than its determinist foundation.\textsuperscript{158}

From this extended passage it becomes clear that, for Mariátegui, the shift from Marxism to Marxism-Leninism does not fundamentally transform the method’s premises; it does not constitute a revolution at the level of method. But it does offer a kind of corrective, a change in emphasis, a historical recalibration of the compass. If Marx’s vision was limited by the progressivism of his conjuncture, if he carried out to quasi-positivist extremes the demonstration that capitalism produces the necessary conditions for a socialist alternative, the Bolsheviks stand against the opportunistic mobilization of Marxism’s economic premise and maintain that voluntarism, willful and conscious action, is just as important in a revolutionary situation as a consideration of the latter’s objective conditions. The Leninism of Marxism-Leninism, in other words, ensures the equality of the economic and political premises of the dialectical method and challenges any positivist or determinist tendencies that might legitimate a reformist project of waiting.

Mariátegui suggests that Lenin contributes to a further recalibration of the Marxist compass insofar as he reveals the historicity of the economic premise and calls for its modification in accordance with the new, imperialist stage of capitalism. The economic premise

\textsuperscript{158} Mariátegui, “Marxist Determinism,” \textit{An Anthology}, 209.
of Marxism, to reiterate, projects that the development of capitalism, including the perpetual accumulation, concentration, and centralization of capital and the socialization of labor, will create the conditions of possibility for a socialist alternative. In “Liberal Economy and Socialist Economy,” another “Defense of Marxism” essay, Mariátegui posits that “[t]he concentration of capital, the most important aspect of the Marxist forecast, has realized itself.” The new economic premise of Marxism-Leninism, which follows from this historical datum, is that “[c]apitalism no longer coincides with progress.” Mariátegui will go on to cite an important passage from Lenin’s famous book on imperialism:

‘[L]ike all monopoly,’ says Lenin, ‘this capitalist monopoly inevitably gives rise to a tendency of stagnation and decay. As monopoly prices become fixed, even temporarily, so the stimulus to technical and, consequently, to all progress, disappears to a certain extent, and to that extent, also, the economic possibility arises of deliberately retarding technical progress.’

The exhaustion of capitalism, its obstruction of social progress, is a premise of Marxism-Leninism rather than a concrete thesis limited to the Russian conjuncture because its reach is international and must inform any historical interpretation of contemporary society, any theoretical translation of the contemporary scene.

The first principle of the Peruvian Socialist Party accordingly maintains that “[t]he international character of the contemporary economy […] does not allow any country to escape

\[159\] Mariátegui, “La economía liberal y la economía socialista,” Defensa del Marxismo, 35.
\[160\] Ibid., 37.
\[161\] Ibid., 37, 38. The quotation of Lenin comes from the following source: V. I. Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (New York: International Publishers, 2008), 99 [original emphasis].
the transformations flowing from the current conditions of production.”\textsuperscript{162} The fourth principle continues: “Capitalism is in its imperialist stage. […] The practice of Marxist socialism in this period is that of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism-Leninism is the revolutionary method in the stage of imperialism and monopoly. The Peruvian Socialist Party takes it as its method of struggle.”\textsuperscript{163} This revised premise of the dialectical method emerges out of a definitive historical transformation of capitalism. It is a universal coordinate within the stage of capitalist imperialism that does not announce a predetermined route to socialism but rather guides Marxists-Leninists as they traverse the specificity of their particular terrain.

\textit{A Materialist Theory of Traveling Ideas}

Socialism is certainly not an Indo-American doctrine. […] And although socialism, like capitalism, may have been born in Europe, it is not specifically or particularly European. It is a worldwide movement from which none of the countries that move within the orbit of Western civilization escape. This civilization drives toward universality with the force and means that no other civilization possessed. Indo-America can and should have individuality and style in this world order, but not its own culture or fate that is unique. […] \textit{We certainly do not want socialism in Latin America to be a copy or imitation. It should be a heroic creation. We have to give life to Indo-American socialism with our own reality, in our own language.}

– Mariátegui\textsuperscript{164}

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\textsuperscript{162} Mariátegui, “Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party,” \textit{An Anthology}, 237. \\
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 238. \\
\textsuperscript{164} Mariátegui, “Anniversary and Balance Sheet,” \textit{An Anthology}, 129, 130 [translation modified, my emphasis].
\end{flushright}
One of the features of capitalist imperialism is the international exportation not only of commodities but also of capital. If, as the economic premise of Marxism holds, the forces of European capital contribute to capital’s own downfall, such that Europe is the site of Marx’s socialist theory and the modern socialist movement, then the international, albeit uneven, circulation of capital to all territories of the globe would likewise contribute to the internationalization of capital’s gravediggers. In an essay from *The Contemporary Scene*, Mariátegui demonstrates that he is acutely aware of this contradiction of imperialism: “Imported by European capital, the doctrine of Marx penetrates Asia. Socialism, which at first was a phenomenon of Western civilization, is currently extending its historical and geographic radius.”

Mariátegui expands upon this idea and offers a more nuanced account of the importation of theory in an essay that focuses on the Japanese conjuncture:

The substantive event in the history of modern Japan is the emergence or apparition of socialism, which, in the same way as capitalism in a different moment, does not occur in that country as the arbitrary importation of an exotic doctrine but rather as a natural expression, a logical stage of its own historical evolution. Socialism in Japan, as elsewhere, was born in the factories.

The *translatus* of socialism from Europe to Asia does not constitute the imposition of a foreign doctrine, as if socialism were “heterogeneous” or “misplaced” in relation to its new site. Nor

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166 Mariátegui, “East and West,” ‘*The Heroic and Creative Meaning of Socialism,*’ 41 [translation modified].
168 For the classical discussion of heterogeneity and Mariátegui, see Antonio Cornejo Polar, “*Indigenismo* and Heterogeneous Literatures,” 100 – 115. Roberto Schwarz argues that
does socialism’s appearance in Japan attest to the universal applicability of Western thought and political formations. On the contrary, from Mariátegui’s materialist conception of the circulation of theory and politics, it follows that Japanese socialism emerges organically from Japan’s own historical process, that socialism in Asia is the result not of arbitrary importation but of specific historical conditions (e.g. the presence of European capital and the factory’s centralization of production and socialization of labor).

Mariátegui formalizes these reflections into a materialist theory of traveling ideas in an article entitled “The National and the Exotic”:

No idea is an exotic idea if it bears fruits, if it acclimates itself. The propagation of an idea is not the fault or merit of its proponents; it is the fault or merit of history. It is not romantic to attempt to adapt Peru to a new reality. It is more romantic to want to deny that reality, accusing it of coinciding with a foreign reality.

It is important to emphasize that such a materialist conception of ideas and their circulation diverges greatly from subjectivist theories of cultural mixing that construe the instantiation of an

“misplaced ideas,” ideas that are transported to where they no longer represent the abstractions of that place, can become “in place” ideas when they are “reconstructed on the basis of local contradictions.” Roberto Schwarz, “Beware of Alien Ideologies,” Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture, ed. John Gledson (London: Verso, 1992), 39. Such a reconstructive practice, as described by Schwarz, resonates strongly with Mariátegui’s theoretical practice of translation. Where Schwarz diverges from Mariátegui, however, is in his quasi-Correjo Polarian analysis of the Brazilian writer Machado de Assis, for Schwarz applauds the writer’s practice of tarrying with the negative “disparity” of the local and the universal rather than developing a form of writing that could overcome such an opposition. See Roberto Schwarz, “‘Who can tell me that this character is not Brazil?,’” Misplaced Ideas, 104.

169 Aricó locates the “originality of Mariátegui” in “this lesson of Marxist immanentism,” in Mariátegui’s recognition that “[t]he necessity and the possibility of socialism find their raison d’être in the very dynamic of the process that makes them emerge as instances of it rather than as foreign impositions [injerto extraño].” José Aricó, “El marxismo en América Latina: Ideas para abordar de otro modo una vieja cuestión,” Socialismo, autoritarismo y democracia, ed. Fernando Calderón (Lima: IEP-CLACSO, 1989), 126.

idea in a new context as the result of an individual proponent’s selective incorporation and transformation of it. Although subjective intervention does contribute to the propagation of an idea in a given site, Mariátegui insists that historical forces play a major, even determining, role in an idea bearing fruit outside of its place of birth. The exotic idea is not the idea that comes from a different place but rather the idea that is at odds with the new site’s historical reality.

In the epigraph to this subsection of the chapter, Mariátegui applies his materialist conception of ideas and their circulation to the question of socialism in the Indo-American continent. Although perhaps born in Europe, Mariátegui maintains that socialism is not exclusively European and that it is not at odds with the historical reality of Indo-America. He then asserts that none of the countries within the orbit of Western civilization, which includes the countries of Indo-America, can escape the worldwide movement of socialism. After the above discussion of Lenin’s contributions to Marxism – the importance of political voluntarism and the international exhaustion of capitalism – this is not a surprising claim. The moment is ripe for global socialist change and only a romantic would try to avoid adapting Peru to this new reality. What follows this statement is a bit strange, however, for Mariátegui contends that Western civilization, rather than socialism, drives towards universality. This is strange principally

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171 This is largely how Rama theorizes transculturation. Consider, for example, how he depicts *indigenista* and *négritude* writers responding to the forces of modernization: “[W]e see the development of autonomous forces working to oppose the homogenizing domination of the dynamic cities and their foreign protectors. […] In areas that had seemed hopeless, destined to be erased by acculturation, there arose teams of researchers, artists, and writers to reclaim their place and oppose the indiscriminate submission that was demanded of them.” Rama, 45. Although with a different emphasis, Alberto Moreiras offers a helpful critique of transculturation’s engaged subjectivism that informs my own response to the conceptual paradigm. See Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 184 – 207.

172 As Mariátegui states in “The National and the Exotic,” “[c]ontemporary Peru moves within the orbit of Western civilization.” This passage will be discussed in context below. See Mariátegui, “Lo nacional y lo exótico,” *Peruanicemos*, 26.
because in other writings, as I have just shown, Mariátegui describes socialism’s appearance outside of Europe as a broadening of theory and politics beyond the constrictive designation of Western phenomena, as a deprovincialization of the Western rather than a Westernization of the world. It is for this reason that I would emphasize Mariátegui’s classification of socialism as a worldwide movement over his strange characterization of Western civilization’s future. If Western civilization drives towards universality, it is not a Western universality but rather a socialist universality that may originate in the West but is not particularly or specifically, which is to say exclusively, Western.

Mariátegui then makes an unapologetically internationalist argument meant to oppose discourses of exceptionalism and isolationism. Although Indo-America should preserve its individuality and style, Mariátegui insists that it cannot construct a unique, non-socialist fate. This position, as noted above, will become a major tenant of the Peruvian Socialist Party. Perhaps paraphrasing Lenin on proletarian internationalism, the party’s programmatic principles attest to “[t]he international character of the revolutionary proletarian movement. The Socialist Party adapts its practice to the country’s concrete circumstances, but […] these national circumstances are subordinated to the rhythm of world history.”173

Between the concrete and the universal, between national circumstances and the rhythm of world history, Mariátegui makes very infrequent references to a continental reality that would serve as the site for the heroic creation of Indo-American socialism. Given that the above

epigraph is extracted from a text that announces the second anniversary of *Amauta*, a journal that had a continental readership, it is unsurprising that Mariátegui interpolates a continental “we” to participate in socialism’s heroic actualization. In the introductory note of *Seven Interpretive Essays*, however, Mariátegui more characteristically states that he has “one avowed and resolute ambition: to assist in the creation of Peruvian socialism.”

How to transition from Peruvian socialism to Indo-American socialism is not something that Mariátegui explicitly addresses in his writings, likely because creating such a blueprint for continental revolution would lead to empty abstractions rather than concrete analysis. Although Mariátegui is of course not against all forms of continental thinking, he is, above all, an unrepentant internationalist who aims to account for, rather than obliterate or fetishize, historical and material differences.

For Mariátegui, to follow the rhythm of world history, to respond to the international character of the economy and the proletarian movement, is to contribute to the heroic creation of Peruvian socialism. Although part of an international movement, Mariátegui clarifies in the above epigraph that the creation of Peruvian socialism cannot copy or imitate the socialisms of other countries. Despite the absolute tone of this assertion, Mariátegui is not calling for a kind of radical creation *ex nihilo*, the construction of a purely Indo-American doctrine (whatever that would mean). Instead, he seeks to create, “from our reality,” a socialism “in our own language.” Mariátegui’s notion of heroic creation thus names the practice of theoretically and politically translating Peru’s contemporary scene to produce Peruvian socialism. In the second major section of this chapter, I will explore how Mariátegui practices theoretical translation as well as the implications of this practice for Peruvian socialism and the dialectical method.

174 Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays*, xxxiv [translation modified].
Mariátegui’s Practice of Theoretical Translation

All this work is but a contribution to Socialist criticism of the problems and history of Peru. There are many who think that I am tied to European culture and alien to the facts and issues of my country. Let my book defend me against this cheap and biased assumption.

- Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*\(^{175}\)

Mariátegui’s *Seven Interpretive Essays* represents the theorist’s most robust attempt to formulate socialist theory through the translation of Peru’s historical reality. Since an entire book could be dedicated to reconstructing Mariátegui’s complex analysis of Peru, what follows aims to telegraphically summarize only some of its most important propositions. This will set the groundwork for an evaluation of Mariátegui’s intervention not only in the debates of his time but also, more broadly, in the legacy of Marxist thought on two fundamental issues – historical development and the revolutionary subject of history.

Before discussing certain superstructural issues, specifically Peru’s educational, religious, geo-political, and literary contexts, Mariátegui’s *Seven Interpretive Essays* dedicates the first three chapters to the task of historicizing Peru’s socio-economic base. These essays cover the evolution of Peru’s economy while offering a materialist analysis of the so-called problem of the Indian and the problem of land.\(^{176}\) Mariátegui always begins his historical narrative of Peru’s economic evolution with the Incan Empire’s autocratic agrarian communism. Underscoring the disastrous material effects the Spanish Conquest and subsequent colonization had on this ancient mode of communal production, Mariátegui notes how the expropriation of indigenous land made possible the installment of a new, feudal economy of large landed estates or *latifundias*. He also

\(^{175}\) Ibid.

\(^{176}\) Ibid., 3 – 76.
notes that colonization introduced a cleavage between Spanish and indigenous peoples and cultures the effects of which could still be felt in the postwar period. Mariátegui thus remains faithful to an anti-positivist outlook throughout his analysis of Peruvian history and denies that colonialism represents a force of progress, positing instead that the Incan mode of production generated more social wealth than the feudal land-tenure system that replaced it.

The War of Independence marks another significant transition in Peru’s history, this time from a Spanish colony to a politically independent republic. Mariátegui emphasizes that Peru’s path towards the creation of republican institutions was rather dissimilar to the path taken by Europe. Unlike the bourgeois democratic revolutions of England or France, during which an alliance between the bourgeoisie and the peasantry led to the overthrow of feudalism and the foundation of a capitalist mode of production and a liberal political system, Mariátegui contends that Peru’s bourgeoisie aligned itself with the landed aristocracy in its struggle for independence from Spanish rule while excluding the peasantry and its claims from the revolutionary program. This meant that the economic and political hegemony of Peru’s landed elite was never truly challenged, a condition that Mariátegui terms gamonalismo. Despite the creation of republican institutions, in other words, the growth of capitalist industry was stunted after the revolution because feudal, rather than bourgeois, interests continued to dominate Peru’s economic and political reality. On this point, Mariátegui’s theoretical practice demonstrates an unwillingness to coagulate historical materialism into a philosophy of history. Even if there was

\[\text{\textsuperscript{177}}\text{Ibid.}, 35, 36.\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{178}}\text{Ibid.}, 45 – 48.\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{179}}\text{According to Mariátegui, }\textit{gamonalismo} \text{ is an economically conditioned hierarchy of different social positions that guarantees “the hegemony of the semi-feudal landed estate in the policy and mechanism of the government.” Ibid., 30.}\]
a historically determined correspondence between liberalism and capitalism in Europe, Mariátegui shows their relationship in Peru to be one of unevenness and disjuncture.\textsuperscript{180}

Since Peru’s bourgeoisie and landed elite were largely creole whereas the overwhelming majority of Peru’s peasants and workers were indigenous, Mariátegui maintains that Peru’s class divisions are historically overdetermined by racial and cultural differences, what he describes as “a dualism of race, language, and sentiment, born of the invasion and conquest of indigenous Peru by a foreign race that has not managed to merge with the Indian race, or eliminate it, or absorb it.”\textsuperscript{181} In Mariátegui’s socio-economic analysis of this phenomenon, the land-tenure system is responsible for social cleavage. From Mariátegui’s perspective, the problem of land can be summarized as the problem of the creole elite’s monopolization of the means of production whereas the so-called problem of the Indian consists of the continued feudal exploitation of the indigenous peasant majority. To solve either of these problems would imply challenging the land-tenure system at its core; it would amount to a revolution at the level of Peru’s material conditions. Mariátegui therefore rejects any appeal to (religious or secular) education, racial mixing (i.e. \textit{mestizaje}), or humanitarian ethics when envisioning the emancipation of Peru’s indigenous people. There can be no cultural, biological, or moral fix to structural exploitation.\textsuperscript{182}

\textsuperscript{181} Mariátegui, \textit{Seven Interpretive Essays}, 164.
\textsuperscript{182} Gareth Williams helpfully draws out the implications of Mariátegui’s rejection of \textit{mestizaje} (and \textit{avant la lettre} rejection of transculturation) in Gareth Williams, \textit{The Other Side of the Popular: Neoliberalism and Subalternity in Latin America} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 50, 51.
Despite feudal hegemony, Mariátegui argues that capitalist industry and techniques did arrive on the shores of Peru’s coast in response to the interests of foreign capital. These interests include the demand for guano and nitrate during the industrial revolution and American and British investment in the production of sugar and cotton in the twentieth century. Mariátegui thus characterizes the coast’s dependence on foreign markets as a form of economic colonialism, which hinders the development of national industry, constrains agricultural production to monoculture, and pauperizes the working class.\textsuperscript{183}

In Mariátegui’s Peru, the communal production and organization of the \textit{ayllu} or indigenous “community” represents a third economy that antagonistically coexists with Peru’s semi-feudalism and dependent capitalism. Drawing a historical parallel with the Russian \textit{mir} of Tsarist Russia, Mariátegui argues that colonial feudalism co-opted rather than eliminated the \textit{ayllu} by transforming it into a “cog in the administrative and fiscal machinery.”\textsuperscript{184} Once Peru obtained political independence, the bourgeoisie’s weakness before feudal hegemony only contributed to the further expropriation and absorption of communal land by the estates. This process “not only plunged [the Indian] deeper into servitude, but also destroyed the economic and legal institution that helped safeguard the spirit and substance of his ancient civilization.”\textsuperscript{185}

The destruction was not, however, total. According to Mariátegui, “hardy and stubborn habits of cooperation and solidarity still survive that are the empirical expression of a communist spirit.”\textsuperscript{186} He continues: “The ‘community’ is the instrument of this spirit. When expropriation and redistribution seem about to liquidate the ‘community,’ indigenous socialism always finds a way to reject, resist, or evade this incursion. Communal work and property are replaced by the

\textsuperscript{183} Mariátegui, \textit{Seven Interpretive Essays}, 68 – 70.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., 43. Mariátegui compares the \textit{ayllu} to the \textit{mir} here: Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 58.
cooperation of individuals.” Borrowing from Ernst Bloch and Raymond Williams, I would propose that Mariátegui conceives of the *ayllu*’s communist spirit as a *subjectively nonsynchronous or residual structure of feeling*, a mode of feeling and living certain values, traces of a pre-colonial past, such that they remain active and effective elements in the present. The habits of cooperation and solidarity, material expressions of this structure of feeling, could thus be understood as *objectively nonsynchronous or residual practices*. Either precariously or no longer tied to communal land and ancestral bonds, these practices of cooperation are “reconverted” or “hybridized,” such that the custom of communal labor is adapted into the practice of collective, rather than individual, contract. Although translated, indeed co-opted, for semi-feudal exploitation, Mariátegui maintains that these practices and feelings contradictorily reproduce an instance of the *nonsynchronous or residual social form* known as the *ayllu*.

*The Ayllu: Starting Point on the Peruvian Road to Socialism*

Whereas “national writers and legislators” condemned the *ayllu* as the residue of a primitive time at odds with the nation’s development and progress, Mariátegui, in agreement with leftist *indigenistas* like Valcárcel and Hildebrando Castro Pozo, suggests that the survival of

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187 Ibid.
the indigenous social form holds immense implications for Peru’s possible socialist future.\(^{190}\)

Consider the following excerpt from the Peruvian Socialist Party’s programmatic principles:

Socialism finds the same elements of a solution to the land question in the subsistence of communities, as it does in large agricultural enterprises. […] But this […] does not mean at all a romantic and anti-historical trend of reconstructing or resurrecting Inca socialism, which corresponded to historical conditions completely surpassed, and of which only the habits of cooperation and socialism of the indigenous peasants, as a favorable factor within a perfectly scientific technique of production, remains. Socialism presupposes capitalist technique and science, the capitalist stage. It cannot permit any setbacks in the acquisition of the achievements of modern civilization, but on the contrary it must methodically accelerate the maximal incorporation of these achievements into national life.\(^{191}\)

This passage takes a classically Marxist stance with regards to its claim that a socialist solution to the problem of land, or the socialization of land qua means of production, can be found latent within the concentrated and centralized production of large industry.\(^{192}\) It nevertheless diverges significantly from Marxist orthodoxy when it draws an analogy between the latent socialist potential of large industry and that of the *ayllu*. In response to skeptics, the passage declares that recognizing an indigenous social form in this way does not constitute a call to revive the pre-Hispanic past. Rather, it amounts to a material analysis of nonsynchronous indigenous culture in the present and of that culture’s possible future.
Indeed, just as the above passage holds that socialism will transformatively accelerate the achievements of capitalist industry, Mariátegui envisions the ayllu as enduring a socialist transformation of its own. In “The Problem of Race in Latin America,” a document Mariátegui submitted for discussion to the 1929 Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires, he posits that “[w]ith minimal effort, the community can become a cooperative. Awarding large estate lands to the communities is the solution to the agrarian problem in the highlands.”\(^{193}\) If Mariátegui’s theoretical translation of Peru’s historical reality produces this socialist theory of land redistribution, its ultimate conclusion calls for an economic translation of the ayllu into a cooperative. In an article entitled “Principles of National Agrarian Politics,” Mariátegui also theorizes a political translation of the indigenous social form, stating that “the ‘ayllu,’ cell of the Incan State[,...] still displays enough vitality to gradually become the cell of a modern socialist State.”\(^{194}\) Such a translation would convert a residual social form into an emergent one; the ayllu would be extracted from its nonsynchronicity so that it could become an economic and political force of Peru’s socialist future.\(^{195}\)

Although Mariátegui describes the transformation of the ayllu as a gradual transition, it is important to note that he draws a direct line between its present instantiation and its socialist future that does not pass through a traditional, bourgeois-democratic stage. To appreciate the polemical implications of this position, Mariátegui’s thought should be situated in relation to the ideas of two major figures of the Latin American left: Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, the leader of the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), and Victorio Codovilla, the head of the


\(^{194}\) Mariátegui, “Principios de la política agraria nacional,” *Peruanicemos*, 109, 110.

\(^{195}\) Bloch describes this process accordingly: “It is our task to extrapolate the elements of the nonsynchronous contradiction which are capable of antipathy and transformation, that is, those hostile to capitalism and homeless in it, and to refit them to function in a different context.” Bloch, “Nonsynchronism,” 36.
Although Mariátegui participated in APRA when it functioned as a broad united front against imperialism, he gravitated towards the Third International and distanced himself from APRA when it became a multi-class populist party with its own idiosyncratic interpretation of imperialism. In explicit disagreement with Lenin, Haya held that imperialism was the first, rather than the last, stage of capitalism in Latin America, so the party’s anti-imperialist agitation in no way sought to challenge capitalism but rather aimed to create the conditions necessary for a new stage of capitalist growth and industrialization. While claiming that this view of imperialism broke with Bolshevik dogma in order to attend to the historical specificity of Latin America, it nevertheless remained constricted by a different form of dogma, namely the dogma of a philosophy of history that views Europe’s economic stages of development (i.e. feudalism, capitalism, socialism) as universal, such that all countries must pass through and complete the same sequence in order to arrive at socialism.

Though not in agreement with Haya’s analysis of imperialism, Codovilla similarly argued that Latin American countries had to endure an anti-imperialist, bourgeois-democratic, and agrarian revolution before constructing a socialist alternative. Codovilla’s strictly continental interpretation of Latin America’s future was directly in line with the program of the Sixth

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196 A helpful overview of the main disagreements between Mariátegui, APRA, and the Third International can be found in Kohan, 116 – 128.  
197 These ideas are explicitly developed throughout Haya’s writings, but many of them are first expressed in Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, El antimperialismo y el APRA (Chile: Editorial Ercilla, 1981). For an in-depth theoretical and historical discussion of the intricacies and complications of Mariátegui’s relationship with APRA and Haya, see Carlos Franco, Del marxismo eurocéntrico al marxismo latinoamericano (Lima: Centro de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Participación, 1981), 80 – 108.  
198 Consider the following remark from Codovilla at the 1929 Conference in Buenos Aires: “It is indisputable that all tactics should be adapted to the particular conditions of every country. But is it the case that Peruvian conditions fundamentally differ from those of the other countries of
Congress of the Communist International (1928), which held that the revolutionary trajectory of all colonial, semi-colonial, and dependent countries would transpire in two such stages. As Robert J. C. Young notes in his excellent historical reconstruction of the Third International’s congresses, the Sixth Congress brought with it a change in perspective, for “independence was now seen as a preliminary stage in the path to socialism, rather than a means for its immediate achievement.” This shift in perspective no doubt represents as much a manipulation of Lenin’s famous “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions” as it signifies an attempt to distinguish the official policy of the rapidly Stalinized Third International from Trotsky’s theory

South America? Absolutely not! Peru is a semicolonial country, just like the others.” Codovilla as cited in Horacio Tarcus, *Mariátegui en la Argentina o las políticas culturales de Samuel Glusberg* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones El Cielo por Asalto, 2001), 70.

Here is the key passage from the Sixth Congress Program: “Colonial and semi-colonial countries (China, India, etc.) and dependent countries (Argentina, Brazil, etc.), have the rudiments of and in some cases a considerably developed industry-in the majority of cases inadequate for independent socialist construction-with feudal medieval relationships, or “Asiatic mode of production” relationships prevailing in their economies and in their political superstructures. In these the principal industrial, commercial and banking enterprises, the principal means of transport, the large landed estates (latifundia), plantations, etc., are concentrated in the hands of foreign imperialist groups. The principal task in such countries is, on the one hand, to fight against the feudal and pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, and to develop systematically the peasant agrarian revolution; on the other hand, to fight against foreign imperialism for national independence. As a rule, transition to the dictatorship of the proletariat in these countries will be possible only through a series of preparatory stages, as the outcome of a whole period of transformation of bourgeois-democratic revolution into socialist revolution, while in the majority of cases, successful socialist construction will be possible only if direct support is obtained from the countries in which the proletarian dictatorship is established.” The Program of the Communist International: Comintern Sixth Congress 1929, accessed September 3, 2015, [https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/6th-congress/index.htm](https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/6th-congress/index.htm).

of permanent revolution, the theory that a democratic revolution could grow into a socialist revolution in an uninterrupted or permanent process.\footnote{See V. I. Lenin, “Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions,” 144 – 151. See also Leon Trotsky, The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects (London: Socialist Resistance, 2007).}

Mariátegui engaged in a virtual debate with the Communist International on this issue when, too sick to attend the 1929 congress in Buenos Aires, he sent the Peruvian doctor Hugo Pesce and the Peruvian worker Julio Portocarrero as representatives and submitted for discussion “The Problem of Race in Latin America” and another essay entitled “Anti-Imperialist Point of View.”\footnote{The best text on this exchange remains Galindo’s La agonía de Mariátegui: La polémica con la Komintern.} Predictably, both of these texts diverge significantly from the Third International’s post-Six Congress position regarding revolution in colonial, semi-colonial, and dependent countries. But since Mariátegui had a copy of the Sixth Congress’s program in his library, it is likely that he was fully aware of the organization’s recent positional changes and may have even prepared the texts in order to defend his divergent perspective.\footnote{Vanden’s National Marxism in Latin America includes an extraordinary appendix that lists the books that formed Mariátegui’s library, including the program of the Sixth Congress. See Vanden, 131.}

Pesce’s section of “The Problem of Race in Latin America,” which he prepared in collaboration with Mariátegui, demonstrates, in fact, that the Peruvian comrades interpreted the implications of the Sixth Congress very differently, perhaps conveniently misreading its implications so as to bolster their own claims:

> The VI Congress of the Communist International has pointed once again to the possibility for economically rudimentary nations to directly initiate a collective economic organization without suffering the long evolution through which other nations have passed. We believe that, amongst the ‘backward’ populations, none like the indigenous
Incan population brings together such favorable conditions that primitive agrarian communism, alive in concrete structures and in a deep collectivist spirit, can transform itself, under the hegemony of the proletariat, into one of the most solid bases of the collectivist society advocated by Marxist communism.\textsuperscript{204}

This interpretation is not entirely inaccurate. The Sixth Congress program did indeed assert that certain countries could be “drawn into the current of socialist construction, and by skipping the further stage of development of capitalism, as a dominating system, obtain opportunities for rapid economic and cultural progress.”\textsuperscript{205} Yet the program also stipulated that skipping the more advanced stage of capitalist development would only be an option for those countries that had already successfully liberated themselves from the grip of imperialism and had aligned themselves with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{206} These conditions did not, of course, apply to 1920s Peru.

Pesce nonetheless ignored these qualifications while mobilizing the program’s main idea in order to defend Mariátegui’s reading of the \textit{ayllu} and its potential contribution to the direct achievement of Peruvian socialism.

How do Mariátegui and his comrades justify constructing a socialist alternative in a predominantly feudal country whose only capitalist industry is imperialistically controlled by

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\textsuperscript{204} Mariátegui, “El problema de las razas en la América Latina,” \textit{Ideología y política}, 68.
\textsuperscript{205} \textit{The Program of the Communist International: Comintern Sixth Congress 1929}, accessed September 3, 2015, \url{https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/6th-congress/index.htm}
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid. This idea is articulated even more explicitly in a document produced in response to the programmatic changes of the Sixth Congress entitled “Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies”: “[T]he alliance with the U.S.S.R. and with the revolutionary proletariat of the imperialist countries creates for the toiling masses of the people of China, India and all other colonial and semi-colonial countries the possibility of an independent, free, economic and cultural development, avoiding the stage of the \textit{domination of the capitalist system} or even the development of capitalist relations in general.” \textit{Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies}, accessed September 2, 2015, \url{http://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/archive/ColNatQ6.htm}.
foreign interest? If the *ayllu* plays a key role in making a socialist solution to Peru’s major problems possible, the enduring traces of Peru’s colonial history make such a solution necessary:

The precapitalist economy of Republican Peru, because of the absence of a strong bourgeoisie class and the national and international conditions that have caused the country’s slow progress on the capitalist road, cannot be liberated under a bourgeois regime subjugated to imperialist interests. It colludes with *gamonal* and clerical feudalism, and suffers from the defects and vestiges of colonial feudalism. The colonial fate of the country determines its process. The emancipation of the country’s economy is possible only by the action of the proletarian masses in solidarity with the global anti-imperialist struggle. Only proletarian action can stimulate and then perform the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution that the bourgeois regime is incapable of developing and delivering.  

For a traditional bourgeois-democratic revolution to take place, the bourgeoisie would have to assume a leadership role and challenge feudal hegemony, but Peru’s colonial history produced an incompetent and subservient bourgeoisie that failed to perform such a role in the past and would continue to do so in the future. For that reason, the programmatic principles of Mariátegui’s socialist party challenge the applicability of the two-stage model of revolution in Peru and maintain, on the contrary, that only the proletariat can perform the necessary tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in their direct march towards Peruvian socialism.

The above passage implicitly suggests, *pace* Haya and Codovilla, that the bourgeoisie would fail not only to challenge feudal hegemony at home but also the influence of imperial interests coming from abroad. This point is more explicitly developed in “Anti-Imperialist Point

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of View,” where Mariátegui argues that Peru’s bourgeoisie, still deluded by the myth of political sovereignty propagated during the War of Independence, ultimately seeks cooperation with foreign imperialism and perpetuates economic dependence. As Mariátegui puts it, the Peruvian bourgeoisie does not embody, as a class, “a sense of revolutionary nationalism that in other conditions would represent a factor of the anti-imperialist struggle[...] as in Asia in recent decades.”  

Clearly thinking of China’s revolutionary nationalist stance in the 1920s against Japanese imperialism, Mariátegui contends that within the Peruvian context the formation of such a nationalist unity is inhibited by a bourgeois internationalist class alliance.

In an early attempt to think the intersectionality of race and class, Mariátegui argues that this internationalist alliance among the bourgeoisie is overdetermined by Peru’s dualism, by the historic and still pervasive tensions between creole and indigenous peoples and cultures:

Over a year ago in our discussion with APRA leaders in which we rejected their desire to create a Latin American Kuomintang, and as part of a desire to avoid European imitations and to accommodate revolutionary action to a precise assessment of our own reality, we put forward the following thesis: ‘Collaboration with the bourgeoisie, and even many feudal elements, in the anti-imperialist struggle in China, can be explained on grounds of race and national civilization that do not exist for us. [...] In Peru, the white aristocrat and bourgeois despise popular and national elements. They are, above all, whites. The petit-bourgeois mestizo imitates this example. [...] The nationalist factor, for these objective reasons that none of you can escape, is not decisive or crucial in the anti-imperialist struggle in our context.’

Mariátegui, “Anti-Imperialist Point of View,” An Anthology, 266.

Ibid., 266, 267.
Given the nature of Peru’s divided social milieu, Mariátegui argues that there can be no alliance, as in China, between the national bourgeoisie and popular elements (i.e. the proletariat and the peasantry). He therefore subtracts Peruvian anti-imperialism from bourgeois-democratic nationalism and argues that “only socialist revolution can permanently and truly oppose the advance of imperialism.”

Although it constitutes solely a passing reference in the above passage, I want to underline Mariátegui’s allusion to “a desire to avoid European imitations and to accommodate revolutionary action to a precise assessment of our own reality.” This statement is actually immense in its implications and responds not only to the Third International and APRA but also to a long tradition of Marxist doxa surrounding the conceptualization of historical development. Kevin Anderson helpfully locates the earliest expressions of this doxa in Marx’s most canonical texts, from the Manifesto of the Communist Party to the first volume of Capital. In the former work, for example, Marx posits that “[t]he bourgeoisie […] draws all, even the most barbarian nations into civilization. […] It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production.” Marx’s estimation of capital’s universalizing drive presupposes what Anderson calls a “unilinear” notion of historical time and social progress, as though time could be subdivided into a set of necessary stages through which each nation must eventually pass. This notion of historical development suggests, moreover, that each nation could be located in time as either closer or further away from civilization and therefore either developmentally ahead or behind other nations. Along these lines, Marx asserts in Capital that all countries must

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210 Ibid., 269.
211 See Kevin Anderson, Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
213 Anderson, 237.
undergo the process of primitive accumulation (i.e. the expropriation of the peasantry) in order to arrive at the bourgeois mode of production. Although Marx allows for slight deviations from primitive accumulation’s “classic form,” exhibited, notably, by England, the eventual completion of the process is invariable.\textsuperscript{214} Marx accordingly writes that England shows to less developed countries the “image of its own future.”\textsuperscript{215}

APRA’s interpretation of imperialism and the Third International’s argument for a two-stage revolution both easily follow from this kind of thinking about historical development and presuppose, on some level, a notion of unilinear time. However, many contemporary readers of Marx have pointed out that the author of \textit{Capital} went on to revise his ideas about historical change and development later in life.\textsuperscript{216} In the 1875 French translation of \textit{Capital}, for instance, Marx restricted his analysis of primitive accumulation to Western Europe, implying that other areas of the world could go through a different process, that historical time could be multilinear rather than unilinear.\textsuperscript{217} In a draft of the famous letter to Vera Zasulich, Marx presents one such
alternative to Western Europe’s trajectory that would relieve Russia from enduring the process of primitive accumulation:

If Russia were isolated in the world, it would have to develop on its own account the economic conquests which Western Europe only acquired through a long series of evolutions from its primitive communities to the present situation. There would then be no doubt whatsoever, at least in my mind, that Russia’s communities are fated to perish with the development of Russian society. However, the situation of the Russian commune is absolutely different from that of the primitive communities in the West. [...] Russia exists in a modern historical context: it is contemporaneous with a higher culture, and it is linked to a world market in which capitalist production is predominant. [...] Thus, in appropriating the positive results of this mode of production, it is able to develop and transform the still archaic form of its rural commune, instead of destroying it.\(^{218}\)

Since Mariátegui could not have had access to this letter during his life, the similarities between his analysis of the indigenous community and Marx’s interpretation of the Russian commune are simply uncanny.\(^{219}\) Just as Mariátegui calls for Peru’s “maximal incorporation” of the “achievements” of Western capitalism, Marx suggests that Russia should “[appropriate] the positive results of this mode of production.” Yet both maintain that this process can take place without destroying nonsynchronous communal forms like the mir and the ayllu, without, in other words, imitating Western Europe’s historical trajectory and enduring the process of primitive accumulation.

\(^{218}\) Marx, “Drafts of a Reply (February/March 1881),” Late Marx and the Russian Road, 102, 103.

\(^{219}\) Michael Löwy alludes to this similarity between Mariátegui’s thinking on the ayllu and Marx’s exchange with Zasulich in Michael Löwy, “Marxism and Romanticism in the Work of José Carlos Mariátegui,” trans. Penelope Duggan, Latin American Perspectives Vol. 25, No. 4 (July 1998), 76 – 88. See also Kohan, 127.
Later in that same letter, Marx suggests, like Mariátegui, that a nonsynchronous social form can function as “the direct starting-point of the economic system towards which modern society is tending; [the commune] may open a new chapter that does not begin with its own suicide.”

Theorizing this new chapter of historical development revises Marx’s earlier hypotheses about time by accounting for a new, Russian road to communism. Mariátegui likewise parts with Marxist doxa in order to chart the Peruvian road to socialism, yet another chapter of multilinear historical development. By assessing the Peruvian conjuncture with a materialist conception, the philosophical coordinate of the Marxist compass guides Mariátegui down this alternative road to socialism. He insists that the Peruvian road has the ayllu as its material starting point and that the road’s path will inevitably diverge from Europe’s trajectory because the path is determined by Peru’s own historical conditions. This move in Mariátegui’s thinking, I would argue, exemplifies his theoretical practice of translating Peru’s historical reality into socialist criticism.

When asked in a questionnaire if the advent of socialism requires the historical completion of the liberal economic stage, Mariátegui offers an extraordinary response that summarizes his contribution to rethinking Marxism’s conceptualization of historical development from Peru:

The political advent of socialism does not presuppose the perfect or exact fulfillment of the liberal economic stage, according to a universal itinerary. I have already said elsewhere that it is very possible that the destiny of socialism in Peru will in part be to...
realize, depending on the historical rhythm that accompanies it, certain tasks that theoretically pertain to capitalism.\(^{221}\)

Since there is no universal itinerary, no philosophy of history or unilinear trajectory, only a dialectical and materialist analysis of a conjuncture’s historical conditions can determine how to proceed. Once Mariátegui charts the Peruvian road to socialism, he is left with one more theoretical task – finding the revolutionary subject who will travel it.

In Search of the Proletariat: Peasants, Workers, Masses, and Classes

The proletariat and the peasantry are inherently ambiguous concepts with a long and controversial history. The proletariat is classically defined as both an economic class and a political subject that will usher in a new, communist society, whereas the peasantry, a potential ally of the proletariat, is traditionally conceptualized as a (non-)class ultimately incapable of politically representing itself and therefore requiring representation from without. In *The German Ideology*, Marx famously posits that the proletariat is the *sine qua non* of the future social order:

> Only the proletarians of the present day, who are completely shut off from all self-activity, are in a position to achieve a complete and no longer restricted self-activity, which consists in the appropriation of a totality of productive forces and in the thus postulated development of a totality of capacities.\(^{222}\)

\(^{222}\) Marx, *The German Ideology*, 96.
Without property, without political representation, and without self-activity – indeed without any “particular quality” – the proletariat embodies a negative universality.\(^{223}\) It is precisely from this negative starting point that the proletariat is in a position to achieve, through its self-negation and the negation of all classes, a positive universality, the emergence of individuals free to collectively engage in complete self-activity and the unlimited expansion of the totality of their capacities.

Marx’s most well known discussion of the peasantry can be found in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. In this text, Marx posits that peasants are bound together as a class negatively by their opposition to other classes, but, unlike other classes, “the identity of their interests begets no unity, no national union, and no political organization.”\(^{224}\) Marx also argues that isolation and a petit-bourgeois attachment to land leaves the peasantry prone to reaction and to serving a charismatic leader like Napoleon. Although political figures as antithetical as Trotsky and Stalin would uncritically adopt these generalizations of the peasantry for their own concrete analyses,\(^{225}\) Marx signals the historically determinate and therefore conjuncturally limited nature of his analysis:

> The Bonaparte dynasty represents not the revolutionary, but the conservative peasant; not the peasant that strikes out beyond the condition of his social existence, the small holding, but rather the peasant who wants to consolidate it; not the country folk who in alliance want to overthrow the old order through their own energies linked up with the towns, but

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on the contrary those who, in stupefied bondage to this old order, want to see themselves with their small holding saved and favored by the ghost of the empire. It represents not the enlightenment but the superstition of the peasant; not his judgment, but his prejudice; not his future, but his past; not his modern Cevennes, but his modern Vendée.\textsuperscript{226}

Instead of a categorical denunciation of the peasantry as such, Marx contrasts the conservatism of the small-holding French peasants in 1799 to the potentially revolutionary peasants of the mid-1800s, whose interests are threatened by the bourgeoisie after Napoleon’s reign and therefore find “their natural ally and leader in the urban proletariat, whose task is the overthrow of the bourgeois order.”\textsuperscript{227}

The political premise of Marxism, as discussed above, entails recognizing the proletariat’s fundamental role in ushering in a classless society. Nonetheless, a careful reading of Mariátegui’s work reveals a profound ambivalence regarding the revolutionary subject’s definition and its function in Peru’s future socialist movement. At times the proletariat, as it is classically defined, appears as the clear leader of the socialist revolution, at times the peasantry assumes a more central role, and at times these categories are blurred, undermined, creatively translated. This vacillation ultimately stems from a (productive) tension in Mariátegui’s work between Marxist concepts and Peru’s historical reality, between the abstractly universal notion of the proletariat and the historical particularity of Peru’s material conditions. According to the statistics Mariátegui provides in “The Problem of Race in Latin America,” four-fifths of the population is indigenous and “[t]he Indian, in 90 percent of the cases, is not a proletarian but a

\textsuperscript{226} Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire,” \textit{Marx-Engels Reader}, 609.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 612 [original emphasis].
It would seem, in other words, that Mariátegui calls for a proletarian revolution without a well-formed proletariat, that he has discovered the Peruvian road to socialism while still searching for the revolutionary subject that will travel it. These conditions bring Mariátegui face to face with the limits of the very Marxist premises that serve as the methodological foundation of his theoretical practice of translation. Rather than abandoning Marxism at this point, however, Mariátegui’s various attempts to experiment with Marxist concepts signal a theoretical aspiration to overcome Marxism’s limits with Marxism. Mariátegui’s theoretical practice of translating Peru’s historical reality thus also entails a reformulation of the dialectical method’s premises, a translation, as it were, of the very method of theoretical translation.

This attempt at reformulation is far from systematic. It could be characterized, on the contrary, as sporadic, vacillating, and ambivalent. This is, of course, what all truly experimental thinking looks like, and, in Mariátegui’s case, it becomes evident as early as 1924 in an essay entitled “The City and the Countryside.” The essay’s main argument uncritically adopts the most dismissive notions of the peasantry as presented in Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

The countryside loves tradition too much. It is conservative and superstitious. […] German nationalism, like Italian fascism, supplies itself with men of the provinces, of the countryside. The communist revolution accordingly has not yet penetrated deeply into the agrarian strata of Russia. The peasants sustain the revolution because they owe the possession of their land to it, but the communist doctrine is still unintelligible for their

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228 Mariátegui, “The Problem of Race in Latin America,” *An Anthology*, 308, 316. According to Nicola Miller, there was no national census taken in Peru from 1876 to 1940 and some debate surrounded the issue of what percentage of the population could be considered indigenous versus mestizo. However, based on an estimate from 1920 deemed reliable by contemporary historians, it seems as though Mariátegui’s statistics may have been fairly accurate. See Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London: Verso, 1999), 159, 160.
mentality and irreconcilable with their greed. The Soviets have to give their radicalism to the backward rural consciousness in doses.\textsuperscript{229}

Just as in Marx’s analysis, Mariátegui reveals the peasantry to be traditional and superstitious, prone to reaction, and willing to serve an enigmatic leader. While Mariátegui admits that there are exceptions to this tendency, such as in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, he goes on to state categorically that “the revolutionary spirit always resides in the city. […] The peasant and the artisan have the ambition to acquire a small individual property. While the city educates man for collectivism, the countryside stimulates his individualism.”\textsuperscript{230}

The article nevertheless concludes with a hesitant fluctuation. Mariátegui posits that the stereotypical division between the revolutionary city and the reactionary countryside is ultimately too simplistic, that the city and the countryside actually represent two “mentalities” or “spirits” and that in an ideal future this division would be resolved in a higher unity.\textsuperscript{231} Mariátegui’s subsequent writings would of course offer a very different analysis of the indigenous peasants of Peru, highlighting their practical socialism and collectivism; however, the subtle wavering in this early article between the categorical and the conjunctural, between the political centrality of the urban environment and the potential contribution of the rural countryside, reappears again and again in Mariátegui’s writings when the topic of discussion centers around the revolutionary subject of Peruvian socialism.\textsuperscript{232}

This same vacillation can be found in the “The Problem of Race in Latin America.” Although Mariátegui and Pesce both theorize the radical potential of the ayllu and its role in

\textsuperscript{229} Mariátegui, “La urbe y el campo,” \textit{El alma matinal}, 55.
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{232} This kind of repetitive vacillation is another issue that can easily become illegible once a stark periodization is imposed on Mariátegui’s writings. For my strategic alternative to periodization, see my discussion of Terán’s reading of Mariátegui in the footnotes above.
charting a Peruvian road to socialism in this essay, Mariátegui pairs his more experimental hypotheses on historical development with a rather traditional appraisal of the influx of capitalist industry in Peru. Along with proletarianizing the indigenous peasantry, Mariátegui holds that capitalist industry engenders a shift from agrarian stasis to urban dynamism, it heightens social contradictions, and it paves the way for the emergence of socialist ideology:

Spanish feudalism superimposed itself over Indigenous agrarianism, although it did in part respect its community structures. But this very adaptation creates a static order, an economic system whose factors of stagnation were the best guarantee of Indigenous servitude. Capitalist industry breaks this equilibrium, breaks this stagnation by creating new forces and new relations of production. The proletariat gradually grows at the expense of artisanship and servitude. The nation’s economic and social evolution enters into an era of activity and contradictions that, on an ideological level, causes the emergence and development of socialist thought. […] Would it be possible to outline the plan or the intentions of a socialist state based on the demands for the emancipation of the Indigenous masses without the material elements that create modern industry or, if you like, capitalism? The dynamism of this economy, of this regime, which makes all these relationships unstable and sets classes and ideologies in opposition, is undoubtedly what makes possible the Indigenous resurrection.233

Mention of the ayllu’s practical socialism, which, in Mariátegui’s estimation just a few pages later, is alive and well in 1920s Peru, is conspicuously absent in this passage. Instead, the reader is presented with the lifeless stagnation of indigenous servitude. While resurrection from this fatal condition is possible, its condition of possibility comes from outside indigenous culture,

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from the capitalist industry that sets in motion a series of processes which contribute to the emancipation of the peasantry from feudal exploitation.

Mariátegui will go on to consider how the proletarianization of the indigenous peasantry in urban settings facilitates an encounter between indigenous workers and their creole and mestizo counterparts:

The language barrier stands between the Indian peasant masses and the white or mestizo nuclei of revolutionary workers [obreros]. But, through Indian propagandists, the socialist doctrine, because of the nature of the demands that are generated, will readily take root among the Indigenous masses. […]n the city, in the environment of the revolutionary worker [el ambiente obrero revolucionario], Indians have already begun to assimilate the revolutionary idea, to appropriate it, to understand its value as an instrument for the emancipation of their race. They are oppressed by the same class that exploits the worker [el obrero] in the factory, in whom they discover a class brother.\(^{234}\)

In an urban setting, racial and linguistic differences are said to give way to revolutionary workers solidarity. According to Mariátegui, indigenous, mestizo, and creole obreros unite on the basis of their shared condition of exploitation and their equal ascription to the revolutionary idea of socialism. This encounter, facilitated by modern industry and indigenous proletarianization, represents an opportunity for the idea of socialism to spread to the indigenous peasant masses in the sierra insofar as a dual translation occurs. There is first the theoretical translation that must take place, the creation of a Peruvian form of socialism that speaks the language of the indigenous masses by basing itself on their demands and the representation of their interests (i.e. the problem of land and indigenous servitude). Yet there must also occur a linguistic translation

\(^{234}\) Ibid., 315 [translation modified].
of this theoretical translation, a literal speaking of the socialist idea in the indigenous languages of Quechua and Aymara. The radical indigenous workers are capable of performing this second form of translation and they consequently contribute to resolving the missed encounter between the white and mestizo workers and the indigenous peasants.\textsuperscript{235} The urban proletarian class is thus depicted in a very conventional manner as the theoretical and political vanguard of socialism while the rural peasant masses are confined to their usual role as the proletariat’s ally.

Yet these orthodox distinctions blur when Mariátegui addresses the ambiguous class identities of Peru’s miners, agricultural workers, and day laborers. Although Mariátegui states that “[i]n Peru, the organization and education of the mining proletariat is, together with that of the agricultural proletariat, one of the most pressing issues,” his concrete description of these sectors of labor reveals a far more complicated picture of class belonging.\textsuperscript{236} For example, the workers of the agricultural estates, despite their use of modern machinery, are ambiguously located between proletarians and serfs, since “[e]state owners retain their feudal spirit and practice it in how they treat their workers.”\textsuperscript{237} Mariátegui similarly reports that indigenous miners, notwithstanding their involvement in wage labor, “are still largely peasants” because they often return to their small plots of land.\textsuperscript{238} Describing miners and laborers in the cities, Mariátegui moreover asserts that “[w]orkers [obreros] from an Indigenous milieu often return temporarily or permanently to their communities. Their language skills allow them to carry out an effective mission as instructors of their racial and class brothers. Indian peasants will only

\textsuperscript{235} For an extended discussion of the notion of the missed encounter, see the introduction and the second chapter of this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{236} Mariátegui, “The Problem of Race in Latin America,” 324.

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 319.

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., 324, 325.
understand individuals who speak their own language." Indigenous obreros once again encounter their “class brothers”; however, in this passage, the class brothers of the indigenous obreros are not the white and mestizo workers but the indigenous peasantry. Obrero, a category generally reserved for the urban working class, thus comes to signify a broader social condition, a conceptually impure fusion of various classes. Throughout “The Problem of Race in Latin America,” as these examples accumulate, a tension builds between the rigid use of certain concepts of class and the fluidity and conjunctural nature of class belonging with respect to that segment of the indigenous population that finds itself migrating between the coast and the sierra, between wage labor and serfdom, and ultimately between Marxist categories. Mariátegui’s theoretical practice responds to this condition of in-betweeness by recreating or translating the abstract term obrero so that it can take on an amplified but also more concrete meaning that attends to Peru’s historical reality.

Such theoretical tensions become palpable again if the Peruvian Socialist Party’s programmatic principles are read alongside the meeting notes that document the party’s prehistory. Before the party was founded, two meetings were held to discuss its strategy and goals. In the notes of the second meeting, known as the Barranco meeting, which Mariátegui attended, it states that “[a]ccording to the current conditions in Peru, the Committee will establish a socialist party, based on the organized masses of workers [obreros] and peasants.”

The passage’s reference to Peru’s specificity is perhaps a subtle and implicit response to the seemingly paradoxical idea of organizing a mass socialist party without a mass proletarian population. In 1920s Peru, since the process of proletarianization was still incipient, the socialist party had to be composed of workers and peasants. What is most striking about this formulation,

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239 Ibid., 324 [translation modified].
240 Mariátegui, “The Herradura Beach Meeting,” An Anthology, 339.
however, is what it does not say. The question of proletarian hegemony and leadership, so clearly articulated in the party’s programmatic principles, is left completely unaddressed and the workers and peasants appear, without qualification, as equal members of the party’s revolutionary organized base.²⁴¹

It is important to note that Mariátegui’s more orthodox statements almost invariably distinguish between the indigenous peasant masses and the proletarian class that organizes and represents the former’s demands. In an essay from the “Defense of Marxism” series, during a polemic with what Mariátegui terms “humanitarian socialism,” the Peruvian Marxist offers some general reflections on these categories that are pertinent to this discussion:

We Marxists do not believe that the job of creating a new social order, superior to the capitalist order, falls to an amorphous mass of oppressed pariahs guided by evangelical preachers of goodness. […] The proletariat only enters history politically, as a social class, at the moment it discovers its mission to build a superior social order with elements gathered by human effort, whether moral or amoral, just or unjust. And it has not gained this ability miraculously. It has won it by situating itself solidly on the terrain of the economy, of production.²⁴²

For Mariátegui, the revolutionary subject is not a formless herd of reactive and altruistic reformers led by ethical priests but rather a politically organized social class beyond good and evil that steers a mass movement prepared to heroically and violently affirm its creative task of

²⁴¹ Consider the ninth and final principle of the Peruvian Socialist Party: “The Peruvian Socialist party is the vanguard of the proletariat, the political force that assumes the task of guiding and leading the struggle for the realization of its class ideals.” Mariátegui, “Programmatic Principles of the Socialist Party,” An Anthology, 240.
ushering in a new social order. Mariátegui accordingly critiques “the idealization of the masses,” asserting that “this mass of people is not the modern proletariat, and its generic demands are not revolutionary and socialist.”

Although these general reflections on the distinction between masses and classes coincide with Mariátegui’s more conventional statements about the revolutionary subject of Peruvian socialism, there are some significant and experimental moments in his oeuvre during which the distinction is blurred and even subverted. As mentioned above, the notes from the Barranco meeting, rather than privileging the proletarian class over the peasant masses, simply refer to “the organized masses of workers [obreros] and peasants” without assigning priority to either term. Mariátegui goes one step further in an article entitled “Indigenism and Socialism” when he equates, rather than distinguishes, the masses and the working class:

No one who looks at the content and essence of things can be surprised by the confluence or alloy between ‘indigenismo’ and socialism. Socialism structures and defines the

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243 My Nietzschean reformulation of Mariátegui’s passage aims to draw out Mariátegui’s clear allusions to the German philosopher in order to draw his own distinction between revolutionary socialism and humanitarian socialism. As I will discuss in the third chapter of this dissertation, which focuses on Frantz Fanon, Nietzschean thought and dialectical thought generally present very different and even antagonistic conceptualizations of historical change, with the former focusing on nihilistic destruction and affirmative creation over the latter’s more translational perspective of negation and preservation. Mariátegui’s call in the opening epigraph of this chapter to heroically create socialism in a different language stages this tension between different philosophical perspectives. But, unlike in Fanon’s writings, Mariátegui’s work shows ultimately very few signs of Nietzsche’s influence, particularly regarding his understanding of historical change. In one of his articles from the “Defense of Marxism” series, in fact, Mariátegui distances himself from what he calls “Nietzschean ethics” insofar as they embody “the sublimated morality of capitalism.” He also states that “Marxist materialism […] encompasses all of our era’s possibilities for moral, spiritual, and philosophical ascent.” In other words, if Mariátegui appropriates Nietzschean themes to expose the limits of non-violent reformism (i.e. humanitarian socialism), he also seeks to contrast the exhausted bourgeois morality of Nietzschean thought to the material and spiritual rejuvenation of the Marxist project. See Mariátegui, “Materialist Idealism,” An Anthology, 225.

demands of the masses, of the working class [la clase trabajadora]. And in Peru, the masses – the working class – are four-fifths indigenous. Our socialism would therefore not be Peruvian if it did not support indigenous demands.²⁴⁵

It is striking how la clase trabajadora follows “the masses,” as if Mariátegui were stretching and molding his terms through metonymy and repetition so that they can fit the contours of Peru’s historical reality. By making the masses synonymous with the working class, Mariátegui conceives of a predominantly indigenous revolutionary subject of socialism that extends to proletarians and peasants.

Along with redefining concepts like obrero and la clase trabajadora, Mariátegui creates new terms in order to express a similar vision of amplified revolutionary subjectivity. Consider, for example, Mariátegui’s discussion of the readership of Labor, a newspaper meant to supplement Amauta:

Labor represents the interests and aspirations of the entire producing class [la clase productora]: industrial and transport workers [obreros], agricultural workers [trabajadores], miners, indigenous communities, teachers, employees, etc. The journal is not the organ of a category or a group but rather a class organ. Intellectuals and students, adherents without prejudice or reservation to the proletariat, have their platform here. The movement of teacher-workers [trabajadores de la enseñanza] for the renovation of schools has this paper for its demands. The defense of employee laws, of the rights and interests of this category of workers [trabajadores], has equal claim to the columns of Labor.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Mariátegui, “‘Labor’ continúa,” Ideología y política, 255.
The notion of a *clase productora* absolutely transgresses the standard demarcations of Marxist thought. While placing intellectual and managerial labor alongside manual labor, the concept also ties together, within a single class, the traditional urban *obrero*, ambiguous worker identities (e.g. miners, agricultural *trabajadores*), and the peasants of the indigenous communities.

Mariátegui also remarkably asserts that intellectuals and students, still traditionally defined as petit-bourgeois and therefore excluded from the producing class, can read *Labor* as their own newspaper insofar as they align themselves unreservedly with the *proletariat*. Another metonymic chain is established that leads from the producing class to the proletariat, such that the classic name for the universal revolutionary subject of history encompasses, rather than represents or strategically aligns itself with, the peasantry. For *Labor* to be a class organ, Mariátegui asserts, it must represent the entire class in its new, expanded conceptualization, without excluding any category of workers or sub-set of producers.

Does this theorization of a new revolutionary subject, insofar as it eliminates the firm distinctions between the indigenous peasantry and the urban working class, sabotage Mariátegui’s commitment to theorizing the specificity of Peru’s historical reality? Does it cloud the reader’s focus on the persistence of feudalism and indigenous servitude, which directly affects Peru’s peasant majority but only indirectly affects its industrial proletarians? During a debate with the Peruvian philosopher and historian Luis Alberto Sánchez, Mariátegui attempts to address this complicated issue, to navigate its tensions, by pluralizing the working class. He translates the concept of *la clase trabajadora* into *las clases trabajadoras* in order to link the *obrero* and the peasant without erasing the very different conditions of exploitation that they face:
The vindication that we argue for is that of work [*trabajo*]. It is that of the working classes [*las clases trabajadoras*], without distinction between coast and highlands, Indian or cholo. If in the debate – that is in the theory – we distinguish the problem of the Indian, it is because in practice it is also differentiated in the facts. The urban worker [*obrero*] is a proletarian; the Indian peasant is still a serf. The vindication of the first – for whom in Europe the struggle has not stopped – represents the fight against the bourgeoisie, whereas the vindication of the second represents the fight against feudalism, whose expressions of solidarity are two: latifundium and servitude. If we do not recognize the priority of this problem, yes it would be right, then, to accuse us of not being tied to Peruvian reality.  

Given that Peru’s economy is predominantly semi-feudal, that the landed estates are economically and politically hegemonic, and that the country’s population is still composed primarily of indigenous peasants, Mariátegui prioritizes the overthrow of the land-tenure system over other struggles. However, despite the practical and theoretical distinctions between the obrero-proletarian and the peasant-serf upon which this priority is established, Mariátegui articulates a notion of work, of working classes without distinctions, that once again challenges the traditional roles of the classes involved. Neither a mere support of revolutionary struggle nor a (non-)class in need of representation, the indigenous peasant appears once again as an equal component of Peruvian socialism’s revolutionary subject.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx argues that the bourgeoisie, by improving the instruments of production and facilitating communication, “draws all, even the most barbarian nations, into civilization. The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it

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batters down all Chinese walls.” Mariátegui turns to this thesis in his response to a questionnaire on the character of Peruvian society in order to describe how the transportation industry, by enhancing communication and movement between the city and the countryside, breaks down a similar wall between the coast and the sierra:

As has been the case so far, the urban, industrial proletariat, that of the transportation sector, etc., has to realize its obligations of solidarity with the peasantry of the hacienda. This is the way it has happened so far, penetrating in spite of all the walls. The wall will be easier to penetrate than it has been, since automotive traffic opens a means of contact between the hacienda and the city. And has the proletariat of the haciendas not struggled to achieve its economic demands many times before? Is it not enough to remember the strikes of Chicama, which are among the most important manifestations of class struggle in Peru, to be convinced that the peasant proletariat [el proletariado campesino] has, if not class orientation, previously engaged in combat?

This is a remarkable passage because it begins with a rather orthodox allusion to one of Marx’s more problematic theses, which Mariátegui’s own theorization of the ayllu ultimately subverts, only to offer a very unorthodox characterization of the producing class of the hacienda. Secluded from the industrial proletariat, Mariátegui describes these laborers as peasants, but, insofar as they struggle to achieve their economic demands, he refers to them as the proletariat of the hacienda. Within the traditional understanding of the hacienda as a feudal formation, of course, this formulation, the proletariat of the hacienda, constitutes a kind of catachresis; however, the idea is precisely to break with conventional definitions, to reformulate traditional notions in the theoretical translation of Peruvian historical reality. The passage closes by

introducing the concept of the peasant proletariat, a subject that may not have class-consciousness but nonetheless acts as an agent of class combat. The proletariat, rather than a descriptive, sociological category, functions once more as the name for a revolutionary subject that participates in the class struggle within a specific historical conjuncture.

*El obrero, la(s) clase(s) trabajadora(s), la clase productora, el proletariado campesino* – together these neologisms and redefined terms represent an unsystematic but insistent experimental practice of translation that holds immense implications for the status of Marxism’s *translatus* from Europe to Peru. When Marxism travels through space and time, there is necessarily a gap between its abstractly universal concepts, which are produced out of a particular context, and its new context, its new historical and material site or destination.

Mariátegui faces may such gaps in his writings, most notable among them being the gap between the concept of the proletariat and Peru’s almost un-proletarian historical reality. This gap puts in crisis the theoretical practice of Marxism, but it is not an irreducible gap, demarcating an unmovable limit. On the contrary, it is precisely the gap that *sets in motion* the process of concrete universality, the movement whereby a universal form, rather than merely subsuming all difference and obliterating the particular content (abstract universalism), incorporates particularity in such a way that the very frame of universality is simultaneously burst asunder and reconstituted.\(^{250}\)

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\(^{250}\) Neil Larsen identifies another gap considered in Mariátegui’s writings, the gap between the nation as form, which travels over from Europe, and the content of Peru, which does not (yet) fit this form. A discussion of Mariátegui’s thinking on the nation is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is worth noting that Larsen likewise sees the dialectic of concrete universality at work in Mariátegui’s response to this gap. See Neil Larsen, “The ‘Hybrid’ Fallacy, or, Culture and the Question of Historical Necessity,” *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative and Nation in the Americas* (London: Verso, 2001), 83 – 96.
While this movement of concrete universality transforms the particular content by investing it with new meaning (e.g. the theoretical ascription of “proletariat” to indigenous producers), it also triggers the reinvention of the universal concept itself. Mariátegui mobilizes the method of Marxism to theoretically translate Peru’s historical reality into Peruvian socialism, and this theoretical practice of translation, as discussed in the first subsection of this chapter, intervenes in or transforms its source-text. The lesson of concrete universality, however, is that the source-text, while undergoing this transformation, can also transform the very method of translation.251 Each neologism or redefined term, as concretizations of the abstractly universal concept “proletariat,” represents a translation of Marxism, an instance of a fundamental reworking of the political premise upon which the dialectical method rests.252 This, I would argue, is the only way to truly understand what is at stake when it is said of Mariátegui that he translated Marxism by attending to Peruvian reality. The concepts of Mariátegui’s ‘theory’ were transformed by the very raw material that Mariátegui sought to mold through theoretical practice.

251 Slavoj Zizek, during his discussion of Mao’s contribution to rethinking the notion of the proletariat in light of the Chinese peasantry, succinctly describes the implications of this theoretical maneuver: “The theoretical and political consequences of this shift [toward the peasantry] are properly shattering: they imply no less than a thorough reworking of Marx’s Hegelian notion of the proletarian position as the position of ‘substanceless subjectivity.’” Slavoj Zizek, “Mao Tse-Tung, the Marxist Lord of Misrule,” On Practice and Contradiction, 4.

252 As Aricó argues in an interview focusing on Mariátegui, when examining a concrete conjuncture, “the universality of the [working] class” is not an abstract given but rather “appears as a possible point of arrival [una propuesta de llegada].” Aricó continues: “We can understand the universality of the class by admitting that it is a collective universal, a universal that is absolutely differentiated into a multiplicity of social forms that will continue mutating.” The social forms of Peru’s particular historical conjuncture come together in Mariátegui’s work to give the universal class its concrete instantiation, but the universal class will take on different instantiations at different times and in different places. See José Aricó, “La cuestión nacional, el socialismo y Mariátegui,” Páginas No. 127: Mariátegui: invitación a pensar y construir el Perú (June 1994), 65.
Chapter Two
José María Arguedas

Introduction: “Zones of Confluence”

The Desencuentro

In 1931, a year after the death of José Carlos Mariátegui, a young José María Arguedas enrolled as a student at the University of San Marcos in Lima, Peru. Mariátegui’s socialist party had already been converted into the Peruvian Communist Party, a translation of a translation of the Leninist vanguard party form that resulted in a political organization obedient to the mandates of the Stalinist Third International. The Peruvian poet Marco Martos recalls that it was at this early moment of formation, for both the political party and the student of San Marcos, that,

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\(^{253}\) For an introduction to the national and international debates that took place just before and shortly after Mariátegui’s death, which led to the Peruvian Socialist Party’s conversion into the Peruvian Communist Party, see José Aricó, ed., *Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano* (Mexico: Cuadernos de Pasado y Presente, 1978).
Arguedas signed up as a militant. One fine day a group of comuneros arrived that were scissor dancers and Arguedas got ‘lost’ with them, forgetting that he had a meeting with the party cell. The leader of the group confronted him a few days later and said: ‘We will have the right to happiness once we have taken power.’ The sensitive type, Arguedas resigned from the party.254

Martos’s anecdote describes Arguedas as caught in the middle of a desencuentro or missed encounter that would haunt his reflections, literary, anthropological, and political, for the rest of his life.255 On one side there was a political party that aimed to liberate Peru’s indigenous masses from conditions of servitude. On the other side there was a popular Andean cultural practice connected to indigenous cosmology. The party sought control, of the State but also of its members, by espousing an ethic of sacrifice in the present for the promise of a better, happier tomorrow.256 The scissor dancers, on the other hand, led Arguedas to lose control, to lose

256 This ethic is a major trope of more orthodox Leftist formations. It’s most famous Latin American exponent was perhaps Che Guevara, who characteristically gave the following warning in “On Socialism and Man in Cuba”: “We know that sacrifices lie ahead. […] Each and every one of us readily pays his or her quota of sacrifice, conscious of being rewarded with the satisfaction of fulfilling a duty, conscious of advancing with everyone toward the new man and woman glimpsed on the horizon.” Che Guevara, “Socialism and Man in Cuba,” Che Guevara...
himself in the present and forget his obligations. Both the political party and the cultural practice were unstable hybrid forms, to some extent already contaminated by the other, yet their encounter was one of non-correspondence or dislocation.\textsuperscript{257} Pulling him in two opposing directions, the \textit{desencuentro} forced Arguedas to choose sides.

The militant’s automatic prioritization of the party meeting over the meeting of the scissor dancers and his dismissal and trivialization of the latter are signs of the abyss that separated Peru’s vanguard leadership from the popular masses and Marxist socialism from indigenous beliefs and customs. As discussed in the previous chapter, Mariátegui’s theoretical practice of translation attempted to bridge these divides by foregrounding the central role of Peru’s indigenous peasant majority and the communal social form known as the \textit{ayllu} in the construction of Peruvian socialism. These aspects of Mariátegui’s project did not, however, survive the communist political organization that became the afterlife of the socialist original. The party leaders imitated rather than critically adapted Marxist orthodoxy of the period and therefore returned the indigenous peasantry and its socio-cultural formations to the subservient position of mere support to the modern industrial factory’s urban proletariat vanguard.\textsuperscript{258}


\textsuperscript{257} If the Peruvian Communist Party is a translation of Mariátegui’s translation of a European political form, Martin Lienhard shows how the scissor dancers both channel the \textit{Wamanis}, the mountains \textit{qua} divinities of indigenous cosmology, and parody the Spanish invaders. Neither the political form nor the cultural practice, in other words, can lay claim to an essentialized indigenous or European purity. See Martin Lienhard, \textit{Cultura popular andina y forma novellesca (Zorros y danzantes en la última novela de Arguedas)} (Lima: Tarea/Latinoamericana editores, 1981), 137.

\textsuperscript{258} Jorge del Prado’s essay on Mariátegui, included in the aforementioned anthology edited by Aricó, is an excellent example of this kind of simple imitation of Soviet Marxist dogma, which effectively erases Mariátegui’s critical legacy in the name of its continuation. See Jorge del Prado, “Mariátegui, Marxista-Leninista: Fundador del Partido Comunista Peruano,” \textit{Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano}, 71 – 92.
The underestimation of indigenous peoples and the demeaning attitude towards their cultures was what propelled Arguedas to abandon official party politics. But it did not lead him to abandon politics *tout court*. Instead, he dedicated much of his time and energy to diagnosing the disastrous effects of the *desencuentro* between Marxist socialism and indigenous beliefs and customs while at the same time attempting to define alternatives to such divisions. It is my contention, in fact, that Arguedas was more radical than Mariátegui on this point. Although taking indigenous culture seriously within socialist thought could already be considered revolutionary for its time, the greatest limitation of Mariátegui’s project was that it held a one-dimensional perspective on indigenous ideas and concepts, viewing them as solely the raw material for a Marxist theoretical practice of translation and not as elements of an alternative system of thought in its own right. As I will demonstrate below, Arguedas exhibited a different approach throughout his life. He recognized that indigenous culture contains its own conceptual framework and that it can contribute, just like Marxist socialism, to better understanding and ultimately transforming what Mariátegui had termed “the contemporary scene.” Although Mariátegui had some familiarity with indigenous customs and history, Arguedas’s personal relationship with Quechua language and culture, as well as his anthropological work, allowed him to appreciate indigenous concepts in a more intimate but also more rigorous light. For these reasons, Arguedas’s response to the *desencuentro* surpassed the one-dimensionality of his predecessor and aimed to construct a new relationship between Marxist and indigenous beliefs and practices that would be more reciprocal in nature.

*Literary Style: Translation, Particularity, Universality*
Arguedas’s reflections on his own literary style and use of language provide some particularly vivid formulations for thinking about what this reciprocal dynamic between different cultures and belief systems might look like. Consider, for example, the following passage from Arguedas’s 1968 acceptance speech of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega Prize, included as the preface to his posthumously published novel *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* (1971):

I attempted to transform into written language what I was as an individual: a strong living link, capable of being universalized [*capaz de universalizarse*], between the great, walled-in nation and the generous, humane side of the oppressors. The link was able to universalize and extend itself, proving to be a concrete and active example. The encircling wall could have and should have been destroyed; the copious streams from the two nations could have and should have been united. […] I am not an acculturated man; I am a Peruvian who, like a cheerful demon, proudly speaks in Christian and in Indian, in Spanish and in Quechua.259

Evoking the “dualism of race, language, and sentiment” that Mariátegui describes in *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1928), Arguedas contends that he translates himself into written language insofar as the style of his writing, like Arguedas as an individual, links indigenous culture and the humane (i.e. leftist) side of the oppressors’ culture.260 He then denies that the encircling wall dividing these two realms is fixed or permanent and announces a project

259 José María Arguedas, *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*, trans. Frances Horning Barraclough (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 269 [translation modified]. For the passage in its original Spanish, see José María Arguedas, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 2011), 11, 12. Note that in the translated version of the novel, this speech is included as an epilogue rather than a preface to the body of the narrative.

that would destroy the dividing structure perpetuating missed encounters by universalizing the living link that he and his literary style embody. In this way, Arguedas conceives of universality not as something opposed to particularity but rather as something intimately tied to it, as something, more precisely, that emerges from the proliferation of translational links between particulars.

The above passage very much echoes Arguedas’s in-depth discussion of his literary style in “The Novel and the Problem of Literary Expression in Peru” (1950). One subsection in particular, entitled “The Struggle for a Style: The Regional and the Universal,” offers an important overview of how Arguedas struggled to aesthetically translate the world into the written word with the added difficulty of writing about the Andean region in Spanish after having lived and learned about it in Quechua. He first tried to “disarrange” Spanish by introducing Quechua’s syntax, rhythm, and lexicon into the former’s semiotic system, thereby creating a fictional hybrid language, a literary invention meant to reflect a cultural condition of bilingualism. He experimented with this method in his early stories and in his first novel, *Yawar Fiesta* (1941). Starting with his second novel, *Deep Rivers* (1958), Arguedas altered his technique by endeavoring “a Spanish translation of the Indians’ dialogues,” which meant that the dialogues between Quechua speakers would be translated into grammatically correct Spanish rather than written in a fictional language and neologisms and grammatical mistakes would be reserved for the moments when Quechua speakers struggled to express themselves in Spanish or vice versa. This new technique abandoned the fictional hybrid language of prior works but continued to weave Quechua words, phrases, and even entire passages into the Spanish narrative.

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262 Ibid., xx.
Not unlike during his 1968 acceptance speech, Arguedas alludes to a kind of universality emerging from an experimental literary style of translation that links particular cultures:

To realize oneself, to translate oneself, to transform a seemingly alien language into a legitimate and diaphanous torrent, to communicate to the almost foreign language the stuff of which our spirit is made: that is the hard, the difficult question. The universality of this rare balance of content and form, a balance achieved after nights of intense labor, is a thing that will come as a function of the human perfection attained in the course of such a strange effort. […] But if language, so charged with strange essences, lets one see the depth of the human heart, if it transmits to us the history of its passage over the earth, the universality may be a long time coming but nevertheless it will come, as we all know that man owes his preeminence and his dominion to the fact that he is one and unique.\textsuperscript{263}

In this complicated passage, Arguedas states that he aims to achieve self-expression by successfully translating regional particularity – “the stuff of which our spirit is made” – into written Spanish. Such a literary style, for Arguedas, would accurately communicate the living link between cultures that he embodies as an individual. If, by virtue of achieving expression in Spanish, the primarily indigenous culture of the Andean region undergoes a transformation, Arguedas holds that Spanish language must experience a transformation of its own so that it can become “a legitimate and diaphanous torrent” for the region’s expression. This dual transformation, which enables the translated expression of the particular, opens onto the universal. More specifically, Arguedas contends that the singular universality of humanity, the axiom that humankind “is one and unique,” can be grasped through the adequate expression of a regional culture in a seemingly alien language. Universality, then, not only emerges from the

\textsuperscript{263} Ibid., xviii [my emphasis].
proliferation of translational links between particulars but also reveals itself in every instantiation of such a translational link.

It is tempting to read Arguedas’s reference in the above passage to a “rare balance” between content and form as mirroring, if not outright reproducing, the limitation of Mariátegui’s theoretical practice. Spanish, in this case, would be the form that molds the raw material of Andean, which is to say predominantly indigenous, content. Arguedas’s full acknowledgement of the rich expressive capacities of Quechua nevertheless unsettles such interpretations. This is not to say, of course, that Arguedas assigns Spanish and Quechua equal roles in his writing. The very fact that he is writing at all privileges Spanish over the orality of Quechua. Yet, unlike Mariátegui, indigenous culture for Arguedas is more than raw material to be worked on or remolded by a European language or system of thought. In Arguedas’s narratives, indigenous culture contributes to both the content and the form; it is as much a part of Arguedas’s style and conceptual apparatus as it is an object of literary representation.

Despite tapping into the universal through the regional-particular, Arguedas contends that his translational literary style does not entail abstraction or generalization. In the same article on literary expression in Peru, Arguedas writes: “I aspired to and sought a universality that would not disfigure, would not diminish the human nature and terrain I attempted to portray, that would not yield one iota to the external and apparent beauty of the words.” Although the words used for his literary style stem primarily from a language alien to the experience being narrated, Arguedas indicates in this passage that his aesthetic translation seeks to avoid the erasure of

264 For Arguedas’s take on the expressive capacities of Quechua, see, for example, José María Arguedas, “Canto Kecha,” Obra antropológica completa tomo 1 (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 2014), 154 – 157.
difference and refuses to sacrifice difference to the achievement of universality. His aim, on the contrary, is to find a style of writing that would express, at the same time, the universality of humanity’s oneness and the difference that makes up the stuff of “our spirit.”

While the above texts are fundamental for both canonical and contemporary readings of Arguedas’s literary works, his readers almost invariably ignore the author’s emphasis on what he terms “the problem of universality.” This chapter, on the other hand, argues that the problem of universality is at the center of Arguedas’s writings, that Arguedas is, among other things, a dedicated theoretician of the universal. The chapter asserts, moreover, that it is impossible to understand what is at stake in Arguedas’s staging and restaging of the divisions and translations between Marxist socialism and indigenous culture without attending to his ideas on universality.

As my reading of the above passages already anticipates, one of Arguedas’s clearest attempts to define an alternative to the desencuentro can be found in his conception of a universality that emerges, without the erasure of difference, from a translational linking of divided particulars.

266 Ibid., xvii, xviii. Those who interpret Arguedas’s literary oeuvre as exemplary of narrative transculturation, for example, as well as subalternist critiques of this reading, typically limit their discussions to the mixing of particular cultures and the excluded remainder that this mixing produces. Whether transculturation is a triumphant counter-hegemonic response to modernization or a response to modernization that is itself caught within the logic of national developmentalism, this focus on the national-particular tends to inhibit a rigorous account of Arguedas’s internationalism and his theorization of universality. For a canonical discussion of Arguedas as a transculturator, see Angel Rama, Writing Across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America, trans. David Frye (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). For the subalternist critique of this approach, see, for example, Alberto Moreiras, “The End of Magic Realism: José María Arguedas’s Passionate Signifier,” The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 184 – 207.

267 Antonio Cornejo Polar and William Rowe both acknowledge this aspect of Arguedas’s project, but their discussions of it are unfortunately scattered and remain, for the most part, intuitive and associational. Their shared interest in Arguedas and universality may stem from a collective conversation that touched on the topic between Cornejo Polar, Rowe, Alberto Escobar, and Martin Lienhard and moderated by Sybila Arguedas. See Sybila Arguedas, ed., Vigencia y universalidad de José María Arguedas (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1984).
Two Principles, Multiple Universalities

If Arguedas’s theorization of the universal is oftentimes ignored, he has likewise not been sufficiently recognized, especially in the United States, as a writer profoundly impacted by and committed to Marxist socialism. It could be said, in fact, that most contemporary literary criticism on Arguedas reproduces the missed encounter staged in his novels insofar as discussions of his representation of indigenous culture are so rarely paired with adequate accounts of his literary and theoretical reflections on Marxism, communism, and socialism. This distorts and de-politicizes Arguedas’s project and makes virtually illegible two fundamental aspects of his writings – the antagonism of the missed encounter and the revolutionary possibility of reciprocal translation. Once distorted and de-politicized, Arguedas’s oeuvre is easily attacked for its supposedly static, culturalist narratives. My focus on missed encounters and reciprocal translation

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268 Even Irina Feldman’s engaging new work focusing specifically on Arguedas’s political philosophy dedicates only a few pages to a discussion of the author’s Marxism. See Irina Feldman, Rethinking Community: The Political Philosophy of José María Arguedas (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 110 – 114. In Peru, particularly in non-academic circles, there have been some salutary efforts to link Arguedas to the revolutionary tradition of the country, including most notably to the legacies of Mariátegui and Tupac Amaru. See, for example, the “Órgano Virtual de Prensa y Comunicaciones del Movimiento José María Arguedas” – with its slogan “¡Todas las Sangres por el Socialismo!” – here: http://movjma.blogspot.com

269 An instructive example of this line of criticism can be found in Neil Larsen’s essay “Indigenism, Cultural Nationalism, and Universality,” in which Larsen states that a “major weakness” of Arguedas’s work is “the persistent tendency to trade the epic and political perspectives that partially foreground [his] narratives for generally static cultural and ethnographic tableaux.” This critique would only be accurate if, instead of describing Arguedas’s writings, it were directed at Arguedas’s readers, who, like Larsen himself in this instance, tend to subtract Arguedas’s politics from his ruminations on culture. One of Arguedas’s basic premises, which I follow in my own reading of him, is that politics and culture are inextricable, that cultural practices always hold within them political stakes and that political forms are always culturally inflected. For Larsen’s reading of Arguedas qua culturalist, see Neil Larsen, “Indigenism, Cultural Nationalism, and Universality,” Reading North by South: On Latin American Literature, Culture, and Politics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 137 – 138.
translations is thus a deliberate attempt to correct this misperception, to re-politicize Arguedas, and to reintroduce Marxist socialism to discussions of his body of work.

Arguedas’s assessment during the 1968 acceptance speech of the “two principles” that equally inspired his work “from the beginning” is germane. Reflecting on his days as a university student, Arguedas describes his discovery of the first principle:

In my early youth I was full of great rebelliousness and great impatience and I was eager to fight, to do something. The two nations from which I originated were in conflict; to me the universe seemed like a sea rough with high curling waves of confusion, of promises, and of a beauty more demanding than dazzling. It was by reading Mariátegui and later Lenin that I found a permanent order in things; socialist theory channeled not only my whole future but also whatever energy there was in me, giving it a direction and making it flow even stronger by the very fact of channeling it. How far my understanding of socialism went I really do not know. But it did not kill the magic in me. I never sought to become a politician, nor did I think I was capable of practicing party discipline; but it was the socialist ideology and my being close to socialist movements that provided direction and permanence, a clear destination for the energy I felt being unleashed during my youth.

After reading Lenin and Mariátegui, Arguedas found in socialist theory a worldview, a view that gave order to the confusing universe surrounding him. Unlike the political militant that confronted him during his youth, however, Arguedas, like a cheerful demon, proudly affirms both socialist theory and magic, both struggle and happiness, both change and tradition. Whereas the party’s discipline sought to control Arguedas’s youthful energy while marginalizing

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271 Ibid., 269, 270.
indigenous culture with an ethic of present sacrifice and future happiness, Arguedas describes socialist theory and practice in the above passage as channeling that very same energy, not to mollify it but to intensify it, not to sacrifice it to the future but to lend it to the future’s actualization, not to kill the magic of the world but to coexist with and perhaps even learn from it.

Arguedas appropriately describes the second principle that inspired his work as “always [considering] Peru to be an infinite source of creativity.”272 He then lists a number of important people, cultural practices, and natural entities that flow from this source, including the “hummingbirds who rise up to the sun to drink in its fire and to flame over all the flowers of the world.”273 What is of note in these closing lines of Arguedas’s speech is less his insistence on the exceptionality of Peru’s creativity and more his subtle reference to the universality that flows from it. The hummingbirds of the Andes do not drink from the sun merely to pollinate the flowers of their region but rather “to flame over all the flowers of the world.” With this powerful image, Arguedas hints at the idea that Peru, and especially its predominantly indigenous Andean region, represents a site from which things are created that are universal in scope.

These passages are of fundamental importance for understanding Arguedas’s writings, and they hold important consequences for the above discussion of both the desencuentro and universality. While the desencuentro consists of a fissure between divided particulars, Arguedas suggests in the aforementioned passages, as well as at other moments throughout his oeuvre, that each side of the desencuentro contains within it certain notions and values that have a universal reach. This is not an extraordinary claim regarding Marxist socialism, which has always been thought of, or at least has always thought of itself, as a form of knowledge containing certain universal concepts. Arguedas’s acknowledgement, on the other hand, that indigenous Andean

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272 Ibid., 270.
273 Ibid.
culture likewise operates at the level of the universal challenges the standard, Eurocentric account of the indigenous as always confined to the particular.\textsuperscript{274} While he may refer to a singular universality that can be accessed through the translational linking of divided particular cultures, he also repeatedly implies that universality is actually multiple and that translation must take place not only between divided particulars but also between what I am calling, following Judith Butler, “competing universalities.”\textsuperscript{275}

In her famous exchange with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek, Butler describes the idea of competing universalities accordingly:

[I]f the ‘particular’ is actually studied in its particularity, it may be that a certain competing version of universality is intrinsic to the particular movement itself. It may be that feminism, for instance, maintains a view of universality that implies forms of sexual egalitarianism which figure women within a new conception of universalization. Or it may be that struggles for racial equality have within them from the start a conception of universal enfranchisement that is inextricable from a strong conception of multicultural community. […]T]he question for such movements will [be…] one of establishing 

*practices of translation* among competing notions of universality which, despite any

\textsuperscript{274} In his reading of the textual debate between Arguedas and Julio Cortázar, Larsen states that both figures ironically “take as given a kind of conceptual or allegorical map in which Europe automatically has assigned to it the category of the universal, while Latin America occupies the site of the particular.” I hope to demonstrate, on the contrary, that much of Arguedas’s writings work actively against this kind of Eurocentric thinking. See Neil Larsen, “Cortázar and Postmodernity: New Interpretive Liabilities,” *Julio Cortázar: New Readings*, ed. Carlos Alonso (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1998), 72.

apparent logical incompatibility, may nevertheless belong to an overlapping set of social and political aims.276

This chapter will consider a multiplicity of particular discourses (e.g. statist, juridical, theological) dramatized in Arguedas’s works that hold within them a certain conception of universality as such. But the chapter’s focus will be on how Marxist socialism and indigenous culture articulate competing notions of universality that, through practices of translation, may nevertheless discover or construct “an overlapping set of social and political aims,” or, in Arguedas’s words, “narrow zones of confluence.”277

If these zones of confluence represent the sites of overlap between competing universalities then Arguedas’s notion of a singular universality of human oneness starts to look like the sign of a kind of meta-universality or the name for the negotiated unity with difference of multiple universalities. To elucidate such a complicated idea, it will be helpful to track the various moments in Arguedas’s oeuvre when he alludes to this universal notion of man as one and unique, a kind of secularized translation of the monotheistic belief in one and only one God. Indeed, the religious resonance of this universal is made explicit in Arguedas’s “Letter to ‘Young Students’ regarding the Death of Javier Heraud,” which was written as an elegy to the Peruvian

276 Ibid., 166, 167 [original emphasis].
277 Arguedas, “The Novel,” xxi. This focus on translational practices that negotiate between competing universalities, on narrow zones of confluence that bridge different worldviews, is meant to challenge the typically one-sided reading of Arguedas as a writer who stages the irreducible heterogeneity between European and indigenous cultures. This interpretation, made popular by Antonio Cornejo Polar, fails to recognize how Arguedas, when faced with such divisions, sought to find common ground that did not necessarily erase difference whereas interpretations typically discount such a procedure as an impossible contradiction. I will consider this issue extensively below, particularly during my reading of El Sexto. For Cornejo Polar’s most concise discussion of heterogeneity and Arguedas, see Antonio Cornejo Polar, “Indigenismo and Heterogeneous Literatures: Their Double Sociocultural Statute,” The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader, eds. Ana del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 100 – 115.
poet and militant murdered in 1963 while fighting for Peru’s National Liberation Army.

According to Arguedas, “[w]e all sing to life and desire it, but some of us want life to have the
same incentives for everyone[,]…] to be illuminated by the joy of work and by the truly purifying
feeling that aspires to universal fraternity, just as it is said that God made man.”

In this passage, Arguedas introduces time into what had seemed like an axiomatic, and
therefore timeless, truth about the fraternal unity of humanity. Universal fraternity, in other
words, functions as a presupposition only after the aspiration for it has been actualized.

Arguedas clarifies this point earlier in the same letter when he defines justice as “the open path
that leads to economic and social equality and that corresponds to the equality of human nature;
this is the path of rebellion, of persecution, and of death.” Arguedas thus envisions a historical,
socialist form of universal equality that, once actualized through a violent struggle of negation,
would “correspond” to a secularized-religious or humanist form of universal equality grounded
in the notion of human nature. In this way, the letter constructs a zone of confluence between the
competing notions of universality as axiom and universality as aspiration.

Arguedas further complicates the idea of universal fraternity during an intervention at the
1965 First Meeting of Peruvian Narrators held in Arequipa, Peru. At one point, Arguedas asserts
that, in his novels,

[t]he creed upheld by the author maintains that aggressive individualism will not promote
the good of Humanity but rather will destroy it. It is human fraternity that will make not

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278 José María Arguedas, “Carta a los ‘jóvenes estudiantes’ a propóstio de la muerte de Javier
Heraud,” Obra antropológica completa tomo 6 (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 2014), 519 [my
translation].

279 Ibid., 518 [my translation].
only Peru’s greatness possible, but also the greatness of Humanity. And human fraternity is what the Indians practice with an order, system, and tradition. For Arguedas, universal fraternity is not only a socialist aspiration but also an actually existing indigenous practice with its own order, system, and tradition. The universal is not merely possible but concretely actual, and its (re)production in a particular site makes possible its universalization, what I am tempted to call the universalization of a universal axiom. In other words, an indigenous universal, in its actuality, occupies a zone of confluence with a potential socialist universal, and the former’s universalization would constitute the realization of the latter and therefore the latter’s correspondence with the humanist universal that man is one and unique. In this complex web of ideas, Arguedas constructs a constellation of competing universalities by performing a kind of translational task of negotiation that illuminates an overlapping set of social and political aims between Marxist socialism, humanism, and indigenous culture without erasing their differences. The idea of a singular universality of humanity, then, points to a multiplicity of competing variations on this idea that nevertheless, through translation, come together in a zone of confluence. Upon concluding this introduction, I will turn to Arguedas’s literary production to explore how similar practices of translation and negotiation between competing universalities might signal a beyond to the desencuentro at the center of Arguedas’s concerns.

Literature as Supplement

Arguedas’s proximity to socialist theory and politics begs the question of why he chose to dedicate so much of his time to writing literature. Although he makes use of various genres to address the issues discussed above, including anthropological studies, political statements, literary criticism, novels, and poetry, Arguedas does consider the specificity of literature and its particular relationship to socialist theory. If, for Arguedas, writing about the Andean world requires lived experience in the region, it equally requires socialist theory. As he declares “with complete jubilance” during the aforementioned meeting of Peruvian writers,

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281 The question of how much time Marxism has for literature has a long and complicated history, starting with a letter the young Marx wrote to his father, which describes writing poetry as “only an accompaniment” to the study of philosophy. Karl Marx, “Letter from Marx to his Father in Trier,” Marx/Engels Collected Works Vol. I (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 11. Although no doubt hyperbolic, given literature’s clear influence on the thought of Marx and Engels, Pierre Macherey suggests that the German philosophers “were well informed of new and important literary developments, but they never made anything of this knowledge, because they never had the time. They had to expend all their theoretical energies on the scientific elaboration of the principles of the struggle of the proletariat. The world of literature is related to these preoccupations, but only indirectly; thus it had to be provisionally sacrificed.” Pierre Macherey, A Theory of Literary Production (New York: Routledge, 2006), 117, 118. After his radicalization in Europe, Mariátegui, like Macherey, emphasizes a lack of time when explaining why his literary aspirations remained unrealized. In a letter to Enrique Espinoza, the pseudonym of Argentine writer Samuel Glusberg, Mariátegui states the following: “Articles and essays are not all that I do; I have another project, a Peruvian novel, [and] I just need some time and tranquility in order to complete it.” Mariátegui as cited in Alberto Tauro, “Nota preliminar,” La novela y la vida: Siegried y el profesor canella (Lima: Biblioteca Amauta, 1987), 16. As one might expect, Mariátegui never found the time to write this novel, although he did write prolifically up until his death. It should be noted, nevertheless, that there are significant cases within the history of Marxism that do not exemplify this general trend of privileging theory over literature, including, of course, Arguedas. But, because such cases are exceptions to the general trend, it is important to address, as I attempt to do here, their rethinking of the relationship between literature and theory, particularly regarding how literature can intervene in theoretical practice. For many examples of literature influencing the ideas of the founders of proletarian communism, which would set the foundation for more nuanced account of their relationship to literature, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, On Literature and Art: A Selection of Writings (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974).

282 The importance of lived experience for writing about the Andes is a recurring theme in Arguedas’s work. John Landreau offers an excellent overview of this topic in John Landreau, “Translation, Autobiography, and Quechua Knowledge,” José María Arguedas:
I would be nothing without *Amauta*, the journal directed by Mariátegui. I would also be nothing without the social doctrines circulated after World War I. *Amauta*, the theoretical possibility that man himself can make all social injustices disappear from the world, this is what makes our writing possible and what gives us a theoretical tool, an indispensible light with which to judge these experiences and to make of them good material for literature.\textsuperscript{283}

For Arguedas, *Amauta* presents a theoretical possibility, a universalist vision of justice, that illuminates experience such that it can be judged and translated into literature. The aesthetic mode of translating the contemporary scene, in other words, is enhanced by the practice of a prior, theoretical mode of translation. Arguedas maintains, moreover, that the willful voluntarism sustaining this vision of justice, the faith in “man himself” as the agent of his emancipation, provides meaning to the practice of writing as a form of political intervention. Arguedas, like Mariátegui, thus conceives of aesthetic practices that expressively translate reality as capable of transforming the very reality they translate.\textsuperscript{284}

However, like his view on the relationship between Marxist socialism and indigenous culture, Arguedas argues that the relationship between theory and literature should not be unilateral, with theory always in the position of augmenting literature and not vice versa, but

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{283} Arguedas, “Primer encuentro,” 179 [my translation].}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{284} I discuss this aspect of Mariátegui’s work in the subsection of Chapter 1 entitled “Modes of Translation: Aesthetic, Prophetic, Theoretical.”}
rather reciprocal. For Arguedas, more precisely, literature functions as a supplement to theory that enhances the latter’s claims while exposing its limits:285

There [in Amauta] we discovered much of the interior world of the Indian, the mestizo, and even the señores, to whom we will not deny the possibility of also contributing to the construction of a great Peru. In the stories that I have written, I describe the gamonal not as a beast or cruel instrument but rather as a human being that has both defects and virtues, just like the Indian. This capacity to judge with lucidity is nonetheless the work of, let’s say, individual labor [trabajo propio], since at times the aforementioned doctrines fanaticize people. In Amauta, I read descriptions of the gamonales that were as monstrously deformed as the descriptions of the Indian. I therefore thought that it was necessary to describe the Andean world, not only the Indian, just as I knew it, from life and not from conscious observation, since conscious observation is posterior, it comes after getting to know the world through life.286

Like Mariátegui, Arguedas links literature to the intuitive expression of experience rather than its rational explanation, but it is precisely this openness to experience, according to Arguedas, that enables literature to function as a kind of corrective for theory.287 In this example, Amauta’s theoretical obsession with the primary contradiction between Indians and gamonales does not allow it to recognize that both aspects of this contradiction are themselves contradictory and

285 Jacques Derrida’s most extensive discussion of this dual logic of supplementarity can be found in Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
286 Arguedas, “Primer encuentro,” 179 [my translation].
287 Once again, I discuss this aspect of Mariátegui’s project in the subsection of the first chapter entitled “Modes of Translation: Aesthetic, Prophetic, Theoretical.”
cannot be fanatically labeled as wholly positive or wholly negative. Arguedas’s more robust literary translation of reality, an individual labor grounded in experience, thus reveals these internal contradictions rather than obfuscates them.

If socialist theory’s light can illuminate reality, it can also be blinding. This is the primary lesson to be gleaned from Arguedas’s attempt to think the supplementarity of literature, and it will be a lesson staged again and again in his literary translations of the desencuentro between Marxist socialism and indigenous culture. In what follows, I will turn to Arguedas’s first novel, *Yawar Fiesta* (1941), to investigate how the text portrays this desencuentro and reveals what provokes and sustains it. I will then turn to Arguedas’s most understudied novel, *El Sexto* (1961), and explore its significant contribution to imagining alternatives to the desencuentro by exploring the kinds of translation practices that might rearticulate, rather than perpetually divide, the relationship between Marxist socialism and indigenous culture.

**Yawar Fiesta: The Desencuentro of Turupukllay**

*Translation Between Primitive Accumulation and the Commons*

*Yawar Fiesta* takes place in 1930s Puquio, an Andean town in the rural province of Lucanas split between the town center, where the mistis (whites) and mestizos live and rule, and the outlying Indian town (pueblo indio), composed of four communities or ayllus. While the novel opens with a highly symbolic description of Puquio’s landscape that connects the

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288 This view of contradiction was one of Mao’s fundamental contributions to theorizing dialectics. See Mao Tse-Tung, “On Contradiction,” *Mao On Practice and Contradiction* (New York: Verso, 2007), 67 – 102. To my knowledge, Arguedas does not mention Mao explicitly in his writings, but he may have been familiar with Mao’s theoretical and political practice and its relevance for thinking the Peruvian conjuncture, given that he does state that “[t]he Chinese Revolution is an event of gigantic dimension insofar as it demonstrates what a people with a very ancient culture is capable of accomplishing, balancing ancient history and modern technology.” See, José Mariá Arguedas, “El indigenismo en el Perú,” *Obra antropológica completa, tomo 7*, 82 [my translation].
distribution of space to the distribution of socio-economic power, the narrative’s focus quickly
shifts to the prehistory of these distributions, for the reader is confronted with a vivid literary
account of the historical dispossession of the Indians from the puna, the mountainous land of the
sierra, through processes of primitive accumulation.\textsuperscript{289} The enclosure of the commons
eventually leads to the establishment of what Mariátegui famously theorized as gamonalismo or
the economic and political hegemony of semi-feudal landed estates.\textsuperscript{290} However, before the
mistis occupied the land, the narrator states that “[t]he great, high, bleak region was for everyone.
None of the pastures were enclosed by stone walls or barbed wire. The big puna had no
owner.”\textsuperscript{291} Early in the novel, the reader is thus introduced to a notion of land as something to be
held in common by all, a universalist notion stemming from indigenous cosmology.\textsuperscript{292}

This notion of the puna is directly challenged in the second chapter when Arguedas
stages an emblematic incident of dispossession during which a priest and a judge, representing
the forces of Church and State, address a group of Indians in broken Quechua. Once the judge
informs the Indians that a segment of the puna is now lawfully private property, the priest,
dressed for a christening, symbolically baptizes juridical authority:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{289} My use of the term primitive accumulation is informed by Marx’s classical theorization of
\textsuperscript{290} Mariátegui, \textit{Seven Interpretive Essays}, 30.
\textsuperscript{291} Arguedas, \textit{Yawar Fiesta}, 10.
\textsuperscript{292} Although Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson oppose Laclau’s notion of the universal to their
own notion of the common, I think it would be a mistake to generalize this polemic, as Mezzadra
and Neilson occasionally do, into a genuine theoretical distinction between the two categories.
Laclau’s conceptualization of the universal is not the only way to conceive of the category, and,
as I have already demonstrated in the introduction, there are a multiplicity of universalities
circulating within Arguedas’s writings, including, as I am suggesting here, a universalist notion
of land as something held in common by all. For their debate with Laclau and their distinction
between the universal and the common, see Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, \textit{Border as
\end{quote}
*Cumunkuna* [common people]: By law Don Santos has proven that these grazing lands belong to him. Now Don Santos is going to be respect; he’s going to be boss of the Indians who live on these lands. God in heaven also respects law; law is for everybody the same. *Cumunkuna!* Let’s see you kiss Don Santos’ hand!\(^{293}\)

The priest thus defends the general right to hold individual private property by articulating a notion of universal equality before the law.

As though to insist on the common or equal application of the law to everyone, the priest conjures a shared identity by repeatedly exclaiming “*Cumunkuna!*” The word *cumunkuna* is a complicated amalgam of Quechua and Spanish insofar as it combines a Quechuanized pronunciation of the Spanish word *común* or “common” with the pluralizing suffix *kuna*. It also evokes the word *runakuna*, a term that simultaneously conjures the notion of “humanity” in general and Quechua Indians in particular, and *comunero*, the Spanish word used to refer to Indians who belong to an *ayllu*. By blending Quechua and Spanish words with inflections that are both universal and particular, the word *cumunkuna* embodies linguistically what the priest attempts to achieve conceptually, namely the translation or conversion of a historically indigenous but also universalist notion of the relationship between the land and its inhabitants into a historically European but also universalist notion of that same relationship.

The second exclamation of *cumunkuna* is followed by a call to kiss the hand of the new landowner. This statement functions as a kind of performative contradiction insofar as it is made within a given theologico-juridical discourse that undermines the discourse’s own claim to universality by exposing the inclusions and exclusions upon which the claim is constituted. The priest’s speech-act, in other words, performs the inequality that persists between the *comuneros*

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\(^{293}\) Arguedas, *Yawar Fiesta*, 13.
and the landowner and priest precisely at the moment that equality is being enunciated. It demonstrates how the right to private property, founded on the enclosure of the commons, represents a particular interest that hegemonizes the universal, that construes itself as identical to the universal. The scene in this way reveals the difference that haunts identity or the gap between a particular content and a universal form, while also staging the historical process of dispossession, the violent act of exclusion, from which this universal form can itself emerge.

If the priest attempts to translate between two competing universalities, it is not ultimately to locate a zone of confluence between them but rather to bless the dominion of one over the other. Although the Indians in this scene oblige the priest, they are more often represented in Yawar Fiesta as organized and disciplined resistors. This is especially the case regarding the collective control of water, which is still distributed in 1930s Puquio by the staff-bearing indigenous leaders of the ayllus as traditionally practiced. While the narrator explains how the mitis tried using violent force or softer forms of coercion to gain control of the natural resource,

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294 In her essay “Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism,” Butler considers radical instances of performative contradiction, such as when particular groups that are conventionally excluded from a given hegemonic articulation of the universal (e.g. women or slaves in the universalist Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen) claim universal rights anyway, despite their exclusion, “[prompting] a set of antagonistic speculations on what the proper venue for the claim of universality ought to be.” While the effects of performative contradiction can lead to a new, more inclusive articulation of universality, in Yawar Fiesta it merely reveals the foundational exclusion upon which theologico-juridical equality rests. See Judith Butler, “Restaging the Universal: Hegemony and the Limits of Formalism,” Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 38, 39.

295 Ernesto Laclau is perhaps the principle theorist of discursive processes that function in this way, such that a particular content momentarily and contingently achieves consensus or hegemony over the universal. However, his insistence on the “irreducible,” rather than equally momentary, gap between the particular and the universal forecloses the possibility, as Zizek argues in The Ticklish Subject, of conceptualizing the notion of concrete universality. For Laclau’s position, see, for example, Ernesto Laclau, “Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics,” Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 44 – 89. For Zizek’s best critique of this position, see Slavoj Zizek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Center of Political Ontology (New York: Verso, 2000), 171, 172.
an unidentified Indian’s voice interrupts the narrative: “My eye first he’ll take out! Like thieving sparrowhawk my eye first he’ll eat! Cumun yaku jajayllas [Common water dammit]!” The last sentence of this passage signals another appearance of the Quechuanized pronunciation of común, this time to assert that water, like land, is to be held in common. By incorporating and “disarranging” a Spanish word, the anonymous indigenous voice, not unlike the priest, performs a kind of translational practice; however, unlike the priest, the voice does not utilize translation to convert one universalist claim into another but rather, in Calibanesque fashion, to turn the language of the expropriators against them by cursing anyone who would threaten the traditional universalist belief that water is for everyone. Previously mobilized to impose and defend the institution of private property, translation now appears as a practice deployed to resist the imposition of this very institution. In Yawar Fiesta, translation is thus a politically ambiguous practice, equally capable of operating under the competing sign of primitive accumulation and the commons.

As though revisiting and revising the passage above, Arguedas notes in his 1956 anthropological study “Puquio: A Culture in the Process of Change” that the Indians of that region differentiate between yaku, the everyday term for water, and aguay unu, which combines

296 Arguedas, Yawar Fiesta, 8.
297 Arguedas experimented with many of these themes, although without the same level of complexity, in his 1935 short story “Water.” The anonymous voice discussed here, for example, could be read alongside the voices of Don Pascual, Pantaleón, and Don Wallpa during their confrontation with Don Braulio over the distribution of water. See José María Arguedas, “Agua,” Obras completas I (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1983), 57 – 82.
298 The practice of translation has a peculiar relationship to the institution of private property, located, as Ricardo Piglia has observed, somewhere between plagiarism and quotation. The antagonism in Yawar Fiesta between the competing universalities of private property and the commons could therefore be interpreted as an allegory for the internal conflict within translation itself. See Ricardo Piglia, “Writing and Translation,” Voice-Overs: Translation and Latin American Literature, eds. Daniel Balderston and Marcy E. Schwartz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 64 – 67.
Spanish (agua) and Quechua (unu) to refer to water “in a religious sense.”  

The religiosity of the latter term stems from its use to refer to the water that flows like blood from the Andean Wamanis or mountain deities and that is believed to be the “common heritage” of all.  

Indeed, after conducting various interviews, Arguedas asserts that he “found no indication that Aguay Unu was considered to be the exclusive birthright of the Indians. They believe that everyone – human beings and animals as well – has a natural right to the blood of the Wamanis.”  

Aguay unu, rather than yaku, might have therefore been the more appropriate term for the Calibanesque voice of Yawar Fiesta.

It is nevertheless striking that both the original phrase in the novel and the term aguay unu incorporate Spanish to express a conception of water that stems from indigenous cosmology. This suggests that indigenous universals should not be understood as pre-Columbian “originary” beliefs that have remained pure and untouched by European culture throughout colonial and postcolonial history. Rather, as Arguedas suggests both implicitly in his novel and explicitly in his anthropological essay, these beliefs exist in and are expressed through translation.

Indigenous cosmology is therefore linguistically and historically linked to yet also in conflict with the European universal of private property. This is symptomatically expressed in Arguedas’s own anthropological translation of aguay unu as a “natural right,” since it is precisely the European concept of property as a natural right that poses a threat to the indigenous conception of aguay unu. As a kind of written parataxis, Arguedas provides, despite himself, a particularly vivid example of translation’s vacillation between the universals of primitive accumulation and the commons.

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300 Ibid.
301 Ibid.
The State’s Monopoly on Translation

After these preliminary scenes of Puquio’s geography and history, the reader is introduced in the third chapter of the novel to the text’s main focus, the yawar fiesta or festival of blood that takes place every year on July 28th to commemorate Peru’s independence from Spain. On this day, the four ayllus of Puquio compete in a turupukllay, an Andean translation of a Spanish bullfight, which consists of the Indians using their ponchos to taunt various bulls brought down from the puna into the town square. The strongest bulls have silk saddlecloths embroidered with silver and gold coins sewn directly onto their backs that the Indians attempt to rip off during the fight, and sometimes a condor is strapped to the bull’s back to further provoke it. The bullfight is over when the Indians kill the bulls by blowing them up with dynamite. Although the town’s spatial division mirrors the class, ethnic, and cultural divisions that characterize the Andean region in general, both mistis and Indians, landowners and comuneros, come together in the town square to celebrate the turupukllay.

Yet this apparent unity across division is deceptive, since the significance of the event is contested throughout the novel. For the Indians, for example, the event is a collective ritual informed by indigenous customs of friendly competition, communal labor, and demonstrations of strength and courage. The landowners and town elite, on the other hand, view the event as a thrilling, bloody spectacle that affords the opportunity to witness and perversely enjoy the violent death of Indians. This hegemonic gaze of the landowners also exoticizes the Indians by converting them into animals, just as “savage” as the bulls against which they are fighting. As one townsperson states, turupukllay “is something to see […] because the Indians are also like

302 This cultural translation leaves a linguistic trace: the turu of turupukllay is a Quechanized pronunciation of toro or bull in Spanish.
wild beasts.” The Andean bullfight should thus be read as a highly contradictory event interpenetrated by multiple, opposing significations.

The Subprefect, who comes to Puquio from the city of Ica, represents the modernizing and civilizing authority of the national government in the rural town. For this reason, he predictably disapproves of the *turupukllay* and, at the beginning of chapter five, announces that he has received an edict from the National Ministry, prohibiting bullfights without trained bullfighters. [...] I think this prohibition is for the good of the country, because it puts an end to a custom that was a savage survival, as you yourselves have informed me, because the bulls caused deaths and injuries. As you realize, I have to enforce this order. And I’m letting you know in good time, so you can hire a professional Spanish-style bullfighter in Lima if you want to hold a bullfight for the national holidays.

Statist modernization is figured in this passage as a kind of *return* or, more precisely, as a practice of *un-*translating the *turupukllay* by recovering the Spanish roots of bullfighting and purifying the practice of its savage, indigenous hybridity. The law’s performative translation in reverse once again imposes and defends property, this time at the symbolic level of that which is *propio* to cultural *propiedad*, or, in other words, the Spanishness of Peru’s cultural patrimony. Peru’s development, from the perspective of the State, depends on the universalization of a purified European cultural practice and the universal prohibition of its contamination. The prohibition of *turupukllay* is therefore also a prohibition of cultural translation, and the universalizing drive of the law is once again founded on the exclusion of indigenous culture.

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303 Arguedas, *Yawar Fiesta*, 32.
304 Ibid., 36.
305 I thank Susana Draper for encouraging me to pursue this reading of the passage.
Although there is some dissent among the misti and mestizo townspeople, the most wealthy and powerful citizens of Puquio decide to support the edict because they “respect the law” and wish to live in a civilized Peru. Religion returns to sanctify the edict, for a local vicar states during a town meeting that turupukllay is a “Santanic feast,” and “[f]or that reason, the Government’s prohibition is holy.” The Indians, devastated by the news, appear to be on the verge of outright rebellion when they receive a false promise from the mayor that there will be a bullfight on the 28th, just as every year.

If, according to Max Weber, an essential attribute of statehood is a monopoly on violence, Yawar Fiesta demonstrates how the Peruvian State also seeks a monopoly on translation. While the people of Puquio, mistis and Indians alike, are prohibited from culturally translating the practices of Europe (i.e. bullfighting), the State readily translates indigenous beliefs and customs for the benefit of its own civilizing project of national development. This Statist mode of translation is exemplified in both the translation of land as common heritage into the universal right of individual property and the translation of turupukllay’s collectivism into the collective spectatorship of an individual Spanish-trained bullfighter. The State accordingly does not stop at mobilizing translation to impose and defend the institution of property; it also seeks to possess translation itself, to make the practice of translation its exclusive property. This fantasy of State control seeks to regulate how translation is practiced, to inhibit competing modes of translation that articulate universalist values contrary to its “civilizing” mission.

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306 Arguedas, Yawar Fiesta, 43.
307 Ibid., 45.
Another example of the Statist monopolization of translation can be found in chapter seven when the flow of the narrative is interrupted to describe the Indian’s “communal work project” of the 1920s, which consisted of building a 180 mile-long highway in 28 days to connect Puquio to the coastal city of Nazca. Although this project enhances Peru’s infrastructure, and it is completed on July 28th to celebrate national independence, it is started “[b]y popular initiative, without government support,” as a competitive response to the Indians of Coracora who sought to build a similar highway from their Andean town to the coastal port of Chala.309 The rivalry that characterizes this communal work project, like the rivalry between the ayllus during the turupukllay, evokes the indigenous values of collective work and friendly competition that contributed to the construction of the Inca road system, a vast network of pre-Columbian transportation routes. As discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation, Mariátegui celebrated contemporary traces of these nonsynchronous values insofar as they presented a local and living model of socialized labor and production.310 In Yawar Fiesta, these same values gain expression in modified form as part of a celebration that both marks Peru’s political independence from Spain and preserves Peru’s intellectual and cultural attachment to it.311 Like the phrase aguay unu, in other words, the indigenous collectivism of Yawar Fiesta is a hybrid formation that exists in and is expressed through translation.

Although therefore linked to European culture, these translated values, because they promote the socialization of labor, are in conflict with the material reality of one of Europe’s

309 Arguedas, Yawar Fiesta, 66.
310 See the subsection of Chapter 1 entitled “The Ayllu: Starting Point on the Peruvian Road to Socialism.”
311 The movement of Latin American independence from Spain was itself inspired by European ideals, as François-Xavier Guerra convincingly demonstrates in François-Xavier Guerra, Modernidad e independencias: Ensayos sobre las revoluciones hispánicas (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010).
primary exports, namely the exportation of capital, which strives for the universal imposition of individual competition and alienated labor.\textsuperscript{312} Accordingly, when Puquio’s completion of the highway inspired other construction initiatives throughout the Andes, the novel’s narrator indicates that the State began to send “engineers, money, and tools,” and,

the highways that the engineers planned would almost always curve around and go down into the valleys […] so that the road might enter the important people’s haciendas. The people in the towns began to lose their confidence in, their enthusiasm for the highways. From then on, road building was a business. And the people from the towns worked as day laborers, or because they were forced to do so. The Lieutenant Governors, the Subprefects, the police – all of the authorities – began to drive the Indians with whips and bullets to make them work on the highways.\textsuperscript{313}

The capitalist State’s coercive apparatuses translate a translation, converting a modified form of Incan road production into a for-profit business. Communal activity is co-opted and transformed into the commodity of labor power and indigenous values of collectivism and friendly rivalry are exchanged for individual competition and exploitation. The State once again imposes its monopoly on translation, and the Indians’ potentially subversive translational practice is stymied.

\textit{Migrant Vanguards and Immanent Critique}

\textsuperscript{312} Lenin, one of Arguedas’s most important theoretical referents, argues that a central feature of capitalist imperialism is the international exportation not only of commodities but also of capital. See V. I. Lenin, \textit{Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism} (New York: International Publishers, 2008), 89.

\textsuperscript{313} Arguedas, \textit{Yawar Fiesta}, 66, 67.
An unintended effect of these highways is that waves of Indians and mestizos begin to migrate from Peru’s rural countryside to the city of Lima for school and work. The novel depicts these travelers preserving their Andean customs and celebrations in the urban center through the organization of cultural groups and sporting clubs, including the Lucanas Union Center. Led by a student named Escobar, the Lucanas Union Center is composed of workers, students, and former *comuneros* from the province of Lucanas who become politically radicalized in Lima as a result of their exposure to new ideologies and worldviews. These migrants accordingly cross not only territorial borders but also conceptual and cultural borders that separate yet link the rural and the urban, the indigenous and the European. While transporting Andean culture to the city, they also aim to facilitate the intellectual and moral reform of their indigenous “brothers” still living in the countryside. In this way, the migrants of *Yawar Fiesta*, although more diverse in their social standing, resemble Mariátegui’s radical indigenous migrant workers, tasked with spatially and linguistically translating socialist theory upon their return to the Andes.

It would be tempting, given their dual movement from countryside to city and from city to countryside, to locate in Escobar and his comrades the figure of the revolutionary border-crosser committed to reciprocal translation between Leftist politics and indigenous culture. A closer reading, however, reveals that the geographical distance Escobar travels in order to arrive in Lima is accompanied by the introduction of another kind of distance, vertical or hierarchical in nature, that becomes palpable when Escobar seeks to unilaterally impose his knowledge and experience on others. Consider Escobar’s statement on the eve of the center’s formation:

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314 Ibid., 70.
315 My discussion of this idea in Mariátegui’s work can be found in the subsection of Chapter 1 entitled “In Search of the Proletariat: Peasants, Workers, Masses, Classes.”
There are now more than 2,000 of us Lucaninos in Lima, and we’re all asleep. Meanwhile, the big landholders and the petty politicians keep on exploiting the comuneros, just as they did 200 years ago, by putting them in the stocks and by flogging them. We who have already had our eyes opened and our consciousness freed should not let them get away with skinning our brothers alive.\textsuperscript{316}

Although the Lucanas Union Center is not an official cell of the Peruvian Communist Party, the well-intentioned Escobar participates in a highly problematic form of vanguardism characteristic of the latter organization and much of inter-war Latin American Marxism.\textsuperscript{317} Escobar fits within this paradigm insofar as he assumes epistemological superiority over the supposedly ignorant indigenous masses and blurs the Indians’ own political agency while claiming to be their defender.\textsuperscript{318} Far from the axiomatic equality of universal fraternity discussed above, Escobar views his indigenous “brothers” as intellectually inferior and in need of his rescue.

A telegram from the mayor of Puquio requesting that the Lucanas Union Center contracts a professional bullfighter for the national holiday on July 28\textsuperscript{th} presents an opportunity for

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\textsuperscript{316} Arguedas, \textit{Yawar Fiesta}, 70.
\textsuperscript{318} Although the general aim of the Lucanas Union Center appears to resonate with Antonio Gramsci’s discussion of the organic intellectual and his or her contribution to organizing the national-popular collective will through intellectual and moral reform, the group’s top-down assumptions and processes make invisible the conscious agency of the subaltern classes whereas Gramsci sought precisely to account for and recognize this agency. Ranajit Guha’s essay “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” significantly informed by Gramsci’s work, likewise considers the problematic political implications of representing subaltern classes as lacking agency and diagnoses this approach to peasant insurrections as a general blind spot in Indian historiography. See Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” \textit{Selected Subaltern Studies}, ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45 – 84. For Gramsci’s discussion of subaltern agency and intellectual and moral reform, see Antonio Gramsci, \textit{Selections from the Prison Notebooks}, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 2005), 52 – 55, 125 – 133.
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Escobar and the other migrants to become what they believe themselves destined to be, namely the saviors of victimized indigenous peasants. Escobar calls a meeting of the group’s governing board, and they collectively decide to hire the bullfighter, travel to Puquio, and help enforce the national government’s edict insofar as it represents a blow to the landowners’ perverse tradition of brutality against Indians. As Escobar exclaims: “Never again shall the Indians die in the Pichk’achuri square to give those pigs pleasure!”\(^{319}\) Although acutely aware of turupukllay’s significance for the landowning elite, the group is completely out of touch with its meaning for the Puquio indigenous community. Just as in Arguedas’s critique of Amauta, a fanatical hatred for the gamonales, sustained by certain theoretical and political commitments, distorts the group’s perception so that anything connected to the economico-political class, including the turupukllay, is portrayed in a wholly negative light rather than in its contradictory complexity. The meeting likewise evokes the desencuentro that opens this chapter, for an organization not unlike a Leftist vanguard party confronts a very different party, the bloody party or yawar fiesta of the turupukllay, and its militants disparagingly dismiss, in the name of politics, a cultural practice in which Indians participate and find meaning.

These resonances are not coincidental. The link between the migrant group and the post-Mariátegui Peruvian Left is made explicit when the narrator reveals that the club’s meeting convenes at Escobar’s place, where a “photograph of Mariátegui, nailed to the wall at the head of the bed, dominate[s] the room.”\(^{320}\) Although Horacio Legrás rightly notes that both Arguedas and Escobar “found a stable order in Mariátegui and in the critical Marxist tradition Mariátegui had inaugurated in Peru,” Yawar Fiesta’s dramatization of Escobar’s uncritical vanguardism suggests that Arguedas’s Mariátegui is a very different Mariátegui and that Yawar Fiesta can be

\(^{319}\) Arguedas, Yawar Fiesta, 72.  
\(^{320}\) Ibid.
read as an immanent critique of a certain tendency within Marxism-Mariáteguism. This theoretical tendency, rather than illuminating the contradictory character of turupukllay, blinds Escobar and his comrades with its one-sidedness. The novel accordingly supplements the very Marxism-Mariáteguism that circulates within its narrative by constructing a literary representation of turupukllay that exposes the blind-spot of Escobar’s theoretical framework while revealing the aspects of the cultural practice that remain invisible within said framework.

At one point during the meeting, Escobar turns to Mariátegui’s portrait and speaks directly to it, “as if the picture were one more member of the Lucanas Union Center. ‘You’d like what we’re going to do, werak’ocha. You haven’t just spoken to us for the pleasure of it – we’re going to put into practice what you have preached.’” Escobar conceives of the group’s plan to uphold and defend the State’s edict as a translation of Mariátegui’s theory into practice, as an act in agreement with Mariátegui’s teachings. The strategic alliance between radicalized migrants and government officials thus allegorizes a more meaningful alliance between Marxism-Mariáteguism and the Peruvian State’s project of national development. To form this alliance, Escobar and his comrades negotiate between the competing universalities of the State’s law (i.e. universal Europeanization) and Marxist socialism (i.e. international revolution) by identifying turupukllay as an obstacle to both Statist development and its socialist alternative.

Escobar’s practical translation of Mariátegui’s theory ironically functions much like the theologico-juridical discourse discussed above insofar as his defense of the edict facilitates the State’s monopolization of cultural translation and inhibits the translated expression of indigenous

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322 Arguedas, *Yawar Fiesta*, 73.
323 The narrator subtly hints at this broader alliance by noting that below the portrait of Mariátegui rests “a guitar, with a rosette of ribbons in the Peruvian national colors adorning its pegs.” Ibid., 72.
collectivism and competition. Yet, as I argued in the previous chapter, Mariátegui sought to organize socialist cooperatives that would facilitate the translated expression of precisely these values, and, as discussed above, Arguedas’s theorization of an indigenous form of fraternity calls for the internationalization or universal translation of indigenous collectivism. The entire scene should therefore be read as an alarming encounter between Marxism-Mariáteguism and the bourgeois State predicated on a missed encounter between socialist theory and the ideals and political will of the indigenous masses.

*Unresolved Contradictions and the Breakdown of Translation*

To underscore this *desencuentro*, the narrator explains that at the very same moment that the migrant group is singing to the portrait of Mariátegui, affirming that the misery of the *turupukllay* will be no more, the Puquio Indians of the *ayllu* K’ayau are excitedly making plans to go into the woods and capture the dangerous and mystical bull Misitu for the upcoming bullfight. Misitu is located in the woods of the Negromayo Canyon, the land of the Koñani Indians, and guarded by the *auki* or mountain spirit Ak’chi. A sorcerer from K’ayau accordingly asks permissions from the *jatun* [great] *auki* K’arwarasu, known as “the father of all the mountains of Lucanas,” to enter these woods and capture the bull. After receiving permission from K’arwarasu, the *ayllu* successfully captures Misitu, but the sorcerer is killed in the process. The Indians interpret his death as an exchange for Misitu’s life, a gift that K’arwarasu gives to Ak’chi out of friendship. The Chief Staffbearer, gazing up at the K’arwarasu mountain peaks, thanks the *jatun auki* for its guidance and support: “Here’s your ayllu, intact. By your will.

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324 This argument can be found in the subsection of Chapter 1 entitled “The *Ayllu*: Starting Point on the Peruvian Road to Socialism.”
There’s Misitu, your animal. For you we’re going to fight the bulls in Pichk’achuri, with great rage, so you’ll be K’ayau’s guardian, always. Thank you, *jatun auki!*”

When the Lucanas Union Center members arrive in Puquio, the streets are empty because the locals have received word that the mystical bull, now captured, will soon be dragged into town. While one disapproving member of the group states that it will take “a thousand years to save the Indians from superstition,” referring to the belief in the bull’s magical powers, Escobar responds: “It depends, brother. A friendly national government, one of our very own, for example, would uproot sooner, much sooner, that awe the Indian has of the earth, of the sky, even of the valleys and the rivers. We know their soul; we would enlighten them from close by.” Although hinting at another kind of State, a State that would function otherwise, Escobar’s imagination is ultimately circumscribed by the present model of statehood, for his vision of a future national government represents merely an intensification and acceleration of the current one, responding to development, as John Kraniauskas would say, with more development. Escobar, like the party cell leader of Arguedas’s past, thus trivializes indigenous beliefs by reducing them to superstitions that obstruct the development and realization of socialism in Peru.

While Escobar’s statement reenacts the same epistemological elitism and vanguardism as before, what follows reveals its source:

Those guys [the government and the landowning elite] are pushing harder and harder all the time, and with hellishly deliberate calculation they force the Indian to become rooted in that dark, fearful, and primitive life, because it’s to their advantage; that’s why they

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326 Ibid., 113.
327 Ibid., 120.
command and rule. [...] They drive the Indians headlong into darkness, into what we call ‘the mythical fear’ at the University. [...] Contemplating him [K’arwarasu], what does the Indian say? He kneels, his heart trembles with fear. And the landowners, the priests themselves, all the people who exploit them, who make money at the expense of their ignorance, try to confirm the belief that the Indians’ fear of the great forces of the earth is good, is sacred. But if we were the national government, brothers! What would happen? We’d smash the causes that have made primitivism and serfdom survive for so many centuries.\textsuperscript{329}

In Escobar’s analysis of the situation, the Indians’ beliefs are not contradictory and therefore to some extent in tension with their exploitative instrumentalization. On the contrary, he envisions a neat correspondence between primitivism and serfdom and more broadly between ideological superstructure and economic base. It is this vulgar economistic analysis of ideology, a certain (mis)translation of Marxism-Mariáteguism, that drives Escobar’s elitist dismissal of indigenous beliefs and values.\textsuperscript{330} From this perspective, the Indians’ context of serfdom leads to an inevitable ignorance that can only be rectified by some outside force capable of introducing enlightenment and the freedom to which it corresponds. It is this perspective that authorizes and legitimates the group’s particular form of vanguardist developmentalism.

Escobar’s interpretation of Misitu’s capture accordingly varies greatly from how it is experienced by the K’ayau Indians. For Escobar, the Indians were tricked into going after Misitu by Don Julián Arangüena, an exploitative landowner who had tried to capture the bull himself.

\textsuperscript{329} Arguedas, \textit{Yawar Fiesta}, 120, 121.

\textsuperscript{330} I demonstrate how Mariátegui, despite occasionally leaving himself open to such misinterpretations, thinks past economistic thinking in the subsection of Chapter 1 entitled “Modes of Translation: Aesthetic, Prophetic, Theoretical.”
and failed. Escobar nevertheless experiences an epiphany while in the Andes that self-critically challenges his initial interpretation of events:

‘When I learned that K’ayau was going after Misitu, I was angry and sad. It would be a slaughter of Indians. But now that we’re going out to meet the ayllu, I’d like to shout with joy. Do you know what this means, brothers – that the K’ayaus have dared to go into the Negromayo Canyon? […] They’ve done it out of pride, to show the whole world how strong they are, how strong the ayllu can be when it wants to. That’s how they built the road to Nazca; that’s why: a hundred miles in twenty-eight days! Like in the time of the Inca Empire! Some students in Lima said, ‘Stupid Indians, they work for the benefit of their exploiters.’ It’s a lie!\(^{331}\)

Instead of perceiving the Indians as necessarily deluded by false-consciousness, victims of their own circumstances and without the political agency necessary to change these circumstances, Escobar interprets the capture of Misitu and the building of the highway as deliberate and willful practices of self-affirmation that express a translated or modified version of traditional Quechua values. His assertion that these practices, although grounded in a specific site, are directed at “the whole world” also suggests a shift in the valuation of indigenous values insofar as what had been dismissed as Andean superstition now seems to carry within itself implications that are international or universal in scope.

Yet Escobar’s self-critical perspective, even if it challenges his usual vanguardism, remains in tension with the K’ayau’s account of Misitu’s capture. Escobar substitutes the will of the mountain spirits for the will of the Indians and the latter’s sacred rage, an expression of loyalty to their jatun auki, for a secular demonstration of pride aimed at a disenchanted world.

\(^{331}\) Arguedas, \textit{Yawar Fiesta}, 121.
He accordingly enacts what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as the “[translation of] diverse and enchanted worlds into the universal and disenchanted language of sociology.”

For Chakrabarty, this translational procedure is inevitable within the social sciences, since a historian or a sociologist, due to the very nature and limits of their disciplines, cannot accept a religious or supernatural account of human experience. The challenge is therefore to translate in such a way that other modes of experience, other life-worlds, are not obliterated or subalternized in the process, but this is precisely what Escobar accomplishes. Even during his self-critical moment, in other words, traces of Escobar’s epistemological elitism and developmentalism remain, for his interpretation of events completely erases how these events are lived by the Indians in such a way that he implicitly perpetuates a progressivist historical narrative that moves from unenlightened superstition to enlightened secularism.

Accordingly, just a moment later during the very same monologue, Escobar offers yet another interpretation of Misitu’s capture that reverts to his prior vanguardism and elitism:

What does it matter if Misitu may have ripped the guts out of ten or twenty Kayaus, if in the end they’ve lassoed his horns and are dragging him along like any old wild highland bull? They’ve killed an auki! And the day they kill all the aukis who are tormenting their minds, the day they become what we are now – ‘renegade “chalos,”’ as Don Julián says – we shall lead this country to a glory no one can imagine.”

After hailing the continuity of past and present communal work projects for their shared collectivism (“Like in the time of the Inca Empire!”), Escobar construes one such project, the

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332 Dipesh Chakrabarty, * Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 76. It is important to note that Escobar’s is an universal language not because he evokes the idea of the whole world but because he alludes implicitly or explicitly to generalizing categories of history and the social sciences, such as myth, superstition, and agency, that occlude the singularity of an indigenous life-world.

333 Arguedas, *Yawar Fiesta*, 121.
capture of Misitu, as a rupture with the past and the beliefs that coincided with it. He suggests that rather than translating Incan beliefs, which is to say ensuring their survival in a modified form, the capture of Misitu signals the death of (the belief in) a god, which initiates an emancipatory process of secularization. Escobar positions himself and his comrades at the other end of this unilinear process, implying that the Indians are developmentally behind the members of the Lucanas Union Center while evoking the colonialist tropes of backwardness and underdevelopment. At this point, Escobar is furthest from Mariátegui, whose interpretation of the ayllu unsettled any unilinear conception of historical time, but, for that reason, Escobar is also generally in line with the thinking of his contemporaries in the Stalinized Third International.\(^{334}\)

When the Lucanas Union Center finally meets the K’ayau Indians in Puquio, embracing each other triumphantly and standing “shoulder to shoulder” like equals as they collectively drag Misitu into town, their physical encuentro quickly displays a deeper desencuentro of worldviews.\(^{335}\) The narrator relates that Escobar and the others, wanted to make the K’ayaus understand [hacer entender] that Misitu had fallen because the comuneros were resolute, because Raura was courageous, because man could always overcome the sallk’a bulls. The K’ayaus seemed to believe them. But the mestizos realized that it was not easy, that the comuneros were certain the great K’arwarasu had protected the community, and that all of them would die worshiping the auki, as the father of the ayllu.\(^{336}\)

\(^{334}\) See once again the subsection of Chapter 1 entitled “The Ayllu: Starting Point on the Peruvian Road to Socialism” for a discussion of this aspect of Mariátegui’s project.

\(^{335}\) Arguedas, Yawar Fiesta, 124.

\(^{336}\) Ibid., 124, 125. For the original, see José María Arguedas, Yawar fiesta (Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 1968), 117.
The same impulse that opens this chapter, the vanguardist impulse that sought to control how Arguedas viewed and intervened in the world, asserts itself here when Escobar and his comrades stand beside their potential allies. Unable to translate between worldviews, the migrant group opposes its universalist enlightenment ideal of man’s domination over nature to a competing understanding of the relationship between man and nature informed by indigenous cosmology.

Escobar ultimately fails to engage in self-critical reflection when considering the significance of the turupukllay; he cannot conceive of Andean bullfighting as anything other than the perpetuation of misti domination. He and the other members of the Lucanas Union Center consequently support the edict prohibiting turupukllay to the very end, but, after a pathetic performance by the Spanish bullfighter from Lima, the Andean elites break their agreement to respect the National Ministry’s prohibition and call on the Indians to enter the ring and fight Misitu. The Indians jump down without hesitation, Misitu gores one of the K’ayaus, and the bull is killed with dynamite. The novel ends when the local mayor leans over to whisper into the Subprefect’s ear: “‘You see, Señor Subprefect? This is how our bullfights are. The real yawar punchau [bloody day]!’”

According to Antonio Cornejo Polar, the Lucanas Union Center’s failure to provide an alternative to turupukllay makes possible the recomposition of the “traditional model” of the Andean world. This model entails an ambivalent “we” (e.g. “our bullfights”), composed of both the misti elites and the indigenous peasants, that resists the bourgeois State’s modernizing and civilizing project. Kraniauskas contends that this interpretation of the novel’s ending implies that the Indians’ “re-Indianization” of the bullfight in response to the State’s “de-Indianization”

337 Arguedas, Yawar Fiesta, 147.
338 Antonio Cornejo Polar, Los universos narrativos de José María Arguedas (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1997), 70.
of *turupukllay* “reproduces – that is, both feeds and guarantees – misti domination.”

Kraniauskas proposes an alternative interpretation that conceives of the Indians’ re-Indianization of the bullfight as evidence of another “we,” of “an agency or collective subject of history” that emerges out of the Indians’ dislocation from both misti domination and the developmentalist alliance between the migrants and the State. While Cornejo Polar’s interpretation veers dangerously close to Escobar’s epistemological elitism insofar as it represents the Indians as once again the unknowing fabricators of their own chains, Kraniauskas’s interpretation veers in the opposite direction towards a celebratory romanticization of the Indians, which would simply be the other side of *Amauta*’s distorted and wholly negative theorization of the *gamonales.* Neither interpretation, in other words, refuses the false choice that occludes the contradictory complexity of the *turupukllay* as both a perverse spectacle of violent death and an affirmative translation of indigenous beliefs and values.

Just as the contradictions of *turupukllay* remain unresolved, the desencuentro between Mariátegui’s translators and the indigenous community they claim to represent and defend persists until the very end of the novel. Escobar and his comrades ultimately fail to construct a translational zone of confluence within which they can align themselves with the Puquio Indians. The novel suggests that three factors contribute to this breakdown of translation: an epistemological elitism that legitimates an oppressive form of vanguardism, a vulgar economism that authorizes colonialist developmentalism, and an enlightenment view of man’s relationship with nature that is irreconcilable with traditional indigenous belief structures. By bringing into relief the cultural and political factors that contribute to the desencuentro between these two

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340 Ibid., 371.
groups, the novel offers a critique, from within Marxism-Mariáteguism, of one of the doctrine’s possible tendencies and supplements its blind-spots. Although Yawar Fiesta does not ultimately present a zone of confluence between the two poles of the desencuentro, much of Arguedas’s literary production is dedicated to exploring alternative forms of thought and action created out of the negotiation and reciprocal translation of Marxist socialism and indigenous culture. The next section of this chapter will accordingly turn to Arguedas’s third novel El Sexto, a nearly forgotten text within which these alternative forms appear most vividly.

**What Comes After the Desencuentro? The United Front in El Sexto:**

*Singing (Beyond) Party Politics*

Arguedas published El Sexto in 1961 although a brief note at the beginning of the book states: “I started preparing this novel in 1957; I decided to write it in 1939.” Marking both the end of the Peruvian dictatorship of Óscar Benavides and the consolidation of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in Spain, 1939 was an important year for Arguedas. Just two years earlier, still studying literature at San Marcos, Arguedas became a member of the underground Peruvian Committee for the Defense of the Spanish Republic. During one demonstration against Italy’s support of Franco’s Nationalists, Arguedas was arrested by Benavides’s troops and incarcerated for 8 months in a Lima prison known as “el Sexto.” It was accordingly a year after his release that he decided to write a novel about this experience, and, although Arguedas does not himself appear in the novel, the protagonist and first-person narrator Gabriel parallels and in a sense

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341 José María Arguedas, “El Sexto,” *Obras completas tomo III* (Lima: Editorial Horizonte, 1983), 219. Since this novel has never been translated, all citations of the book in English represent my translations from the original.

342 The details of these events are reviewed in in Cornejo Polar, “El Sexto. Las cárceles infinitas,” *Los universos narrativos de José María Arguedas*, 150.
stands in for the author as his fictional double. Like Arguedas, Gabriel speaks Quechua, spent his childhood in the Andes, traveled to Lima to study, and is imprisoned because of his involvement in solidarity protests during the Spanish Civil War.

Arguedas may have returned to the project of writing *El Sexto* in 1957 because it was in that year that he began planning a trip to Spain to conduct fieldwork for a comparative anthropological study on Spanish peasant communities and peasant communities in Peru. *El Sexto*, in other words, was in part written while Arguedas was studying in and traveling around a country that was still ruled by Franco’s dictatorship. Writing the novel therefore represents, among other things, an opportunity for Arguedas to come to terms with the period in his life during which he was incarcerated for defending the Spanish Republic abroad, a period marked by his involvement not in an official political party but rather in a coalition organization that operated as a kind of united front of many different political groups and doctrines.

Although the novel is historically set during a moment of unprecedented international solidarity, it becomes clear by the very first page that the anti-sectarian politics of the Spanish Civil War did not unite the Peruvian left of the thirties. *El Sexto* begins with Gabriel and a

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343 This is a common strategy in Arguedas’s writings and one most famously deployed in *Deep Rivers*, a quasi-autobiographical portrayal of his childhood through the novel’s protagonist, Ernesto. See José María Arguedas, *Deep Rivers*, trans. Frances Horning Barraclough (Illinois: Waverland Press, 2002).
344 This fieldwork served as the basis of Arguedas’s doctoral dissertation in anthropology. See José María Arguedas, *Las comunidades de España y del Perú* (Madrid: Cultura Hispánica, 1987).
345 Recall Alain Badiou’s prescient description of the Spanish Civil War as “the strongest moment, perhaps unique in the history of the world, of the realization of the great Marxist project: that of a truly internationalist revolutionary politics. We should remember what the intervention of the International Brigades meant: they showed that the vast international mobilizaion of minds was also, and before anything, an international mobilization of peoples.” Alain Badiou, “Poetry and Communism,” *The Age of the Poets*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2014), 97.
346 The novel subtly shows, in fact, how the Spanish Civil War was itself an issue that split the Peruvian Left between those who offered their unqualified support of Spanish republicanism and
number of newly arrived prisoners passing through the gates of the prison, at which point a very low voice starts to sing the words of the apristia party’s official hymn, an adaptation of the French revolutionary anthem La Marseillaise. This voice is quickly followed by another voice, described as a very high voice, singing the opening lines, in Spanish, of the Internationale or the hymn of international communism. Gabriel notes that “a few seconds later a chorus of men, competing, sang out both hymns. […] El Sexto sang, with its gloomy body trembling. It appeared to be moving.”

If the political prisoners aim to welcome their newly arrived comrades with familiar revolutionary hymns, the competition to see which group can sing the loudest quickly reveals the deep fissure, the desencuentro, that divides the Peruvian Left into at least two conflicting political logics.

This division dates back to the late 1920s when Raúl Haya de la Torre transformed the Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), which was originally conceived of as a united front against imperialism, into a multi-class populist party. Although Mariátegui is well known for founding the Peruvian Socialist Party, he spent most of his life participating in alternative political institutions, including APRA, because he viewed the Peruvian Left as not yet strong enough to divide into separate party organizations. He accordingly spoke out against Haya’s plan to dissolve the united front, but, when APRA became a party, Mariátegui left the organization and only then founded the Peruvian Socialist Party. Although differing greatly from Mariátegui’s theoretical and political legacy, the Peruvian communists of the 1930s those who saw the overthrow of the Republic as also a salutary defeat of Soviet Russia. See Arguedas, “El Sexto,” 242.

Ibid., 221 [my emphasis].

José Aricó offers an extended analysis of Mariátegui’s participation in these popular institutions and the implications of this participation for the eventual formation of a political party in José Aricó, “Mariátegui y la formación del partido socialista del Perú,” Socialismo y Participación N. 11 (1980), 139 – 167.
continued to reproduce the split between Mariátegui and Haya through their own conflictual relationship with their aprista counterparts. As the opening scene of El Sexto suggests, these political logics had a competitive relationship, each vying to be the loudest voice of the Peruvian Left.

Along with figuring the division between the aprista and communist parties, this competition between songs also stages a broader desencuentro between two conflicting forms of universalist thought and action. The Marsellesa aprista, for example, translates what could be described as the French Revolution’s nation-state universalism, exchanging monarchists for imperialists while preserving the Jacobinist principle of universal liberty through its reference to “the truth” of “a liberating reality [una realidad liberante].” Just as the version of the Internationale sung by the political prisoners is a Spanish translation of the French original, the Peruvian communists translate (or perhaps more accurately imitate) Soviet universalism and its aim to create a new communist society. Both Peruvian communism and aprismo emerge, in other words, through a process of translating or carrying across universalist claims into a new site of enunciation. The desencuentro of the Peruvian Left is accordingly not only a matter of two political parties disagreeing on particular issues but also of two translated worldviews in conflict. Yet when the Marsellesa aprista and the Internacional are sung together, albeit in a competitive fashion, so much noise is produced that the walls of the prison seem to shake, as though the combined sound might make the walls crumble and reveal an opening through which

349 In his reading of El Sexto, Cornejo Polar underlines the centrality of the split between political parties for the novel’s thinking of politics, but he confines his analysis of this split to the particular, to “the political struggle at the national level,” rather than recognizing that the split also takes place at the level of the universal, that the split is also one of competing universalities. Cornejo Polar, “El Sexto. Las cárceles infinitas,” Los universos narrativos de José María Arguedas, 157.
the newly confined prisoners could escape. This subtle detail foreshadows the possibility of a shared political struggle that would precipitate an alliance, indeed a united front, between the conflicting tendencies of the Peruvian Left.\footnote{Feldman notes that El Sexto “widens the sphere of the political by separating it from party politics.” While I do not think the novel separates the political from party politics, I agree that the novel widens the sphere of the political by exploring another kind of politics, by exploring, in Feldman’s words, “the political beyond party politics.” Feldman continues: “But if the political event in Arguedan fiction is removed rom the sphere of party politics, then where has it been relocated? The short answer is: the political is relocated to symbolically powerful mass mobilizations that preferably avoid bloodshed.” Feldman then goes on to discuss the civil disobedience of the colonos in Deep Rivers and a scene from The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below in which Gregorio Bazalar leads a group of “slum dwellers” across Chimbote as they transplant funeral crosses from the soon-to-be enclosed cemetery for the rich to a new plot of land. While Feldman’s answer to her own question is, in one sense, not broad enough, since I would argue that Arguedas extends the domain of the political beyond mass, non-violent mobilizations, it is also, in another sense, too broad, as it quickly jumps to other novels and ignores El Sexto’s own rethinking of politics beyond party politics. If the political event is removed in El Sexto from the sphere of party politics, I argue in what follows that it is relocated in the sphere of the united front. See Feldman, 119 – 121.}

The protagonist Gabriel is a member of neither party. In El Sexto, he embodies and is at times called upon to represent a third group of political prisoners, “the students and the prisoners without party affiliation.”\footnote{Arguedas, “El Sexto,” 275. While Mario Vargas Llosa, like Cornejo Polar and Feldman, attends to Gabriel’s rejection of both parties, he suggests that this move is a sign of his individualism rather than, as I will maintain, a conscious attempt to engage in politics beyond party politics. See Mario Vargas Llosa, La utopía arcaica: José María Arguedas y las ficciones del indigenismo (Spain: Alfaguara, 2008), 263 – 265.} His position is incorporated into this subtle allusion to a united front when he recounts that, while the hymns were simultaneously chanted,

the man that was in front of me […] reached out his hand. […] I saw his beautiful face, without traces of its usual toughness. He was an aprista prisoner that had hated me without knowing me and without having ever spoken to me. […] I thought that […] he
would reject me even more when he heard the *Marsellesa*. I knew that he was from Cuzco, that he spoke the same language as me.\(^{353}\)

As a song of party affiliation, Gabriel assumes that the cantation of the *Marsellesa aprista* will widen or reinforce the already existing gap between himself and his *aprista* counterpart. In this instance, however, the song has the opposite effect. It provokes the *aprista* prisoner to reach out to Gabriel and symbolically cross the political border that separates an *aprista* “us” from a non-*aprista* “them.” Searching for an explanation for this unexpected turn of events, Gabriel notes that they both share the same language and culture of the Andes, as though this commonality might constitute an alternative “we” that would unsettle the exclusionary logic of party affiliation. Rather than a pole of the *desencuentro*, indigenous culture, or more precisely its Andean migrant translation, appears in this instance to permeate both sides of the political fissure and contributes to the formation of a new collectivity.

The narrative quickly introduces a third song that accompanies Gabriel’s third, independent political position. The song reverberates in Gabriel’s memory when he recalls the sounds that traveled through the fog of his Andean village:

> We heard the birds sing. […] The song animated the hidden world. […] I remember that I passed under the large eucalyptus tree of the plaza when dense clouds covered the fields. In the silence and in that kind of happy blindness, I heard the very loud noise of the leaves and the trunk of the immense tree. And then neither the land, nor the sky, nor human beings were distinct [Y entonces no había tierra, ni cielo, ni ser humano distintos]. In that moment, the *chihuacos* and *palomas* sang, with such different voices; the song

\(^{353}\) Arguedas, “El Sexto,” 221.
stood out, it accompanied the profound sound of the tree that went from the ground to the infinite and invisible sky.\textsuperscript{354}

The \textit{chihuacos} and \textit{palomas}, like the deep \textit{aprista} voice and the high communist voice, sing at different registers, yet the sound produced is enhanced when their voices come together and join a third voice, just as the \textit{aprista} prisoner joined hands with Gabriel as the two hymns shook the walls of el Sexto.

Such structural similarity between scenes invites a reconsideration of the opening paragraphs of the novel in light of Gabriel’s memories. If Gabriel and his \textit{aprista} rival are able to momentarily come together despite the \textit{desencuentro} of the Peruvian Left, the aforementioned passage suggests that their bond is not founded simply on the regional particularism of a common language and culture but rather on a universalism intrinsic to that particularism that stems from Quechua cosmology. When Gabriel describes how the land, the sky, and human animals were no longer \textit{distintos} or conceived of as independent of each other, he is translating a tripartite Quechua worldview that emphasizes the interconnectedness of \textit{hanan pacha} (the world above), \textit{ukhu pacha} (the world below), and \textit{kay pacha} (this world).\textsuperscript{355} The tree, with its roots extending into the ground below and its branches reaching high above, serves as a powerful image of this interconnectedness. The song of the birds and the tree, their hymn of three voices, thus brings into relief, through the fog, a universal cosmovision of a world of three worlds shared by students and \textit{apristas} alike.

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid, 224.
\textsuperscript{355} Manuel Larrú Salazar and Sara Viera Mendoza offer an insightful reading of Arguedas’s depiction of animals throughout his \textit{oeuvre} on the basis of this tripartite worldview. See Manuel Larrú Salazar and Sara Viera Mendoza, “Animales del aire, de la tierra, y del subsuelo en la obra literaria de J.M. Arguedas,” \textit{Academia Peruana de la Lengua Boletín 52} (July – December 2011), 91 – 122.
This vision is equally emitted by communists like Gabriel’s cellmate Alejandro Cámac, a former peasant and proletarianized indigenous miner left with only one functioning eye after a torture session. As Gabriel states, “the light of that single eye made me feel once again the world […] like the song of the birds and the beginning of the day in the high valleys [that] provoke in human beings eternal joy.”\footnote{Arguedas, “El Sexto,” 237.} The light from Cámac’s single eye returns Gabriel to that joyful feeling of a world of three worlds, the same feeling that alleviated the usual toughness of the aprista prisoner’s face. Light and sound, clear references to the spirituality and orality of Quechua culture, are in this way portrayed as the vehicles through which a universal worldview travels, crossing the political borders dividing communists, apristas, and independent students.\footnote{This reading extends William Rowe’s assertion, formed without reference to El Sexto, that “[s]ound is […] the means of conveying the utopian thrust in Arguedas’s texts,” that sound plays a central role in Arguedas’s thinking through political alternatives to that which already exists, including alternative (indigenous) forms of knowledge that vary from “Western rationalism.” See William Rowe, “Arguedas: Music, Awareness, and Social Transformation,” José María Arguedas: Reconsiderations for Latin American Cultural Studies, 36, 42. In a slightly modified Spanish version of this essay, Rowe even suggests that the sound of the Pachachaca river in Deep Rivers – not unlike, I would add, the sounds of Gabriel’s memories – points to “an alternative universality.” William Rowe, “La música como espacio sonoro: La evolución y la reflexión de Arguedas sobre la música andina,” Ensayos Arguedianos (Lima: Editorial de la Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 1996), 51. Rowe also discusses the political symbolism of light in Arguedas’s writings throughout William Rowe, Mito e ideología en la obra de Arguedas (Lima: Instituto Nacional de Cultura, 1979).} 

In light of the novel’s strong symbolism, my hypothesis is that the above passages represent attempts to envision, through Quechua cosmology, what a united front might look like between three conflicting tendencies of the Peruvian Left. I want to suggest, in other words, that Gabriel’s migrant translation of an Andean worldview not only articulates a third universalism in the novel’s series of translated universalisms, a counterpart to the universalisms of Peruvian communism and aprismo. Gabriel’s Andean cosmovision in translation also gestures towards a kind of universalism of universalisms, a coalition of three distinct yet interconnected
world(view)s, a polytonal song of different universalist songs reciprocally enhancing each other. This is what I referred to in the introduction as a meta-universality, a unity with difference of multiple universalities. The recurrent imagery of light and sound crossing political borders could thus be read as figures of translation practices that negotiate between a multiplicity of competing universalities and make possible the formation of alliances beyond party politics.

Much of this resonates, in fact, with how Mariátegui theorized the united front. In a fascinating text entitled “May Day and the United Front,” which was written before the historical split of APRA, Mariátegui maintains that,

[t]he classist movement, between us, is still incipient, too limited to think about fracturing or splitting it. Before the perhaps inevitable moment of division, it is up to us to complete much common work, much shared labor. […] The united front […] does not signify confusing or amalgamating all of the doctrines into a single doctrine. It is a contingent, concrete, practical action. The program of the united front only considers the immediate reality, outside of any abstraction or utopia. […] Inside the united front everyone should keep their own affiliation and their own ideology. Everyone should work for their own credo.358

As Mariátegui describes it, the united front is not a populist arrangement, in which a particular element of the group hegemonically assumes a leadership role and synecdochically claims to represent the whole.359 Nor, of course, is the united front simply a repetition of the traditional vanguard political party, in which all members submit to a single party line construed as

359 While I am here alluding to the aprista party, my theoretical formulation of a populist arrangement is derived directly from Laclau’s discussion of populist reason. See Ernesto Laclau, On Populist Reason (London: Verso, 2007).
universal. Instead, the united front is a multi-centered “we,” a contingent alliance between various groups, each with their own universalist horizon. In this spirit, Mariátegui states that “May Day does not belong to one International: it is the date of all Internationals.” Although there are multiple Internationals or a multiplicity of universalities intrinsic to the political doctrines of the Left, May Day represents a day to reflect on and experiment with the possible united front of this multiplicity.

_El Sexto_ is accordingly a novel for May Day, a novel that should be read as involved in precisely this kind of reflection and experimentation. It is also a novel that resuscitates an alternative Mariátegui, not the Mariátegui hailed by Peruvian communists as an orthodox thinker of the vanguard party, but rather the unconventional and anti-sectarian Mariátegui of the united front. Indeed, _El Sexto_ can be read as itself a response to the _desencuentro_ between the vanguard party form and indigenous cultural practices precisely insofar as it reimagines an alternative form of political organization, a form stemming from Marxism-Mariáteguism, through Quechua cosmology. As opposed to the migrant vanguards of _Yawar Fiesta_, Gabriel’s

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360 George Lukács offers one of the best summaries of this idea in his study of Lenin on the vanguard party: “Lenin’s idea of party organization therefore contains as fixed poles: the strictest selection of party members on the basis of their proletarian class-consciousness, and total solidarity with and support for all the oppressed and exploited within capitalist society. Thus he dialectically united exclusive singleness of purpose, and universality – the leadership of the revolution in strictly proletarian terms and its general national (and international) character.” Georg Lukács, _Lenin: A Study of the Unity of His Thought_ (London: Verso, 2009), 30.

361 At this point, I am channeling Félix Guattari’s discussion of autonomist politics in Italy, which resonates in surprising ways with the anti-sectarian Mariátegui of the united front, for Guattari describes new political movements as “multi-centered” and emphasizes that, within such political formations, “contradiction does not paralyze action.” Félix Guattari, “The Proliferation of Margins,” _Autonomia: Post-Political Politics_, eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi (California: Semiotext(e), 2007), 110.


363 For the reading of Mariátegui as an orthodox vanguardist, see Prado, “Mariátegui, Marxista-Leninista,” _Mariátegui y los orígenes del marxismo latinoamericano_, 71 – 92.
migrant radicalism illuminates the possibility of a different kind of relationship between the Peruvian Left and indigenous culture that is more reciprocal in nature.

*Foundational Exclusions*

Before examining two moments in the novel during which a united front explicitly emerges, it will be helpful to consider what sustains the divisions between communists and *apristas* as that is precisely what must be destabilized if a non-party alliance is to materialize. The reader is invited to reflect on this issue when Pedro, the vanguardist leader of the vanguard communist party, poses the following question to Gabriel and Cámac: “[W]hy have the leaders of APRA never agreed to a united front with us?”

Although he never explicitly answers his own question, Pedro does so implicitly when he attempts to convince Gabriel and Cámac that the *aprista* party should be viewed with hatred as an enemy of the working class. Consider the following exchange:

- Hate, Cámac, is the sacred flame of the communist. Without that weapon, without that invincible force, we will not unite all peoples, we will not create their eternal brotherhood. We will not transform the world.
- And the hated? – I asked.
- They obey or they die. APRA is only a passing incident in Peru. We Marxists constitute the future, the world force of renovation.

For Pedro, a new, communist world requires that certain elements be purged (death) or reincorporated in such a way that their difference undergoes erasure (obedience). The aim is to hegemonize or eliminate any and all remainder in the march towards the future. Far from an

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empty container for all the particulars, this kind of universal rests on the violent foundational exclusion of some particulars. While a communist universalism has always implied some procedure of exclusion, since Marx’s own discussion of the proletariat as a negating and self-negating force, Pedro’s sectarian translation of this doctrine leads him to view potential allies as enemies.\textsuperscript{366} It is, in fact, an excellent example of the ultraleftist “class against class” strategy, which became the \textit{doxa} of Stalinized communist parties after the 1928 Sixth Congress of the Communist International, a strategy that identified all non-communist left-wing organizations as petit-bourgeois enemies of the working class.\textsuperscript{367} Pedro’s universalism, which reflects this strategy, forecloses the very possibility of a united front of multiple universalist political logics.

Luis, Pedro’s \textit{aprista} double, appropriately mirrors the latter’s sectarian universalism when he describes the communists: “The communists do not have a nation, nor a homeland, nor a destiny. […] They work for a foreign country, all for a salary. We \textit{apristas} represent Peru, we are its body, its blood. […] We will crush [the communists] no matter what, like venomous snakes!”\textsuperscript{368} In this passage, Luis articulates a universal of the nation-state by claiming that his party represents all of Peru. For this universal to emerge discursively, some of Peru, its communists, must be violently excluded as nationless agents of a foreign power just as dangerous as venomous snakes. As with Pedro, a universal claim at the center of a political party is constituted on the violent exclusion of a potential ally of the Left.\textsuperscript{369} The novel thus

\textsuperscript{366} Marx develops this idea in various texts throughout his \textit{oeuvre}, but some classic formulations of it can be found in Karl Marx (with Friedrich Engels), \textit{The German Ideology} (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998).


\textsuperscript{368} Arguedas, “El Sexto,” 265.

\textsuperscript{369} Zizek develops this issue of the role of exclusion in the articulation of universality in a particularly helpful way during his exchange with Butler and Laclau. The fundamental question
reveals how the *desencuentro* between the Peruvian communist party and the *aprista* party is sustained inside the prison by not merely alternative, but seemingly mutually exclusive articulations of the universal, for both groups, as a matter of doctrine, envision a future without the other. This revelation, I would add, functions as yet another example of Arguedas using literature to supplement theory, since *El Sexto*, in the name of the united front, exposes the limits of the discursive frames that encase and therefore isolate the dominant groups of the Peruvian Left.

**Threading Together Competing Universalities**

Yet *El Sexto* includes two significant examples of alliances that momentarily reconfigure the seemingly incompatible claims of communism and *aprismo*. A united front emerges, for example, when the communists, *apristas*, and independent political prisoners collectively protest the actions of Puñalada and Maravi, two non-political prisoners who collect a profit by forcing a physically weak inmate named Clavel to engage in acts of prostitution. The timing of this alliance is particularly significant for my argument. Instead of providing an account of the negotiation between the opposing political parties that would eventually lead to the formation of an allied bloc, the narrative of *El Sexto* turns to Gabriel comforting his cellmate Cámac because the latter’s “healthy eye lost its light, its profound radiance became muddled.”[^370] It is as though Cámac’s incarceration is causing him to lose sight of his Andean cosmovision and the joy that radiates from it. At one moment, Gabriel states: “Brother, you feel that there is a *universe* in

those human bodies that dance or that play the harp and the clarinet or the pinkullo and the siku." With this exchange, Gabriel attempts to rekindle the light of Cámac’s eye by reminding him of indigenous dances and songs that evoke the sensation not merely of a region but also of a universe.

The light eventually returns to Cámac’s eye, but, surprisingly, he turns to Gabriel and states, “only the communists…,” at which point Gabriel promptly interrupts him and retorts: “But I am not a communist, Cámac. Many uphold the ideals of justice and liberty, perhaps better than the communists.” This exchange appears to be an abrupt shift in the conversation, since it quickly moves from a discussion of indigenous culture to a discussion of party politics. But the disagreement between Cámac and Pedro can also be read as an obvious continuation or extension of what came before if Gabriel’s translation of an Andean cosmovision is once more interpreted as gesturing not merely towards a universal vision of a world of three interconnected worlds but also towards a kind of “universe” of three aligned world(view)s. If justice and liberty name the universal claims of communism and aprismo respectively then Gabriel demands a re-articulation of these claims, their translation, such that they would no longer be founded on the ultra-leftist exclusion of independent leftists. The reader is not offered an account of the negotiation between the communists and apristas regarding the prostitution of Clavel, even though this negotiation is happening at the same time, because all of the elements for such a negotiation are already being staged during the conversation between Gabriel and Cámac. What would be the practical expression of the universal claims of justice and liberty if they were subtracted from the confines of party politics and reimagined through Quechua cosmology? The novel suggests that these claims would materialize as a united front against a common enemy, for Gabriel’s

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371 Ibid [my emphasis].
372 Ibid., 274.
discussion with Cámac literally anticipates a scene in which Pedro and Luis invite Gabriel to join their common struggle against the involuntary prostitution of Clavel.

Although Gabriel, Luis, and Pedro meet with the head commissary to address the situation, they are beaten and ridiculed for speaking up and Clavel’s prostitution continues with tacit consent from the prison officials. While Gabriel attempts to preserve the coalition despite its defeat, Luis and Pedro retreat to their old ways of treating each other and the alliance dissolves. Something like a united front momentarily congeals once again, however, when all of the political prisoners attend an actuación, a kind of funeral ceremony, to pay homage to Cámac after his death due to the unhealthy conditions of the prison.\(^{373}\) The actuación begins with the communist prisoners singing the Internacional while the apristas remain silent. Pedro then embarks on a long speech, which includes the following statement: “Here […] they have thrown us, apristas and communists, because we fight for a Peru without criminals, without exploiters, without bosses.”\(^{374}\) This passage is rather remarkable and unexpected within the narrative of El Sexto, for Pedro uncharacteristically enunciates a politics beyond party politics that derives a political claim from a concrete situation rather than from the platform of a political group. His prior universalism is thus transformed through the creation of a new, multi-centered “us” founded on a zone of confluence between competing political logics. This confluence does not eliminate all disagreement, but it does facilitate common action. Accordingly, when the Internacional is sung in this instance, it does not function as a song of exclusionary political affiliation but rather sets the stage for Pedro’s pronouncement of a new collectivity, an International of Internationals. In Butler’s words, Pedro performs “a rethinking of universality

\(^{373}\) Ibid., 293.  
\(^{374}\) Ibid., 297.
itself, a sundering of the term into its competing semantic operations […] and a threading together of those competing terms into an unwieldy movement.”

Upon concluding his speech, Pedro calls out “Glory to the great fighter […] Alejandro Cámac!” and only the communists repeat “Glory!” At this point Mok’ontullo, an aprista laborer from Arequipa,

stepped out of his line. […] He raised his arms and cried out:

- Viva the great fighter, Alejandro Cámac!
- Viva! – about half of the apristas responded.
- Viva APRA, comrades!
- Viva! – all of the apristas responded.

Afterwards […] he began to sing:

‘Apristas to the struggle…’

All of his comrades joined Mok’ontullo. The communists intoned the International.

Mok’ontullo steps out of the line formation of aprista prisoners to break with or step out of the aprista party line, to interrupt the apristas’s uniform silence with a chant to commemorate the life of a communist. Mok’ontullo does not exactly abandon his party so much as invite others to join him in the reconfiguration of the party line, in the critical translation of its sectarian universalism. He accordingly does not repeat Pedro’s call but rather issues his own, which, although different, shares a common aim. Mok’ontullo and Pedro, the apristas and the communists, then sing the same universalist revolutionary hymns that began the novel. This time, however, they sing their different songs together rather than competing with each other.

375 Butler, “Competing Universalities,” Contingency, Hegemony, Universality, 168 [my emphasis].
377 Ibid., 298.
This is perhaps the most powerful image in the novel of what the united front might look like in practice.\textsuperscript{378}

\paragraph*{A New Genealogy of Political Formations}

After the ceremony, Gabriel returns to his empty cell and continues to reflect on his friendship with Cámac. At one point, during a conversation with Pedro, Gabriel even predicts the future return of his fallen cellmate:

[In the mining town of] Cerro de Pasco, or in Morococha, the Indian Alejandro Cámac will remain keeping watch. If some new form of slavery appears, whatever it may be, Cámac will once again burst into life, organizing the tyrannized. He will summon them, releasing voices, just as Pachacámac….\textsuperscript{379}

\textsuperscript{378} As before, this united front formation eventually dissolves and the two parties continue to view each other as enemies until the next attempt to form an alliance. Cornejo Polar contends that the united front’s dissolution represents one of many examples in \textit{El Sexto} of a tragic repetition that reveals “the uselessness of all fraternal gestures.” I find this pessimistic reading of political action in the novel unconvincing. The united front is an inherently unstable organization that is not meant to be permanent, particularly insofar as it is formed around a shared aim rather than a deeper ideological principle. The dissolution of the united front is therefore not necessarily a tragic event, nor does dissolution always undermine what the united front accomplishes during its materialization. While Cornejo Polar contrasts the tragic repetition of \textit{El Sexto} with the utopian repetition of rebirth in Arguedas’s short story “La agonía de Rasu-Ñiti,” I would suggest that the appearance and reappearance of united front formations throughout \textit{El Sexto} likewise points to a utopian possibility of rebirth, to the always-possible reemergence of an alliance between conflicting political logics. See Cornejo Polar, \textit{“El Sexto}. Las cárcceles infinitas,” \textit{Los universos narrativos de José María Arguedas}, 161 – 166.

\textsuperscript{379} Arguedas, \textit{“El Sexto,”} 301.
This comparison between Cámac and the *huaca* or deity Pachacámac is complex and multilayered. Pachacámac in Quechua means “creator of the world,” so Gabriel is foretelling not merely the return of his friend but literally the recreation, the *cámac*, of the world. Gabriel’s remarks could accordingly be read as constituting a rethinking of world revolution through indigenous concepts, a theoretical practice with a long history in Andean political thought, including, most recently, Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar’s analysis of Bolivian social movements via the related notion of *pachakuti* or the rhythmic overturning (*kuti*) of space-time (*pacha*).³⁸⁰

Through its particular representation of Pachacámac, the above passage also subtly evokes the indigenous political and cultural movement of the 1560s known as Taqui Onqoy. The movement’s name, which translates as “Song of Sickness,” refers to the music to which indigenous peoples would dance in an effort to call upon a number of deities to wipe out the Spaniards with disease. Rather than an Incan movement, Taqui Onqoy brought together the cosmological beliefs of a number of non-Incan indigenous communities from the Peruvian coast to Lake Titicaca, forming what one archeologist has referred to as “a confederation of huacas.”³⁸¹

This passage from *El Sexto* thus recalls an indigenous movement that could itself be described as a kind of united front of different universalist perspectives that would come together, through song, to overthrow a common enemy. Since the novel notes that the miners of Cerro de Pasco


and Morococha are divided between communism and aprismo, Cámac can only follow the example of Pachacámac if, upon his return, he likewise unites the miners around a shared aim rather assimilating their differences to the communist party.

It is noteworthy that, in a novel written about an experience precipitated by the Spanish Civil War, Arguedas includes no clear reference to the kind of experimentation with political organization that that event inspired. Instead, he reaches back further in time to an indigenous movement involved in a similar form of organizational experimentation. This gesture establishes an alternative, critical genealogy of political organization. If El Sexto rethinks the united front through Quechua cosmology, this final passage suggests that such a rethinking entails not only translating a historically European form of organization but also destabilizing the very Eurocentric notion that such a form of organization is without precedent in the Andes. In other words, the novel constellates different political traditions, constructing a new, reciprocal relationship of translation between Marxism-Mariáteguism and indigenous culture, so as to imagine a future world. For Arguedas, this represents the radical possibility of literature’s supplementarity, its capacity to enhance socialist theory so as to move past the desencuentro provoked by its limits.
Chapter Three

Frantz Fanon

Introduction: Two Fanons

A year after the publication of his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Frantz Fanon, as a newly certified psychiatrist and *chef de service* at the Saint-Alban hospital in Blinda-Joinville, Algeria, ordered that all institutionalized patients be released from their straitjackets. This unorthodox freedom within the confines of the psychiatric wing of the hospital was part of an experiment, the first step towards implementing an alternative method of *sociothérapie* that aimed to treat mental illness through group and cultural activities.\(^{382}\) In this particular case, the

method’s implementation also led to the desegregation of all patients such that settlers and natives lived and worked together. Patients, doctors, and staff contributed, moreover, to the production of a journal whose various titles, first Trait d’Union [Hyphen] and later Notre Journal [Our Journal], underscored the connecting lines sociothérapie aspired to draw, linking different sectors of the hospital by uniting them around a common organ.

Fanon wrote a number of short essays in this journal that have never been anthologized and that are just as rarely discussed. In one essay, entitled “Memory and Journal,” Fanon uses an extended metaphor to describe how the journal as medium can combat sentiments of isolation: “On a boat, it is commonplace to say that you are between the sky and the water, that you are cut off from the world, that you are alone. It is precisely the journal that fights against that letting go [laisser-aller], against that solitude. […] The boat, although isolated, maintains contact with the exterior, which is to say with the world.”

The ship in this passage could be read as an allusion to the patient, whose psychic condition and physical confinement has led to generalized alienation. It could also be read as an allusion to the psychiatric hospital itself, an institution that has historically aimed to confine madness and isolate it from society. While the journal aims to ameliorate individual isolation by facilitating self-expression, its sections devoted to recent events and cultural phenomena aim to combat the isolation of hospitalization by acting as conduits that allow the world beyond the walls to cross over into the institutional space. With the aid of the journal, the individual and the institution take on new meaning as vessels capable of establishing contact and passage.

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383 Frantz Fanon, “Mémoire et journal,” Trait d’Union N. 1 (December 24, 1953), no page number [my translation].
384 Fanon’s metaphor conjures the imaginary and real historical constellation of madness, boats, and water. As Michel Foucault argues in Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, the “ship of fools” was an actually existing institution that captured the
the institution from the world becomes the line – the hyphen – that connects previously separate entities.\textsuperscript{385}

At one point in “Memory and Journal,” Fanon extends his reflections on the journal to consider the practice of writing in general: “To write is certainly the most beautiful of discoveries, for it enables man to remember, to present that which has happened and above all to communicate with others, even if absent.”\textsuperscript{386} In this passage, Fanon asserts that writing makes possible not only communication but also remembrance or memory. Yet the passage also suggests that the two practices made possible by writing may be more closely interrelated. In other words, perhaps Fanon is suggesting in this concise statement that writing permits not only communication \textit{and} memory but also communication \textit{with} memory or communication with those “others” who are absent and exist only in memory and in writing. Writing could thus be understood as a form of communicating with the dead, of producing or prolonging their imagination of many writers and painters during the Renaissance. It was a boat of madmen who were sent out to sea in an attempt to exile madness from society. This “embarkation” of madness, however, was also viewed as a purifying passage that would eventually allow for a “disembarkation.” According to Foucault, “confinement” within the walls of the mental hospital historically replaced the practice of embarkation, which is why the ship of fools is treated as the first figure in a book on the history of insanity. It is striking that Fanon’s metaphor of the boat captures the polyvalent significance of “embarkation” as both isolation and passage. Although it is unlikely that Foucault read this obscure essay in the barely-circulated internal journal of Saint-Alban’s psychiatric wing, Fanon’s metaphor in many ways anticipates Foucault’s genealogical analysis of madness and its circulation from boats to hospitals. Thanks to Ana Sabau for pointing out this similarity. Michel Foucault, \textit{Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason}, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 3 – 37.\textsuperscript{385} Just as the border of the individual became more fluid when the straightjackets were removed, Fanon’s experimentation with day hospitalization, as documented in his co-written medical paper, “Day Hospitalization in Psychiatry: Value and Limits,” demonstrates a commitment to making institutional borders more porous and crossable. See Frantz Fanon and C. Geromini, “L’Hospitalisation de jour en psychiatrie, valeur et limites,” \textit{La Tunisie médicale}, Vol. 38, No. 10 (1959), 713 – 732. For a helpful discussion of Fanon’s experimentation with day hospitalization, see Nigel C. Gibson, \textit{Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination} (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 91, 92.\textsuperscript{386} Fanon, “Mémoire et journal,” no page number [my translation].
afterlives. While Fanon’s writings engage in many, sometimes heated, conversations with his contemporaries, including most notably Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and Jean-Paul Sartre, his writings are also in conversation with many thinkers from the past, such as Hegel, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. A central focus of this chapter will accordingly be Fanon’s relationship with the dead or, more precisely, the way his writings enter into conversation with and translate the dead, thereby contributing to the extension of their afterlives.

Though Fanon rarely uses the word “translation,” Robert J. C. Young rightly notes that translation, broadly conceived, is a “guiding thread” throughout Fanon’s life and works. Young also suggests that “[p]erhaps nothing in Fanon’s life so decisively represented his politics of translation as his dramatic entrance to the hospital at Blinda-Joinville, translating the patients from passive, victimized objects into subjects who began to recognize that they were in charge of their own destiny.” While Fanon’s experiments with transforming the institutional space of psychiatry and the way individuals relate to each other within that space constitute translational practices as well, Young emphasizes the translational process of subjectivization, something Fanon normally theorizes, in both clinical and (more overtly) political settings, as a process of mutation.

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387 This list could of course include many more thinkers, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Lenin. For a careful reading of Fanon that situates his theorization of political will alongside Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jaconinism and Lenin and Bolshevism, see Peter Hallward, “Fanon and the Political Will,” Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2011) 104 – 127.
389 Young, Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction, 144.
390 In the interview with Nergaard, Young suggests that when Fanon uses the word “mutation” he is essentially describing a translational process. Nigel Gibson underlines the centrality in Fanon’s work of this concept, “mutation,” in the following book chapter: Nigel Gibson, “Radical
Fanon’s theorization of mutation will be discussed at length below. At this point, however, I would like to note that if Fanon’s actions during his early days at the Saint-Alban hospital most decisively exemplify his politics of translation, Fanon’s reconsideration a year later of these experiments perhaps most decisively represent Fanon’s critical awareness of his own failure to translate. In a medical paper entitled “Sociothérapie in the case of Muslim Men: Methodological Difficulties,” which Fanon co-wrote with his colleague Jacques Azouley, there appears a self-critique of the application, without translation, of sociothérapie in Algeria. Although Fanon found that some patients, namely European women settlers living in Algeria, responded well to the method, it did not have an equally positive effect on other patients, specifically native Muslim men. These latter patients oftentimes refused to participate in the organized group and cultural activities. They were suspicious of gatherings and celebrations that did not have a religious or familial basis, they felt uncomfortable singing in groups and acting in plays, they found the films to be boring, and many ignored the journal because they could not read it.

Fanon and Azouley suggest that this resistance to the activities of sociothérapie is the result of their own naïveté as European-trained doctors who applied their method without attending to the specificity of the method’s new site of implementation:

We had naively thought of our division as a totality [comme un tout]. […] We wanted to create institutions, and we forgot that all such development should be preceded by a tenacious, concrete, and real interrogation of the organic basis of the autochthonous society. What lapse in judgment led us to believe that it would be possible to help

Muslim madmen with a Western form of *sociothérapie*? How would a structural analysis be possible if geographic, cultural, and social conditions were put in parentheses?\(^{391}\)

As Fanon and Azouley contend, the method of *sociothérapie* is not universally applicable, it cannot be viewed as already whole in itself. It is this mistaken view that led them to graft a historically determined framework onto a society that could not fit its contours because it did not share the same historical conditions. It is equally important to note, however, that Fanon and Azouley do not stop at the provincialization of *sociothérapie*, at the critical recognition of its determinate limits, but rather go on to suggest that a structural analysis *is* possible once geographic, cultural, and social specificities are taken into consideration. Translating the method of *sociothérapie* so as to attend to the particular would thus contribute to the method’s concrete universalization, to its deprovincialized expansion beyond the limits of European society.\(^{392}\)

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\(^{392}\) Fanon’s translational response to provincial universalism as a form of deprovincialized and concrete universalization is oftentimes completely obscured by so-called “decolonial” readings of Fanon. This is nowhere more clear than in Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s reading of Fanon in *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity*, which repeatedly argues that Fanon “opposes the move to an abstract universalism with an emphasis in concrete particularity” and that Fanon’s humanist philosophy constitutes a “de-colonial suspension of the universal.” In Fanon, there is no facile dichotomy between abstract universalism and concrete particularity. Rather, abstract universalism, once identified and critiqued, is transformed/translated through its dialectical encounter with the particular, resulting in the substantiation of concrete universality, a notion that decolonial thought is incapable of thinking. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres, *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 152, 158. Walter Mignolo comes close to recognizing this project of translating and concretizing universals precisely during his discussion, in *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, of Mariátegui, Fanon, and the Zapatistas. Nevertheless, in the 2012 preface to that book, he enunciates what has become the standard decolonial critique of a straw-man Hegel, stating that his work “reduces Hegel’s thesis [regarding the abstract subject] to its own local history and fully rejects its pretense to universality.” This study aims to demonstrate how any such facile rejection of universality would bar a thinker from claiming Mariátegui, Fanon, or the Zapatistas as part of his or her intellectual heritage. See Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, of Mariátegui, Fanon, and the Zapatistas.
It is worth noting that this medical paper, which critiques the application of an untranslated method while implicitly calling for the method’s translation, contains within its critique a critique of translation itself. Since Fanon could not speak Arabic or Berber, a translator or interpreter was required during interactions with many of his patients. Fanon and Azouley describe the scene accordingly:

The doctor, and especially the psychiatrist, makes his diagnosis through language. […]

At that moment, the interpreter summarizes in two words what the patient describes in detail over the course of ten minutes: ‘He says they took his land or that his wife cheated on him.’ Oftentimes, the interpreter, in his own way, ‘interprets’ the thought of the patient according to stereotypical formulas, removing all of its richness. Since so much is lost in translation, particularly when the interpreter has recourse to stereotypes, diagnosis through translated speech is necessarily limited, perhaps even impossible.

In a sense, Fanon and Azouley are gesturing towards the *untranslatability* of a patient’s speech and the limits of analytic diagnosis across languages. As Diana Fuss rightly points out, “[s]trictly speaking, the speech Fanon analyzes in the sessions with his Muslim patients is the translator’s, not the patient’s, a situation that impossibly confuses the analytic process and

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*Thinking* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), xiv, 140, 141. To my knowledge, George Ciccariello-Maher is the only thinker aligned with decolonial thought that fully recognizes Fanon’s universalist aspirations; however, Ciccariello-Maher’s broader project of theorizing what he calls “decolonial realism” shares many presuppositions with Maldonado-Torres and Mignolo and for that reason equates the universal to the abstract. The adjective “abstract,” in other words, no longer distinguishes some universals from their concrete counterparts but rather becomes synonymous with anything that claims universality: “If realism generally understood rejects such abstract universals, decolonial realism sets out from a more resolute rejection of existing reality and a more concrete recognition of the dangers of such universals, which often do more to uphold ontological apartheid than to tear it down.” See George Ciccariello-Maher, “Decolonial Realism: Ethics, Politics, and Dialectics in Fanon and Dussel,” *Contemporary Politics Theory Vol. 13, No. 1* (2014), 4 – 10, 12, 13.

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Azouley and Fanon, “La sociothérapie,” 1104 [my translation].
urgently poses the question of whether a therapeutic model constructed in one language or culture can be so easily or uncritically translated into another." While the patient’s speech may be untranslatable, there is no indication throughout this very self-critical paper that Fanon and Azouley felt the same way about the method of sociothérapie. The necessary transformation of the method would therefore require a very different kind of translation, one that would be not easy but tenacious, not uncritical but concrete. Such a translation would entail a prior investigation into the real social, cultural, and geographic conditions of the method’s new site. It would also require, as this passage implicitly recommends, that the doctor learn the language(s) of the new site.

Nevertheless, in other writings from the same period Fanon appears to take a more radical stance, one that searches for clinical and political strategies beyond translation. Returning to Fanon’s writings in the hospital journal, an essay entitled “Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow” represents, as the title suggests, another rumination on time and memory. The main argument of the article holds that it is important to remain cognizant during treatment of the past, the present, and the future in order to avoid repressing the past, living the present without hope, or circumscribing the future to repetition. Yet there is a brief moment of tension, an emergence of something discordant, within this general prescription. Fanon writes that “memory should not predominate in man. Memory is oftentimes the mother of tradition. And if it is good to have tradition, it is also pleasurable to depose/eliminate that tradition [il est aussi agréable de déposer/déplisser cette tradition] in order to invent the new mode of life [inventer le nouveau

mode de vie].” This is an extraordinary thing for a psychoanalytically informed psychiatrist to write, especially while in the midst of prescribing thoughtful reflection on the past. It almost appears like a lapsus – with jarring implications – insofar as it reveals Fanon to be divided or at odds with himself. Unlike what has been discussed thus far, Fanon, in this passage, calls for supplanting (déposer) the reign of tradition, for ironing out (déplisser) its imprint on one’s memory, in order to clear room for the invention of a new form of life. Rather than portraying tradition as something that should be translated, that will find its afterlife in this new form of life or that is this new form of life in an altered state, Fanon articulates an alternative project that begins by ceasing to translate. In this alternative project, the overthrow of the past, the death of tradition, is a precondition for the creation of the future. It is as though Fanon is saying, as he ironically suggests in Black Skin, White Masks with a quotation from Marx, that sometimes it is best to let the dead bury the dead, that new life can emerge after afterlife.  

If translation is a guiding thread throughout Fanon’s life and work, creation or invention beyond translation is equally a guiding thread. While future work will more fully substantiate this claim, in what follows I will focus on Black Skin, White Masks to demonstrate its validity for Fanon’s early thought. It is my contention that Fanon is ultimately split between two projects or modes of thinking that have at their core divergent notions of historical change and the emergence of the new. While these modes of thinking sometimes appear to be mutually

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395 Frantz Fanon, “Hier, aujourd’hui, demain,” Trait d’Union N. 138 (March 6, 1953), no page number [my translation].
396 See Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 198. John Drabinski, although seemingly unaware of this archival material, pinpoints the very same tension in Fanon’s thought when he considers “the role of memory and history in the radical break” of The Wretched of the Earth. Although, according to Drabinski, memory does play an important role is motivating radical change, he also locates in Fanon’s thinking a “troubling imperative to forget” that is at odds with the radical potential of remembrance. See John E. Drabinski, “Fanon’s Two Memories,” The South Atlantic Quarterly 112:1 (Winter 2013), 5 – 22.
exclusive, they are not always opposed to each other and occasionally co-exist without contradiction in Fanon’s writings. The more well-known or classical project of translation is rooted in a dialectical theory of mutation that views past and present methods, traditions, technology, and subjects as translatable material that can meaningfully contribute to, and therefore be preserved and sublated in, the construction of the future. We see this theory of change in practice when Fanon repurposes psychoanalytic, psychiatric, existential, Enlightenment, and Marxist thought for the analysis of race, colonialism, and the struggle for liberation in the Caribbean, in Africa, and beyond. Nevertheless, even during these moments in Fanon’s writings, another, minor Fanon sporadically appears and reappears who enunciates a more radical or subterranean project, a project that unevenly and discordantly interrupts translation with alternatives to it. This subterranean mode of thinking conceives of change as a non-dialectical break with or sometimes destruction of the past followed by genuine invention and creation.

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397 This interpretation of Fanon as split throughout his life between a classical and a subterranean mode of thinking is directly influenced by and borrows from Emilio de Ípola’s invaluable presentation of Louis Althusser’s dividedness. See Emilio de Ípola, *Althusser: el infinito adiós* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2007).

398 There is a third mode of thinking that Homi Bhabha sometimes attributes to Fanon while at other times recognizing that he is actually diverging from Fanon’s thought. This third mode of thinking, according to Bhabha, “is effective […] to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of translation: a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other, properly alienates our political expectations.” Bhabha, in other words, is describing translation as a non-dialectical procedure of “negotiation” of “contradictory and antagonistic instances” that “destroy[s…] negative polarities” and creates new, “hybrid sites.” This is a fascinating account of translation in its own right; however, it is ultimately unhelpful for comprehending Fanon’s thought insofar as it obscures the immensely important tension in Fanon’s writings between a dialectical project of translation/mutation and a non-dialectical project of total, rather than negotiated, destruction and creation. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 37. For Bhabha admitting that this line of thinking ultimately diverges from Fanon, even as he uses Fanon to articulate it, see ibid., 88 – 90.
It would be a mistake to construe the relationship between Fanon’s classical and subterranean thinking as one of symmetrical opposition, as though translation and dialectical universalization were on one side and anti-translation and non-dialectical anti-universalization were on the other side. When Fanon describes the new form of life that would follow the overthrow of tradition’s reign, he does not qualify it as a new Arab or Muslim or Algerian form of life. The formulation is generic; he announces the possibility of a new mode of existence without qualification. Such an open formulation hints at something that appears and reappears often in Fanon’s writings, namely the possible emergence of a genuinely alternative universalism irreducible to the universalisms of the past. This universalism, in other words, would not even be the deprovincialized translation of a prior yet transformed universalism. Rather, Fanon is hinting at the invention of a new universalism that, by the fiery nature of its own creation, would reduce any prior universalisms to ashes. I accordingly maintain that neither Fanon’s classical project nor his subterranean project gives up on the universal. Their divergence, on the contrary, stems from how each project approaches the emergence or becoming of the universal – either through a process of concretizing translation or of absolute destruction and creation.

My interpretation of Fanon’s oeuvre aims to offer an alternative to three major trends among Fanon’s readers and critics. The first trend, already discussed above, makes illegible Fanon’s universalism in an effort to construct a “decolonial” school of thought. The second trend, which applies to a much larger field of critical work on Fanon, starkly periodizes his writings and therefore blurs the many continuities between his early and late thought, replacing these continuities with a facile “progression from psychiatric practice to political theory” or from
As Anthony Alessandrini rightly notes, the very last line of *The Wretched of the Earth* is mistranslated as “we must make a new start” rather than “we must create new skin [il faut faire peau neuve],” and this mistranslation of a clear allusion to Fanon’s first book at the end of his last book is symptomatic of the erasure of such allusions and connections within the critical literature on Fanon. While I cannot treat Fanon’s entire *oeuvre* in this chapter, I will show how his early work cannot be subtracted from its radical political implications in an effort to counteract naïve periodization. Finally, the interpretation developed in this chapter opposes those readers and critics of Fanon who blur the decidedly unresolved tensions and contradictions in Fanon’s writings. There are two tendencies within this third trend – either the disavowal and obfuscation of said tensions or the complete resolution of overt contradictions through interpretive acrobatics. What I am proposing, on the contrary, is

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399 Jock McCulloch, *Black Soul, White Artifact*, 85. Even David Macey, Fanon’s most dedicated biographer and one of his closest readers, is not immune to the temptation of periodizing Fanon’s writings into an early, pre-political period and a late, revolutionary period: “Nothing in his early work anticipates the theses on the cleansing and liberating effects of revolutionary violence with which he would be come so closely associated.” David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (New York, Verso Books, 2012), 202.


401 Bhabha’s reading of Fanon is a particularly notable example of disavowing the latter’s tensions and contradictions insofar as Bhabha acknowledges them only to then unacknowledge them. Bhabha writes, for example, that Fanon “may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change.” This recognition of division, of at least two different and perhaps antagonistic tendencies in Fanon’s thinking, is then quickly replaced by its disavowal: “For Fanon such a myth of Man and Society is fundamentally undermined in the colonial situation.” Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 57, 62. Ato Sekyi-Otu’s ingenious but ultimately unconving close reading of *The Wretched of the Earth* on the other hand, best exemplifies the tendency to neatly resolve, rather than untidily disavow, Fanon’s contradictions and tensions. For Sekyi-Otu, the later chapters of *The Wretched of the Earth* are to be read as dialectical revisions of the naïve and absolute claims of its first pages, such that *The Wretched of the Earth*, like Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, moves from
a detailed analysis of Fanon’s writings that forefronts those tensions and contradictions in an
effort to track their persistence and develop their implications. Such an analysis requires
beginning again at the beginning.

**Black Skin, White Masks**

*Translating Descartes, Marx, Freud, Césaire...and Nietzsche?*

Fanon’s introduction to *Black Skin, White Masks* is one of his most complicated and
lyrical pieces of writing. Its form vacillates between prose and poetry, oftentimes interrupting
the development of an idea with erratic line breaks, vivid imagery, and rapid shifts in focus and
content. It reads much like the most powerful sections of Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*,
from which Fanon extracts a passage to use as his opening epigraph. *Black Skin, White Masks*
thus begins with citation; it refers to, while at the same time participating in, a certain tradition of
thought. Fanon’s very gesture of citation, in fact, could be read as citational, as a nod of sorts to
Césaire’s own nod to René Descartes’s “charter of universalism,” his *Discourse on Method*.402 If
the title of Césaire’s pamphlet implicitly alludes to Descartes’s work, this allusion becomes
explicit when Césaire notes that intellectuals have contributed to “the cause” of colonialism by
immediacy to rational judgment. The fundamental flaw with this teleological interpretation is
that it ignores how some of Fanon’s most absolute statements, the statements that most strongly
resonate with the opening claims of *The Wretched of the Earth*, can be found precisely at the end
of the book, in its concluding chapter. Rather than a progressive teleological overcoming, the
book’s movement is more akin to a repetition with difference punctuated by the appearance and
reappearance of contradictions and tensions. Whereas Sekyi-Otu proposes that the only
alternative to his “dialectical” reading of Fanon is “[attributing] to Fanon’s imagination a
perverse delight in self-contradiction,” I would argue that the truly dialectical reading would not
attempt to resolve every contradiction through interpretation but would instead recognize,
preserve, and make visible those very contradictions. Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of

refuting Descartes’s axiomatic proposition that “reason…is found whole and entire in each man” and that, “where individuals of the same species are concerned, there may be degrees in respect of their accidental qualities, but not in respect of their forms, or natures.”adows Fanon’s epigraph accordingly situates his work as contributing to this tradition from the start, a tradition of universalist thinking that runs from Descartes to Césaire and beyond.

The passage Fanon extracts from *Discourse on Colonialism* describes colonialism’s process of subjectivization, its anti-universalist impulse to systematically fracture and differentiate the human species along racial lines: “I am talking about millions of men whom they have knowingly instilled with fear and a complex of inferiority, whom they have infused with despair and trained to tremble, to kneel and behave like flunkeys.” The brief prose that follows this epigraph is quickly interrupted by a list of interrelated yet disparate statements. Given their proximity to Fanon’s own ideas, this interruption could be interpreted as representing a surge of possible responses to the hierarchized condition of human alienation. The list includes: “Striving for a New Humanism. Understanding Mankind. Our Black Brothers. I believe in you, Man. Radical Prejudice. Understanding and Love.” Fanon nevertheless quiets the “bombardment” of these thoughts in order to reexamine the effects of colonial subjectivization through the lens of desire: “What does man want? What does the black man want? […] The black man wants to be white. The white man is desperately trying to achieve the rank of man.” While the white man strives for self-realization, the black man strives to be other. This incongruent situation is the symptomatic expression of what both Césaire and Fanon describe as a complex of inferiority, and both thinkers are united in their aim to combat it.

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403 Descartes as cited by Césaire in ibid.
404 Aimé Césaire as quoted by Fanon in Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xi.
405 Ibid., xi.
406 Ibid., xii, xiii.
One possible form of combating an inferiority complex is the revalorization of that which has been inferiorized – in this case, blackness or *négritude*. Fanon, whose complicated relationship with *négritude* will be examined at length below, appears to be skeptical: “The white man is locked in his whiteness. The black in his blackness. We shall endeavor to determine the tendencies of this double narcissism and the motivations behind it.”

Rather than disalienation, a celebration of black particularity traps the subject and exchanges inferiority for narcissism. Fanon accordingly calls on another tradition of thinking to push the liberation process beyond this exchange of complexes:

We have just used the word ‘narcissism.’ We believe, in fact, that only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem can reveal the affective disorders responsible for this network of complexes. We are aiming for a complete lysis [une lyse totale] of this morbid universe. We believe that an individual must endeavor to assume the universalism inherent in the human condition. And in this regard, we are thinking equally of men like [Arthur de] Gobineau or women like Mayotte Capécia. But in order to apprehend this we urgently need to rid ourselves of a series of defects inherited from childhood.

Psychoanalysis, by aiding in the diagnosis of certain affective disorders, contributes to the liberation of the individual from inferiority and superiority complexes (Capécia vs Gobineau), as well as from narcissistic attachments to particularity. Disalienation, in other words, is the individual’s arrival, whether white or black, man or woman, at a universal human condition.

Yet Fanon’s discussion of disalienation implies a modification, a translation, of the tradition of Enlightenment universalism that runs from Descartes to Césaire, for Fanon inserts

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407 Ibid., xiii, xiv.
408 Ibid., xiv. For the original, see Frantz Fanon, “Peau Noire, Masques Blancs,” *Oeuvres*, 65.
the element of time into the articulation of an axiomatic principle. If Descartes considers reason to be a universal presupposition of man as a species, Fanon suggests that the universalism inherent in the human condition has not yet been realized because the human does not yet exist. The morbid universe created by colonialism, in other words, is inhuman.\footnote{This reading is greatly influenced by Nick Nesbitt’s discussion of revolutionary inhumanism in Fanon’s \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}. See Nick Nesbitt, \textit{Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant} (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 192 – 215.} Fanon describes the situation accordingly: “Uprooted, dispersed, dazed, and doomed to watch as the truths he has elaborated vanish one by one, [Man] must stop projecting his antinomy into the world [il doit cesser de projeter dans le monde une antinomie que lui est coexistante].”\footnote{Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, xii.} The truth of humanity’s universal condition, though already elaborated by thinkers like Descartes, is destroyed by its impossible coexistence with its antinomy in the world. Psychoanalysis, Fanon suggests, can contribute to a total rupture – like the lysis of a cell membrane – with this inhuman, antinomical situation. As Fanon states just a few paragraphs later: “We believe that the juxtaposition of the black and white races has resulted in a massive psycho-existential complex. By analyzing it we aim to destroy it.”\footnote{Ibid., xvi [my emphasis].}

One of the most cited passages of Fanon’s introduction elaborates on this condition of inhumanity as it pertains to \textit{le Noir}:

Running the risk of angering my black brothers, I shall say that a Black [le Noir] is not a man [un homme]. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can
emerge [d’où un authentique surgissement peut prendre naissance]. In most cases, the black man [le Noir] cannot take advantage of this descent into a veritable hell.\footnote{Ibid., xii. For the passage in the original French, see Fanon, “Peau Noire, Masques Blanes,” 63, 64.}

The translation of this passage takes some interpretive liberties that are ultimately misleading, but it does convey the profound idea of something being born out of nothing.\footnote{Lewis Gordon has noted that the translation of Black Skin, White Masks misleadingly genders \it{le Noir} as “the black man,” which leads Gordon to use the clunky but more accurate “the black” in his own discussion of Fanon. I have chosen to simply use the term in the original French throughout my discussion of the text, much like the decision of most commentators to use the untranslated neologism \it{negritude}, since I remain dissatisfied with any proposed alternatives. I nevertheless think that Gordon’s discussion of the translation too quickly passes over the gender politics of Fanon’s generic universalist terms. As this passage indicates, the ungendered generic term \it{le Noir} is quickly followed by the famously gendered generic term \it{homme}. \it{Le Noir}, for Fanon, is therefore in some sense already entangled in a masculinist formulation of universality even if, when considered on its own, in abstraction, this does not appear to be the case. Judith Butler has accordingly pointed out that at times both Fanon and Sartre remain caught in the equivocation of \it{homme} as both “human” and “man” even as their thought, particularly Fanon’s, seeks to reach “beyond the strictures of gender.” I will return below to Butler’s discussion of Fanon’s “new universality” beyond such strictures, which “begins, perhaps, precisely when decolonization ends.” See Lewis Gordon, \textit{What Fanon Said: A Philosophical Introduction to His Life and Thought} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 22. See also Judith Butler, “Violence, Nonviolence: Sartre on Fanon,” \textit{Senses of the Subject} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 182, 195, 196.} While the original French more explicitly croons existentialist notes of authenticity and individual freedom, a theme that is explored at other moments in the book as well, I want to underscore the structural similarity between this passage and the Marxist paradox of the proletariat, whose negative universality makes possible the positive universality of a communist society without classes. It could be said, in fact, that this passage translates the Marxist notion of substanceless proletarian subjectivity by theorizing the possibility, through a psychoanalytic intervention, of the dialectical conversion of the veritable hell of nonbeing into a genuinely new departure.
Fanon continues his conversation with Marx and Marxism when he implicitly evokes dialectical materialism as an underlying premise of his understanding of disalienation. As Fanon explains:

The analysis we are undertaking is psychological. It remains, nevertheless, evident that for us the true disalienation of the black man implies a brutal awareness of the social and economic realities. The inferiority complex can be ascribed to a double process: First, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority. [...] The black man must wage the struggle on two levels: whereas historically these levels are mutually dependent, any unilateral liberation is flawed, and the worst mistake would be to believe their mutual dependence automatic. [...] For once, reality requires total comprehension. An answer must be found on the objective as well as the subjective level. [...] Genuine disalienation will have been achieved only when things, in the most materialist sense, have resumed their rightful place.\textsuperscript{414}

Fanon’s initial presentation of the black man’s inferiority complex appears economistic, a simple application of dogmatic, rather than dialectical, materialism. He nevertheless clarifies the relationship between the objective and the subjective, between base and superstructure, by stating that historically these two spheres are mutually dependent, that a change in one sphere typically affects the other, although this reciprocity is not automatic or guaranteed. Fanon maintains accordingly that disalienation requires a struggle on two fronts, since a change in material conditions will not necessarily entail a change in psychic conditions and vice versa. Total comprehension of reality requires both Marxism and psychoanalysis and genuine disalienation requires a transformation in both material and psychic conditions. Periodizing

\textsuperscript{414} Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, xv.
Fanon’s thought as starkly divided between an early (pre-political) psychoanalytic or psychiatric stage and a later (radically) political stage is therefore ultimately deceiving because, for Fanon, the psyche is itself a region of the political battlefield and *Black Skin, White Masks* represents a radical psychoanalytic intervention in that very field.

As with Enlightenment universalism and Marxism, Fanon’s aim is not to merely apply psychoanalysis to the so-called “black problem.” Anticipating the conclusion of his self-critical reflection regarding *sociothérapie*, Fanon aims to translate the psychoanalytic method in light of the specificity of its new object of analysis. Consider the following passage:

Reacting against the constitutionalizing trend at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud demanded that the individual factor be taken into account in psychoanalysis. He replaced the phylogenetic theory by an ontogenetic approach. We shall see that the alienation of the black man is not an individual question. Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny.415

Instead of applying Freudian ideas, Fanon is responsible for a more radical project of repeating Freud, of performing the same critical gesture of revolutionizing the method of psychoanalysis to account for a different – social – factor of human experience.416 This translation of a translation

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416 This interpretation of Fanon as repeating Freud is greatly influenced by Slavoj Zizek’s own call to repeat, rather than to return to, Lenin, to repeat “in the present worldwide conditions, the Leninist gesture of reinventing the revolutionary project in the conditions of imperialism and colonialism.” See Slavoj Zizek, “Introduction: Between Two Revolutions,” *Revolution at the Gates: A Selection of Writings from February to October 1917* (New York: Verso, 2004), 11. Fanon’s amplification of psychoanalysis to the level of sociogeny may already be perceptible in certain texts by Freud himself, which is something that Freudian Marxists from Herbert Marcuse to León Rozitchner have attempted to demonstrate. See Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974). See also León Rozitchner, *Freud y los problemas del poder* (Buenos Aires: Losada, 2003).
is a repetition with difference that amplifies, rather than discards, a method inherited from the past.

Before moving on, it is important to notice how, even at this early stage in *Black Skin, White Masks*, there are numerous, latent tensions in the presentation that subtly, yet no less importantly, contrast with the image of Fanon as a translator of the traditions of Enlightenment universalism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. Consider, for example, the language Fanon uses to theorize the process of disalienation. If it sometimes sounds like disalienation entails a dialectical overcoming of contradictions, Fanon nonetheless also uses the non-dialectical concept of “antinomy” to describe a perhaps *irreconcilable* opposition between an inhuman condition and the truth of humanity. This may be why Fanon calls for a “complete lysis of this morbid universe,” a total rupture with the system of inhuman relations as it presently stands. Fanon similarly diverges from the standard Freudian position that analysis is a lengthy, if not interminable, practice of working through the past and instead describes analysis as a practice that “destroys” present traces of the past, as a practice that aims to “rid” the subject of that which has been internalized during childhood.\(^{417}\) Fanon’s particular word choice suggests that perhaps the new is not dialectically latent in that which already exists nor is the new an analytical reorganization or resignification of what has already happened. Rather, the new emerges after the complete destruction of the old.

This alternative theorization of change opens up another possible reading of that famous passage on the zone of nonbeing. Fanon notes in that passage that *le Noir* is rarely able to take advantage of the veritable hell that defines his condition. What would it mean to take advantage

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of such a condition? What advantage could it potentially hold? In light of Fanon’s more radical notion of change, perhaps it is precisely the very absence of content, the arid nature of that region of nonbeing, that, like Ernst Bloch’s “hollow spaces,” remains open in its emptiness to possibility beyond the present accumulation of the past. While I would still maintain that Fanon’s “zone of nonbeing” can be read as a translation of Marxist substanceless subjectivity, it is worth noting that the passage is followed by the presentation of another line of thinking that presents an alternative to dialectical thought: “Man is not only the potential for self-consciousness or negation. […] Man is a ‘yes’ resonating from cosmic harmonies.” This clearly Nietzschean description of Man as more than (Hegelian/Marxist) negation and self-consciousness, as also affirmation, hints at what we could call a non-dialectical “disjunctive synthesis” of the inhuman antinomy, the possibility, in other words, of affirmative creation emerging out of the void. Fanon’s process of disalienation at times sounds less like the sublative negation of the negation of Man and more like what Nietzsche described as the radical transformation that “break[s] the history of the world in two.”

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419 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii.


421 Nietzsche as cited in Badiou, *The Century*, 31. Alberto Toscano, in a commentary on Badiou’s *The Century*, turns to Fanon and the legacy of anti-colonialism to describe one of the lessons of the century, namely “the possibility of a break, a salutary interruption in the (political, technological, metaphysical) dialectic of Europe.” This is a very perceptive, albeit brief, reading
These two theorizations of change cross paths once again when Fanon describes the relationship between the present and the future: “The future must be a construction supported by man in the present. This future edifice is linked to the present insofar as I consider the present something to be overtaken [comme chose à dépasser].”

Although the present and the future are linked, their connection consists of the former overcoming the latter. The original French word dépasser is incredibly equivocal on this point, since it resonates with both dialectical and non-dialectical conceptualizations of time. Alexandre Kojève’s *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, for example, which was a very important text for Fanon and an entire generation of French Hegelians, begins with an epigraph from Hegel’s 1806 Jena lecture that describes the contemporary moment as one in which Spirit “has gone beyond its previous concrete form [a dépassé sa forme concrète].” Yet French translations of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* commonly use the word dépasser as well, particularly when the arguably non-dialectical notion of Fanon, for it identifies one of the key features of Fanon’s subterranean thought. While Toscano comes to this realization through a reading of the concluding chapter of Fanon’s final work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, my interpretation of *Black Skin, White Masks* demonstrates that such a call for radically breaking with the dialectic can be observed as early as Fanon’s first book. Paraphrasing Marx, Toscano applauds Fanon’s call for invention beyond that “tradition of dead generations” that “weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” What Toscano does not address, however, is the irony and latent tension that remains unresolved when such a call for rupture and creation is made in a Nietzschean key. Even Fanon’s call for a radical break, in other words, is made in the traditional, European language of dead generations; it remains, like Toscano’s own paraphrasing of Marx, citational. Recognizing how Fanon’s subterranean project is itself framed through the classical project of translation avoids obscuring these tensions and ironies. See Alberto Toscano, “‘European nihilism’ and beyond: commentary by Alberto Toscano,” *The Century*, 199 – 201.


of self-overcoming, of the dépassement de soi, is being addressed.\textsuperscript{424} The very word dépasser is thus historically split regarding its philosophical connotations. It is for that reason fitting that Fanon uses the word dépasser when theorizing the relationship between the present and the future, since it is precisely the issue of change that, in a sense, splits Fanon.

Is Fanon best understood as a translator of Nietzsche as well? While Nietzsche should certainly be included in the list of the dead with whom Fanon is in conversation, the implications of the Nietzschean ideas that Fanon is translating threaten to undermine Fanon’s very practice of translation, of contributing to the afterlife of that which has existed or has been said in the past. Indeed, this tension invites the reader to consider some urgent and complex questions: Should psychoanalysis or Enlightenment universalism or Marxism or Nietzscheanism be considered elements of the morbid universe that must be destroyed? Can these traditions be utilized, which is to say translated and repurposed, in the effort to achieve total rupture? Or would such a practice undermine the project of complete lysis? There are no easy answers to these questions, and Fanon does not ultimately provide answers to them in Black Skin, White Masks. Instead, as I will demonstrate below, the reader is left with a text that vacillates between and sometimes hovers over, at the very same time, two modes of thinking that contain two different conceptualizations of temporality and change.

\textit{Language: Assuming and Breaking with the Weight of Specters}

If in the introduction to Black Skin, White Masks Fanon’s conceptualization of the process of disalienation is split between two ways of the thinking about time, the text’s first

chapter, which addresses le Noir’s relationship to language, appropriately tends to favor construing historical change as a translative process. Although Fanon begins the chapter with an analysis of the various dimensions of le Noir’s being-for-others, he is quickly met by Marx’s specter, whose ghostly voice in French translation speaks to Fanon’s present:

But once we have taken note of the situation, once we have understood it, we consider the job done. How can we possibly not hear that voice again tumbling down the steps of History: ‘It’s no longer a question of knowing the world, but of transforming it.’ This question is terribly present in our lives. To speak means being able to use a certain syntax and possessing the morphology of such and such a language, but it means above all assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization.

In this topsy-turvy world where the past is located above and in front of the present rather than placed more conventionally behind it or below it, a voice from the dead tumbles down the stairs of History into Fanon’s present. Fanon then seems to suggest that this is effectively how all speaking functions, for to speak a language is to be haunted by its dead, to participate in the reanimation of a culture and a civilization. Language is thus always citational and to speak is to endure the weighty labor of translation.

The voice that haunts Fanon calls for the transformation of the world, for the construction of the new. The past is therefore not only a weight that one assumes when speaking, for it also provides the present with a language through which the very question of transformation can be articulated. This implies that change is translational as well, that the future’s connection to the past and the present is tightly intertwined and cannot be reduced to a relationship of non-dialectical dépassement. Fanon attempts to convey this lesson when he enigmatically states that

425 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 1, 2.
“[i]t is important […] to tell the black man that an attitude of rupture has never saved anybody; and although it is true that I must free myself from my strangler because I cannot breathe, nevertheless it is unhealthy to graft a psychological element (the impossibility of expanding) onto a physiological base (the physical difficulty of breathing).”

Breaking free from the stranglehold of an inferiority complex, in other words, is not the same thing as breaking free from a strangler. The strangler attempts to make breathing impossible, so ultimately the only option is a complete separation from the strangler. The language, culture, and civilization of the colonizer similarly produce the effect of psychological asphyxiation, but these violently inherited symbolic systems can also contribute to reopening the psyche’s airways. Although they remain enduring traces of the history of colonization, Fanon’s work itself presupposes that French language and culture can serve as tools in the mutational process of disalienation.

Much of the first chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* is dedicated to exploring a process of mutation that only *appears* to liberate *le Noir* from the pathological complexes of his psyche. Fanon is particularly interested in the case of the student who travels to France to learn proper French and to assimilate French culture. This journey across land and sea, a kind of spatial translation, makes possible a psychic and social translation of the student’s personality and being-for-others. The first signs of this mutation become visible before the journey even begins: “On departure, the amputation of his being vanishes as the ocean liner comes into view. He can read the authority and mutation he has acquired in the eyes of those accompanying him to the ship: ‘Adieu madras, adieu foulard.’”

The amputation of being, being as the loss of being, is itself amputated and replaced with the authoritative prosthesis of French language and culture.

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426 Ibid., 12 [translation modified]. For original French, see: Fanon, “Peau noire, masques blancs,” 79.

Fanon explains the logic of this conversion accordingly: “[T]he more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets – i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being. We are fully aware that this is one of man’s attitudes faced with Being.”

Assimilating the fullness of French language and culture appears to be a possible escape route from the emptiness of nonbeing; however, it is actually an expression of the black student’s desire to be white, an expression, in other words, of his inferiority complex. Instead of disalienation, the student’s mutation is merely the growth of a white mask that disguises black skin and covers up an amputated condition. This is an example of Fanon psychoanalytically diagnosing a “misfire [raté],” a behavior that, like “an engine misfiring,” fails to properly initiate the combustion process of disalienation.

Antillean students seem destined to misfire when they encounter each other, for they are left with the dead-end choice between rupture and assimilation: “Either support the white world – i.e., the real world – and with the help of French be able to address certain issues and aim at a certain degree of universalism in their conclusions. Or reject Europe […] and come together thanks to Creole by settling comfortably in what we’ll call the Martinican Umwelt.” The choice is between French or Creole, the abstract universalism of the white world or the isolated particularism of the black island. Yet Fanon hints at a third alternative beyond these two choices through the quotation of a passage from Michel Leiris’s essay “Martinique-Guadeloupe-Haïti”:

If in the Antillean writer there is a desire to break with the literary forms associated with official education, such a desire, striving toward a freer future, would not assume the

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{428} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 6, 7. For the original French, see Fanon, “Peau Noire, Mascques Blancs,” 75. Gordon’s most recent study of Fanon takes as one of its focal points Fanon’s analysis of misfires in Black Skin, White Masks. See Gordon, What Fanon Said.  
\textsuperscript{430} Ibid., 20.}
appearance of folklore. Seeking above all in literature to formulate a message that is their very own and, in the case of some of them at least, to be the spokesmen of a real race with unrecognized potential, they scorn the artifice which for them, whose intellectual education has been almost exclusively French, would represent recourse to a language they could only use as a second language they have learned.  

Antillean writers use French, the language of their education, to break with its traditional literary forms and to formulate their own messages. The break is not an absolute rupture that retreats into a folkloric, pre-colonial past. Rather, it is an introduction of distance, a kind of splintering, that creates the space necessary for a freer future of self-expression to emerge. This movement does not constitute the assimilation of French language and culture so much as its translation, its dialectical repurposing for new ends. If speaking a language entails assuming the spectral weight of a culture and civilization, particular uses of language can also ease the burden of that weight and open up new airways not beholden to the asphyxiating dead-ends of rupture or assimilation. Although not fully developed here, Fanon also suggests through Leiris that the third term of translation offers an alternative to the dichotomy between (abstract) universalism and (isolated) particularism.

Restructuring the World beyond Manichaeism

The inevitable misfires of Antillean students in France are expressions of a deeper psycho-social riff. Fanon identifies this riff through his discussion of Capécia’s Je suis Martiniquaise:

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431 Leiris as cited by Fanon, ibid., 23.
Apparently for her, Black and White represent the two poles of this world, poles in perpetual conflict: a genuinely *Manichaean* notion of the world. There, we’ve said it – Black or White, that is the question. I am white; in other words, I embody beauty and virtue, which have never been black. […] I am black; I am in total fusion with the world, in sympathetic affinity with the earth, losing my id in the heart of the cosmos. […] And there we are in a hand-to-hand struggle with our blackness or our whiteness, in a drama of narcissistic proportions, locked in our own particularity.432

While this passage describes both poles of the world as prisons walled off by narcissistic particularism, Fanon also describes each pole as containing a “Weltanschauung” or a “metaphysics” that consists of “customs and the agencies to which they refer.”433 As perhaps with all particularisms, in other words, both poles of the divided world contain a certain worldview, a belief structure that competes with the Weltanschauung of the other. This comes through most vividly when Fanon contrasts the white’s particular embodiment of the universals of Beauty and Virtue with the naturalistic or pantheistic description of (black) Man’s relationship with the earth. The Manichaean riff that Fanon is exploring thus separates both narcissistic particularisms and competing universalisms.

Driven by an inferiority complex and an emotional state of hypersensitivity called “affective erethism,” *le Noir* aims to leap over the Manichaean chasm that divides blacks and whites to join the other side.434 The second and third chapters of *Black Skin, White Masks* reconsider the issue of mutation in light of this temptation to jump. More specifically, these chapters examine how black men and women, through romantic relationships with their white

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432 Ibid., 27, 28 [my emphasis].
433 See, for example, ibid., xii, 25, 90.
434 Ibid., 41.
partners, attempt to undergo a process of “lactification,” of “whitening the race,” by gaining recognition from their partners as *equally white*.\textsuperscript{435} This is how Fanon imagines the mutation of Nini, a mulatto woman in Abdoulaye Sadji’s fictional piece of the same name, after a white man asks for her hand in marriage:

> The day the white man confessed his love for the mulatto girl, something extraordinary must have happened. There was recognition and acceptance into a community that seemed impenetrable. […] Overnight the mulatto girl had gone from the rank of slave to that of master. […] She was no longer the girl wanting to be white; she was white. She was entering the white world.\textsuperscript{436}

Nini’s mutation into the other as a result of being recognized by the other as the same constitutes a modified resolution of the master-slave dialectic that pairs recognition with romantic love.\textsuperscript{437} Yet the resolution is not dialectical but substitutional. Overcoming the Manichean situation of black versus white entails, in this instance, elimination of one of the antinomical poles rather than a sublation of both. For Fanon, however, this is not a true instance of overcoming. Instead, it is yet another pathologically neurotic expression of *le Noir’s* enslavement to an inferiority complex.\textsuperscript{438} Whitening or lactification therefore also constitutes a misfire, an illusory behavior that sustains alienation and ultimately leads to an impasse.

Fanon closes the second and third chapters by hinting at a possible beyond to the endless stalling of the dialectic of disalienation. In the closing lines of the second chapter, Fanon

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{435} Ibid., 29, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{436} Ibid., 40.
\item \textsuperscript{437} Ibid., 27. Here is how Fanon describes this translation of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic: “I was to be recognized not as *Black*, but as *White*. But – and this is the form of recognition that Hegel never described – who better than the white woman to bring this about? By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man.” Ibid., 45.
\item \textsuperscript{438} Fanon’s diagnosis of this procedure of substitution can be found here: Ibid., 42.
\end{enumerate}
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rhetorically asks if indeed there are “no other possibilities” to pathological behavior and then enigmatically asserts that “[w]hat we can say is that the flaw must be expelled once and for all [la tare doit être expulsée une fois pour toutes].”

There is an apparent similarity between how Capécia and Nini work through their inferiority complexes and how Fanon intends to deal with such complexes insofar as both methods involve a strategy of elimination. Yet the flaw for Fanon is not black skin but the psycho-affective and socially conditioned belief that black skin is a flaw. To get beyond the impasse of inferiorized alienation une fois pour toutes, a more radical approach is required. Fanon calls for a total expulsion of inferiority complexes from the psyche, not a “detranslation” but a destruction of colonialism’s alienating translation of desire, which left “millions of people,” in the words of Césaire, “infused with despair and trained to tremble, to kneel and behave like flunkeys.”

The final lines of the third chapter begin to address what this total and final destruction would entail:

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439 Ibid., 44. For original French, see: Fanon, “Peau noire, masques blancs,” 107.
440 Césaire as cited by Fanon in Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, xi. Young introduces the notion of “detranslation” in his very suggestive reading of Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks: “In Black Skin, White Masks, [Fanon] argues that the black man and woman have already been translated not only as colonial subjects in the regime of French imperialism but also internally, psychologically: their desires have been changed into another form, carried across into the desire for whiteness through a kind of metempsychosis. […] Fanon’s project is to understand this so as to find a way to translate them back again. This begins with a refusal of translation, of black into the values of white. Like psychoanalysis, it involves a detranslation, as a result of the failure of translation.” If I prefer to use the term “destruction” over “detranslation,” it is because I want to emphasize the radical implications of Fanon’s call to refuse to translate. While Young also recognizes this aspect of Fanon’s thought, he distorts its significance with the notion of “detranslation,” for detranslation implies a return to an original, as I suggested in the previous chapter when discussing the purification or detranslation of turupukllay into Spanish bullfighting. For Fanon, however, there is no original or pre-colonial desire that can be recovered. Instead, as I argued above, psychoanalysis halts translation in order to make room for the emergence of something new. See Young, Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction, 144.
In no way must my color be felt as a stain. From the moment the black man accepts the split imposed by the Europeans, there is no longer any respite; and from that moment on, isn’t it understandable that he will try to elevate himself to the white man’s level? […]

We shall see that another solution is possible. It implies restructuring the world.441

Once the Manichaean valuation of black as inferior and white as superior is accepted, le Noir becomes trapped in a closed and neurotic circle of hallucinatory whitening. The solution to this situation requires rejecting the terms of European Manichaeanism tout court, refusing both poles of the antinomy rather than eliminating one of them or sublating both of them. Instead of simply making an appeal to therapy, Fanon suggests that such a change in psychic life would require a restructuration of the world. This passage accordingly reinvokes Fanon’s dialectical and materialist assertion that disalienation requires a transformation at the subjective and the objective level.

Indeed, Fanon develops this outlook in the fourth chapter of Black Skin, White Masks during his critical dialogue with the French psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni. For Fanon, pace Mannoni, psycho-affective complexes, including the so-called “dependency complex,” are the products of – rather than preconditions for – colonization. If these complexes successfully take over the psyche, it is because a world exists that makes them possible, yet such a world also “draws its strength by maintaining [these complexes].”442 Although he will go on to cite a passage from Pierre Naville’s Psychologie, Marxisme, Materialisme that presents a quasi-economistic picture of society, Fanon’s own theorization of the relationship between society’s material base and the individual’s psyche is more properly dialectical.443 Fanon concludes:

441 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 63.
442 Ibid., 80.
443 For Fanon’s discussion of Naville, see ibid., 86.
“What emerges then is a need for combined action on the individual and the group. As a 
psychoanalyst, I must help my patient to ‘consciousnessize’ his unconscious, to no longer be 
tempted by hallucinatory lactification, but also to act along the lines of a change in social 
structure.” By making certain complexes conscious, psychoanalysis frees the individual to act 
differently, to participate in a new form of group or collective action that aims to eliminate the 
very material conditions that make these psycho-affective complexes possible. Fanon’s wager is 
that this struggle on two fronts will restructure the world in such a way that colonialism’s 
translation of desire will be destroyed along with its attendant Manichaeanism. This is one of the 
most striking examples in Fanon’s writings of the coexistence of dialectical and non-dialectical 
thought, for the ultimately non-dialectical event of rupture with the psychic effects of 
colonialism takes place in and through a dialectical process that restructures the interpenetrating 
realms of the subjective and the objective.

Diagnosing Misfires: Rationalism and Irrationalism

The fifth chapter of Black Skin, White Masks, perhaps the most famous section of the 
book, gives a phenomenological account of the lived experience, what Edmund Husserl termed 
Erlebnis, or le Noir. But the generic quality of the category – Noir – is deceiving, since, as 
Fanon tells the reader in his introduction,

there is nothing in common between the black man in this chapter and the black man who 
wants to sleep with the white woman. The latter wants to be white. […] In this chapter, 
on the contrary, we are witness to the desperate efforts of a black man striving

444 Ibid.
445 According to Macey, Fanon likely came across Husserl’s notion of Erlebnis through Maurice 
Merleau-Ponty’s popularization of the term’s French translation, expérience vécue. See Macey, 
162.
desperately to discover the meaning of black identity. [...] We shall demonstrate
furthermore that what is called the black soul is a construction by white folk.\textsuperscript{446}

True to what Fanon describes as the “progressive infrastructure” that organizes the chapters of 
\textit{Black Skin, White Masks, le Noir} of the fifth chapter is someone who is not beholden in the same way to the inferiority complex that manipulates the behavior of \textit{le Noir} in the previous chapters.\textsuperscript{447} The new \textit{Noir} has become conscious of his unconscious desire for whitening and acts differently as a result.

Although at this point \textit{le Noir} searches for the meaning behind black identity, Fanon assures the reader that such a search will not lead to the discovery of an identitarian essence, since the black soul is a social construct, something historically produced by white civilization and European culture. While many scholars have produced important work regarding Fanon’s treatment of identity and existential phenomenology, my discussion of the fifth chapter of \textit{Black Skin, White Masks} seeks to redirect attention towards the mutational process of disalienation and its underlying premises regarding historical change and temporality.\textsuperscript{448} To achieve this, the following two sections will focus on Fanon’s discussion of various responses to racial prejudice and alienation that are not circumscribed by a complex of inferiority.

The first response that Fanon considers is one of rationalism, a response that aims to “rationalize the world and show the white man he was mistaken” regarding his supremacist

\textsuperscript{446} Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, xvii, xviii.
\textsuperscript{447} Ibid., 161.
views towards black people. To elucidate this strategy, Fanon turns to Sartre’s *Anti-Semite and Jew* because, despite the differences between anti-Semitism and anti-black racism, rationalization is has been mobilized to critique both forms of systematic discrimination. Fanon cites a particularly suggestive passage to explore this strategy, one in which Sartre claims that inside the Jew resides,

>a sort of impassioned imperialism of reason: for he wishes not only to convince others that he is right; his goal is to persuade them that there is an absolute and unconditioned value [une valeur absolue et inconditionnée] to rationalism. He feels himself to be a missionary of the universal; against the universality of the Catholic religion, from which he is excluded, he asserts the ‘catholicity’ of the rational, an instrument by which to attain to the truth and establish a spiritual bond among men.

Sartre thus describes the struggle against anti-Semitic discrimination as a kind of collision or conflictive encounter between two competing universalities. What is remarkable about this passage and Fanon’s choice to cite it is that it constitutes a rather precise translation of Hegel’s conceptualization of the historical progression from the alienated universality of the church to the absolutely rational universality of the state. Like the state in its actuality, reason assumes

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449 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 98.
450 Ibid. For the original French, see: Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 160.
451 Étienne Balibar has very helpfully framed this point for readers of Hegel, noting that the German philosopher “was acutely aware of the conflict […] between two realizations of universality: the religious and the national-popular. In a sense it could be said that Hegel’s dialectic of history had no other object than precisely explaining how one great historical ‘fiction,’ that of the universalistic church, could be substituted by another historical ‘fiction,’ that of the secular, rational institutions of the state (in practice, the nation-state), with equally universalistic aims. To be sure, Hegel’s view of this process was associated with the idea that historical development necessarily leads from religious universality to political universality (in Hegelian terms, religious universality is ‘rational’ only *anstich*, or in alienated form, whereas political universality is ‘rational’ *für sich*, or consciously). In other words, he saw it as an irreversible progression.” Therefore political universality, notwithstanding its fictive character,
an absolute quality as an end in itself, and, just as in Hegel’s dialectic of history, the individual, while appearing to be the wielder of instruments, is in fact the instrument of reason’s cunningly imperial universalization.452

For Fanon, le Noir who adopts the strategy of rationalism likewise becomes rationalism’s missionary, a servant to the latter’s self-instantiation, and opposes the universality of reason to the white supremacist universals of (white) Beauty and (white) Virtue. This transposition of Sartre’s Hegelian portrayal of the Jew onto Fanon’s theorization of le Noir is not, however, without some tension. In earlier chapters, Fanon presents these competing universals as antinomical whereas in the Hegelian dialectic from which Sartre is drawing the opposition between church and state, including their corresponding universals, is eventually resolved in a higher, sublated union.453

Fanon nevertheless veers away from both Manichaean antinomies and Hegelian dialectics to present an alternative conceptualization of the rationalist response to racial prejudice that underscores its incapacity to contribute to disalienation. Although the aim of construing reason as universal is to challenge the hierarchization of human beings, Fanon notes that this aim can be easily undermined by the uncompromising persistence and rationalization of myth:


452 Regarding the absolute quality of the state, Hegel asserts in his Philosophy of Right: “The state is absolutely rational inasmuch as it is the actuality of the substantial will which it possesses in the particular self-consciousness once that consciousness has been raised to consciousness of its universality. This substantial unity is an absolute unmoved end in itself, in which freedom comes into its supreme right.” He will go on to discuss the role of individuals in the historical dialectic of Spirit’s actualization: “All actions, including world-historical actions, culminate with individuals as subjects giving actuality to the substantial. They are the living instruments of what is in substance the deed of the world mind.” G. W. F. Hegel, Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1967), 155, 156, 218.

Everyone was in agreement with the notion: the Negro is a human being – i.e., his heart’s on his left side, added those who were not too convinced. But on certain questions the white man remained uncompromising. Under no condition did he want any intimacy between the races, for we know ‘crossings between widely different races can lower the physical and mental level… Until we have a more definite knowledge of the effect of race-crossings we shall certainly avoid crossings between widely different races.\textsuperscript{454}

The pseudo-science of eugenics rationalizes the belief that romantic life should be segregated based on the myth that failing to do so would contribute to mental and physical devolution. Since this myth is an expression of a white supremacist worldview, its persistence ultimately reintroduces the same alienating racial hierarchy into the supposedly new and rational articulation of the universal notion of “human being.” If the strategy of rationalism religiously defends reason’s capacity to overcome myth, Fanon points to an alternative, circular dialectic of Enlightenment in which reason turns on itself and becomes myth’s instrument.\textsuperscript{455}

Fanon subtly develops his account of this circular dialectic by demonstrating how even the founding figure of European rationalism can become mythical:

It’s in the name of tradition, the long, historical past and the blood ties with Pascal and Descartes, that the Jews are told: you will never belong here. Recently, one of these good French folks declared on a train where I was sitting: ‘May the truly French values live on

\textsuperscript{454} Fanon, \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, 99.

\textsuperscript{455} This reading of Fanon, which alludes to a subtle elective affinity with the work of Adorno and Horkheimer on Enlightenment reason and dialectics, is inspired by the important efforts of Natalie Melas and Paul Fleming to bring together postcolonial theory and Frankfurt School thought in a two-part conference series at Cornell University entitled “Critical Theory and (post)Colonialism.” Compare Fanon’s arguments about rationalization with the opening “fragment” in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments}, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1 – 34.
and the race will be safeguarded! […] A united front against the foreigners (and turning to me) whoever they may be.'

Fanon thus shows how the very thinker that wrote the charter of universalism, which held that all men, irrespective of their accidental properties, equally share the same faculty of reason, can become a symbol of white French tradition and particularity that must be preserved and protected by excluding (Jewish and black) outsiders. Fanon accordingly suggests that the reasoned defense of the universal equality of man on the basis of a shared attribute, be it of the mind (reason) or body (the heart), is inadequate in the struggle against white supremacy, for it will be met with mythic counter-rationalizations that undermine the articulation of a truly alternative and disalienated universal.

Fanon next explores the logical opposite of the rationalist response: “I had rationalized the world, and the world had rejected me in the name of color prejudice. Since there was no way we could agree on the basis of reason, I resorted to irrationality.” Throughout this section of the chapter, Fanon cites foundational texts of négritude from Senghor and Césaire that contrast black rhythm, emotion, and poetry with white reason, intellect, and science. Whereas rationalism starts with a premise of commonality, of the universality of human reason, irrationalism begins with heterogeneity, an oppositional assertion of black particularity. As Fanon writes, “I finally made up my mind to shout my blackness.”

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456 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 101. I modified the brackets in this passage to parentheses in order to avoid confusion between Fanon’s writing and my own interventions, which appear uniformly throughout this essay in brackets.

457 Césaire makes a similarly critical analysis of the circular dialectic of Enlightenment when he notes in *Discourse on Colonialism* that colonialist intellectuals of so-called civilization participate in a “barbaric repudiation” of Descartes while maintaining that their own claims are “based on the firmest rationalism.” See Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 56.

458 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 102.

459 Ibid., 101.
irrationalism furthermore projects a competing universality that I described above as a quasi-
pantheistic worldview:

Yes, we niggers are backward, naïve, and free. For us the body is not in opposition to
what you call the soul. We are in the world. And long live the bond between Man and
the Earth! […] I embrace the world! I am the world! The white man has never
understood this magical substitution. The white man wants the world; he wants it for
himself. He enslaves it. His relationship with the world is one of appropriation. […]
Between the world and me there was a relation of coexistence. I had rediscovered the
primordial One.”

The irrationalist worldview thus opposes the rationalist Enlightenment tradition of construing
man’s relationship with nature as one of domination with an alternative and indeed prior, more
fundamental, relationship of unity with nature to which le Noir retains privileged access.

Irrationalism is, predictably, shown to be equally incapable of successfully challenging
racial prejudice and alienation. As Fanon mentioned in the introduction, the supposedly original
black soul that is celebrated as an alternative to white civilization is itself a creation of white
civilization, a creation that allows white civilization to assert its superior rationality. Fanon
accordingly describes a feeling of being persecuted by something that cannot not be embraced:
“Black magic, primitive mentality, animism and animal eroticism – all this surges toward me.
All this typifies people who have not kept pace with the evolution of humanity. […] I was long
reluctant to commit myself. Then even the stars became aggressive. I had to choose. What am I

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460 Ibid., 106, 107.
461 Although this was much more the belief of Senghor than Césaire, Fanon does not draw such a
distinction when discussing the strategy of irrationalism.
saying? I had no choice.”

A few pages later, Fanon echoes this same sentiment of feeling cornered into blackness by white civilization: “I was haunted by a series of corrosive stereotypes: the Negro’s sui generis smell…the Negro’s sui generis good nature…the Negro’s sui generis naïveté. I tried to escape without being seen, but the Whites fell on me and hamstrung me on the left leg.”

Both of these passages show irrationalism to be an insufficient response to alienation precisely insofar as irrationalism “accepts [involuntarily] the split imposed by the Europeans,” which is to say the Manichaean antinomy that sustains black inferiority.

Négritude: *Tarrying with the Negative*

Fanon considers a third response to racial prejudice that draws from both the rationalist and the irrationalist strategy. It begins by “excavat[ing] black antinquity” and proving the historical existence of a black civilization and “learned black men.” The unearthing of an alternative history, buried by official history, refutes the myth that only white civilization is rational and therefore fully human: “The white man was wrong, I was not a primitive or a subhuman; I belonged to a race that had already been working silver and gold 2,000 years ago.”

Yet unearthing this alternative history also refutes the “mystical past” of négritude, which ultimately accepts the myth that white civilization enjoys exclusive sovereignty over the realm of the rational. As Fanon revealed just a few pages earlier, it was Senghor who maintained that “[e]motion is Negro as reason is Greek.” Accordingly, the third strategy, while challenging white supremacist narratives of history that continue to dehumanize and

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462 Ibid., 105, 106.
464 Ibid., 109.
465 Ibid.
466 Ibid., xviii.
467 Senghor as cited by Fanon in ibid., 106.
inferiorize le Noir, translates négritude out of irrationalism; it “claim[s…] negritude intellectually as a concept.”

As I will discuss below, Fanon returns to the idea of excavating black antiquity in a decidedly critical vein, but he first suspends criticism and defends this second-order or translated négritude despite its limitations. Even after Sartre famously “shattered” this “last illusion” in his essay “Black Orpheus,” Fanon “[took] this negritude and with tears in [his] eyes [pieced] together the mechanism.” Before considering why Fanon would want to piece back together an illusory concept or mechanism, it is important to examine how exactly Sartre shattered it. According to Fanon, Sartre smashed négritude to pieces when he “proved to me that my reasoning was nothing but a phase in the dialectic.” Fanon then cites an extended passage from “Black Orpheus” that I include in abbreviated form below:

The Negro, as we have said, creates an anti-racist racism. He does not at all wish to dominate the world; he wishes the abolition of racial privileges wherever they are found; he affirms his solidarity with the oppressed of all colors. At a blow the subjective, existential, ethnic notion of Negritude ‘passes,’ as Hegel would say, into the objective, positive, exact notion of the proletariat. ‘For Césaire,’ says Senghor, ‘the ‘White’ symbolizes capital and the Negro, labor…Among the black men of his race, it is the struggle of the world proletariat which he sings.’ This is easier to say than work out [C’est facile à dire, moins facile à penser]. And without doubt it is not by hazard that the most ardent of apostles of Negritude are at the same time militant Marxists. But nevertheless the notion of race does not intersect [ne se recoupe pas] with the notion of

468 Ibid., 111.
469 Ibid., 116, 117.
470 Ibid., 111.
class: the one is concrete and particular, the other is universal and abstract. […]

Negritude appears as the weak stage of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Negritude as antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself and the Blacks who employ it well know it; they know that it serves to pave the way for the synthesis or the realization of the human society without race. Thus Negritude is dedicated to its own destruction, it is transition and not result, a means and not the ultimate goal.⁴⁷¹

Sartre presents négritude as a necessary but insufficient moment in the dialectical overcoming of racism. While the negativity of négritude puts in motion the dialectic of disalienation, this negativity must ultimately negate itself and clear the way for the emergence of its opposite, namely the positivity of a human society without racial prejudice. Sartre’s mechanical application of the Hegelian triad of affirmation-negation-negation-of-negation thus construes négritude as incomplete and transitory. Sartre also gives a Marxist twist to the Hegelian story by maintaining that négritude will pass into the notion of the proletariat and that this passage constitutes a dialectical mutation from the subjectively particular and negative to the objectively universal and positive. This assertion is strange because it inverts the classical theorization of the proletariat as a negatively universal notion, and Sartre appears skeptical of the intelligibility of such a passage from race to class anyway. Nonetheless, Sartre’s assertion has the effect of further weakening the role of négritude in the dialectical movement of history, for even its ultimate goal of a society without racial prejudice appears to be merely a stage in the ultimate, ultimate goal of a classless society.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 111, 112. For the French original, see Fanon, “Peau noire, masques blancs,” 170.
Fanon faults Sartre’s interpretation of négritude not for being too Hegelian but for being *not Hegelian enough*. He therefore counters Sartre’s schematic application of Hegel with a more rigorous translation. Consider the following passage:

> We had appealed to a friend of the colored peoples, and this friend had found nothing better to do than demonstrate the relativity of their action. For once this friend, this born Hegelian, had forgotten that consciousness needs to get lost in the night of the absolute, the only condition for attaining self-consciousness. To counter rationalism he called the negative side, but he forgot that this negativity draws its value from a virtually substantial absoluity [tire sa valeur d’une absoluité quasi substantielle].

It is tempting to read this passage as an oblique allusion to Hegel’s critique of Friedrich Schelling and the latter’s conceptualization of the Absolute. In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, after all, Hegel famously compared Schelling’s Absolute to “the night in which, as the saying goes, all cows are black.” However, the absolute in question is not the indifferent Absolute that drowns all particularity in the dark water of its universal container. Fanon is instead recalling the moment in the dialectic of self-consciousness when consciousness withdraws into the absolute night of the pure “I,” into “the night in which ‘I’ = ‘I,’ a night which no longer distinguishes or knows anything outside of it.” The absolute night of the pure “I” therefore represents not an indifferent whole but rather a singular subtraction from the whole,

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472 Ibid., 112, 113. For the French original, see Fanon, “Peau noire, masques blancs,” 171.
474 Ibid., 476. Nigel Gibson is one of the few critics to recognize Fanon’s illusion to Hegel’s conceptualization of the pure “I” in his response to Sartre. See Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*, 81.
not a neutral container that includes all particularity but rather an absolute self-relating negativity that excludes all particularity.475

While it is true that the darkness of negativity eventually passes dialectically into the light of self-consciousness, Sartre’s application of this Hegelian movement effectively short circuits the process insofar as he relativizes a negativity that must be affirmed as absolute if, as Hegel contends, it is to push past “what circumscribes it” and “attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom.”476 Fanon thus suggests that a true friend of the colored peoples, if he were a true Hegelian, would recognize that a gesture like Sartre’s constitutes the shattering of a necessary illusion, the undermining of a liberating fiction that drives forward the movement of disalienation. As Fanon concisely states, “I needed not to know [j’avais besoin d’ignorer].”477 Fanon then offers an alternative account of négritude that attempts to reconstruct its absoluity:

In terms of consciousness, black consciousness claims to be an absolute density, full of itself, a stage preexistent to any opening, to any abolition of the self by desire. […] I needed to lose myself totally in negritude. […] Black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am. I do not have to look for the

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475 As Slavoj Žizek explains, the pure “I” entails “absolute negation of all determinate content; it is the void of radical abstraction from all determinations.” Slavoj Žizek, Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism (New York: Verso, 2012), 365, 366 [original emphasis].

476 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 18, 19. These lines are extracted from Hegel’s discussion of the faculty of Understanding: “The activity of dissolution is the power and work of the Understanding, the most astonishing and mightiest of powers, or rather the absolute power. […] But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom – this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure ‘I.’”

477 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 114 [original emphasis]. For original French, see Fanon, “Peau noire, masques blancs,” 172 [original emphasis].
universal. […] My black consciousness does not claim to be a loss. It is. It merges with itself.478

For Fanon, négritude represents the moment when black consciousness withdrawals into itself and merges with itself, affirming that “I” = “I,” that “I am fully what I am.” It does not have to seek out the universal because it is itself already (abstractly) universal by virtue of its abstraction from all determinations. The absolute negativity of such an affirmation, Fanon implies, is what allows black consciousness to break free from that which circumscribes it and set the dialectic of disalienation in motion.

Fanon takes issue not only with Sartre’s relativization of négritude’s absolute negativity but also with his deterministic reading of the movement.479 This second issue becomes visible in the following passage from “Black Orpheus”:

Will the source of Poetry silence itself? Or indeed will the great black river, despite all, color the sea into which it flows? No matter; to each epoch its poetry, for each epoch the circumstances of history elect a nation, a race, a class, to seize again the torch, by creating situations which can express or surpass themselves only through Poetry. At times the poetic élan coincides with the revolutionary élan and at times they diverge. Let us salute today the historic chance which will permit the Blacks to ‘raise the great Negro shout with a force that will shake the foundations of the world (Césaire).’480

According to Sartre, le négre does not create meaning through poetry. Instead, the meaning of poetry is already determined by history. “It is not as the wretched nigger,” Fanon writes, “that I

478 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 113, 114.
480 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 113.
fashion a torch to set the world alight; the torch was already there, waiting for this historic chance." This interpretation of négritude resonates with Hegel’s discussion of the “cunning of reason,” which, as discussed above, inverts the Enlightenment notion of an autonomous individual that can use the faculty of reason, maintaining instead that reason uses the individual in the process of its own self-actualization.

Fanon maintains, however, that once again Sartre falters not because he is too Hegelian but because he is not Hegelian enough. According to Fanon, “[Sartre] should have opposed the unforeseeable to historical destiny. […] The dialectic that introduces necessity as a support for my freedom expels me from myself. It shatters my impulsive position.” The withdrawal of consciousness into the absolute night of the pure “I” destroys all determinations; in Hegel’s analysis of religion, this moment represents the death of God, the liberation of the Subject from the certainty of a transcendent Substance cunningly determining its destiny. Sartre’s grounding of freedom in necessity, on the other hand, expels the “I” from the “I,” prematurely returning the Subject to its cunning substantial determination and therefore inhibiting the further dialectical movement of self-consciousness. Sartre ironically disproves his own deterministic interpretation of négritude by grinding the dialectic to a halt the moment he announces its inevitable movement forward.

Does négritude’s affirmation that it is not a potentiality of something else effectively accomplish the same thing and inhibit dialectical movement? Fanon assures his critics that

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481 Ibid.
483 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 113, 114.
négritude can posit itself as absolute and at the same time “take into consideration the historical process.”

He elaborates on this point by referring to a poem written by the Haitian Marxist intellectual Jacques Roumain. While the voice of the poem speaks to Africa of an absolute withdrawal into black particularity (“I want to be of your race alone”), the passage concludes with the following universalist message: “We proclaim the unity of suffering / And revolt / Of all the peoples over the face of the earth / And we mix the mortar of the age of brotherhood / In the dust of idols.”

This excerpt from Roumain’s poem does a lot of work for Fanon’s presentation of a properly Hegelian dialectic. The negativity of withdrawal is not shown to be a weak stage of relative worth that will ultimately be surpassed. It is construed, rather, as the absolute and necessary moment of dialectical negation and recovery, the particular force that joins other struggles to produce a new universal out of the ground-up materials of the past and the present.

The death of a divine and cunning Substance that immediately determined the Whole, be it God or an aggregate of idols, is what makes possible, as in the Christian fable, the resurrection of Substance in the form of a community of believers, in the form of a brotherhood.

This dialectical movement from the particular to the universal, the negative to the positive, the “I” to the “We,” is a process with its own temporality. When Fanon returns to the

485 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 114.
486 Ibid., 114, 115.
487 Zizek on this point: “With regard to Christianity, this means that the death of Christ is simultaneously a day of grief and a day of joy: God-Christ had to die in order to be able to come to life again in the shape of the community of believers (the ‘Holy Spirit’). Instead of the ‘substance qua God-Master, the inscrutable Fate which reigns in its Beyond, we obtain the ‘substance’ qua community of believers. In this precise sense, ‘the wound is healed only by the spear that smote you’: the death of God is his resurrection, the weapon that killed Christ is the tool that created the Christian community of the Holy Spirit.” Zizek, Tarrying with the Negative, 170, 171. Zizek could have arrived at this point while thinking of this memorable passage from Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: “This [pure] form is the night in which substance was betrayed and made itself into Subject. It is out of this night of pure certainty of self that the ethical Spirit is resurrected as a shape freed from Nature and its own immediate existence.” Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 426.
issue of *négritude* in the sixth chapter, he explains that the dialectic cannot be rushed lest its transformative power be undermined. Alluding to Césaire’s famous poem *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Fanon writes:

One day he said: ‘My negritude is neither a tower…’ And then they came to Hellenize him, to Orpheusize him…this black man who is seeking the universal. Seeking the universal! But in June 1950 the hotels in Paris refused to take in black travelers. […] The black man is universalizing himself, but at the lycée Saint-Louis in Paris, they threw one out: had the cheek to read Engels. […] How come I have barely opened my eyes they had blindfolded, and they already want to drown me in the universal? And what about the others? Those ‘who have no mouth,’ those ‘who have no voice.’ I need to lose myself in my negritude and see the ashes, the segregation, the repression, the rapes, the discrimination, and the boycotts. We need to touch with our finger all the wounds that score our black livery.⁴⁸⁸

This passage can be helpfully read alongside recent debates surrounding the #blacklivesmatter movement that emerged in the summer of 2014 in response to the repeated killing of unarmed black men and women by police in the United States. Much like when police supporters responded to the viral tweet #blacklivesmatter with the counter-tweet #alllivesmatter, Sartre misses the point when he attempts to drown the particular struggle of *négritude* in the universal. The affirmation of certain particulars over others is motivated by their constitutive exclusion from the universal. As it is presently articulated, the universal notion of “all lives” mattering does not yet include “black lives,” just as the universal notion of the “human,” Fanon notes, does

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not yet include the dehumanized and voiceless Noir. Négritude and #blacklivesmatter militate against this exclusion; both movements share in common the aspiration of translating the universal, of rearticulating its contours so that the universal can become concrete.489

What Sartre and those who tweet #alllivesmatter are effectively doing is returning the particular to a universal that has not yet been transformed, which consequently perpetuates exclusion. Although the particular struggle of négritude may lead to the concrete universal of Roumain’s brotherhood, this process must follow its own dialectical rhythm that tarrys with the negative before a new formation can come into being.490 Fanon gives a spatial account of this rhythm when he partially redeems Sartre’s allusion to Orpheus, the Greek hero who descended into the Underworld to save Eurydice, and states that “Césaire went down. He agreed to see what was happening at the very bottom, and now he can come back up. He is ripe for the dawn.”491

Fanon will go on to give one last pass over Sartre’s interpretation of négritude that summarizes many of the issues that I have addressed above:

We can understand why Sartre sees in the black poets’ Marxist stand the logical end of négritude. What is happening is this. Since I realize that the black man is the symbol of

489 This interpretation of #blacklivesmatter is greatly influenced by Judith Butler’s account of the movement in a New York Times interview: “If we jump too quickly to the universal formulation, ‘all lives matter,’ then we miss the fact that black people have not yet been included in the idea of ‘all lives.’ That said, it is true that all lives matter (we can then debate about when life begins and ends). But to make that universal formulation concrete, to make that into a living formulation [...] we have to foreground those lives that are not mattering now, to mark that exclusion, and militate against it. Achieving that universal, ‘all lives matter,’ is a struggle, and that is part of what we are seeing on the streets.” See George Yancy and Judith Butler, “What’s Wrong with ‘All Lives Matter,’” The New York Times, January 15, 2015. Available online at: http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/01/12/whats-wrong-with-all-lives-matter/?_r=0.

490 Remember Hegel on this point: “Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts [absolute Spirit] into being.” Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 19.

491 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 172.
sin, I start hating the black man. But I realize that I am a black man. I have two ways of escaping the problem. Either I ask people not to pay attention to the color of my skin; or else, on the contrary, I want people to notice it. I then try to esteem what is bad – since, without thinking, I admitted that the black man was the color of evil. In order to put an end to this neurotic situation where I am forced to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, nurtured with fantasies, that is antagonistic – inhuman, in short – there is but one answer: skim over this absurd drama that others have staged around me; rule out these two elements that are equally unacceptable; and through the particular, reach out for the universal. When the black man plunges, in other words goes down, something extraordinary happens.

As soon as the white supremacist valuation of humanity is accepted, le Noir faces two equally insufficient responses to it: rationalism or irrationalism, abstract (colorless) universalism or isolated (subordinate, black=evil, irrational, etc.) particularism. As I demonstrated above, both of these responses ultimately reproduce rather than challenge alienation and therefore inhibit the mutational process.

There appears to be no possible resolution to this antinomical or Manichaean situation except via the rejection of both terms, for they both share a common, white supremacist ground. This non-dialectical rupture with an inhuman condition, which was presented in the previous section as the result of a dialectical process, now appears to be the latter’s precondition, the founding break that sets in motion the Hegelian dialectic of concrete universality. Fanon reminds his reader that concrete universality can be reached only through the particular rather than through an indifference to it. But this particularity, it is important to emphasize, is the transvaluated particularity of negritude after it has been liberated from white supremacist values.
Once white supremacy’s false dialectic is rejected, in other words, the true contradiction of white supremacy can withdraw into itself and the dialectical process of disalienating mutation can move forward.


How does a descent into particularity change directions and rise to the height of universal brotherhood? How does the withdrawal into the self pass into self-consciousness? Hegel theorized the master-slave dialectic in part to answer these questions, so Fanon appropriately turns to this aspect of the philosopher’s work in a section of the seventh chapter entitled “The Black Man [Le Noir] and Hegel.” As Fanon states, clearly alluding to his previous discussion of self-referential negativity, “[t]he only way to break this vicious circle that refers me back to myself is to restore to the other his human reality, different from his natural reality, by way of mediation and recognition. The other, however, must perform a similar operation.” Self-consciousness entails eventually breaking out of the vicious circle in which “I” = “I” and achieving a relationship with the other of reciprocal recognition; true self-consciousness, in other words, is inter-subjective and relational. Fanon, paraphrasing Hegel, notes that this form of recognition can only be attained as the result of a life and death struggle in which one’s natural life is risked for the higher, human ideal of “a world of reciprocal recognitions.” Once “absolute reciprocity” is achieved in this way, “subjective certainty of my own worth” is dialectically transformed into “a universally valid objective truth.”

492 Hegel’s discussion of the master-slave dialectic can be found in Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111 – 119.
493 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 192.
494 Ibid., 193.
495 Ibid., 191, 193.
Whereas Fanon turns to Hegel’s dialectic of self-consciousness in order to think through négritude and Sartre’s interpretation of it, he is more reserved in his approach to Hegel when considering the particular moment of lordship and bondage. Much like his account of Freud, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan in previous sections of Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon underscores the historical limits that bar the easy applicability of Hegel’s conceptual schema: “Historically, the black man, steeped in the inessentiality of servitude, was set free by the master. He did not fight for his freedom.” As Anthony Bogues has rightly pointed out, Fanon’s pessimistic and one-sided summation of the abolition of slavery is dubious. It was Fanon’s mistaken belief that former slaves did not really win their freedom as a result of their own actions but rather were granted their freedom by their masters. The form of recognition that historically accompanies freedom without struggle does not instantiate Hegel’s notion of self-consciousness because it is not absolutely reciprocal. As Fanon puts it in an important footnote:

We hope we have shown that the master here is basically different from the one described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master scorns the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work. Likewise, the slave here can in no way be equated with the slave who loses himself in the object and finds the source of his liberation in his work. The black slave wants to be like the master.

Fanon’s reformulation of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic is meant to account for the historical specificity of colonial domination. In Fanon’s translation, the dialectic concludes with the freed

496 Ibid., 194. Fanon’s account of the translatability of psychoanalysis is considered throughout the sixth chapter of Black Skin, White Masks, which is entitled “The Black Man [Le Noir] and Psychopathology,” and in the first section of the seventh chapter, “The Black Man and Adler.” See, ibid., 120 – 191.
497 Ibid., 201. For Bogues’s critique of Fanon on this point, see Anthony Bogues, Empire of Liberty: Power, Desire, & Freedom (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 113.
498 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 195, n. 10.
black slave reaching for a white mask and “assum[ing] a master’s attitude,” thus returning the
reader to Fanon’s prior discussion of psycho-affective complexes of inferiority that leave le Noir
yearning for lactification.⁴⁹⁹ This divergence from Hegel’s original conceptualization of the
dialectic is not an instance of Fanon rejecting Hegel’s universalism and taking the “opposite road”
of provincialized or “decolonial” particularism, which would amount to a mere Kantian mapping
out of conceptual limits.⁵⁰⁰ Rather, it is an instance of Fanon embodying the Hegelian spirit and
responding to, in Fanon’s words, “a dialectical demand” to critically move past conceptual limits
through a process of translation or historical concretization.⁵⁰¹

It is important to note that Fanon does not generalize his historical analysis of abolition
and notes that “the black Americans are living a different drama. In the United States the back
man fights and is fought against.”⁵⁰² Borrowing from the title of a Richard Wright novel, Fanon
poetically refers to the “twelve million black voices” that “scream against the curtain of the
sky.”⁵⁰³ This “unique occasion” for struggle jumpstarts the historically stalled motor of the
dialectic and allows it to run its original course.⁵⁰⁴ Fanon concludes his brief analysis of the
United States conjuncture with a prophetic vision: “On the battlefield, marked out by the scores
of Negroes hanged by their testicles, a monument is slowly rising that promises to be grandiose.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., 194.
⁵⁰⁰ According to Maldonado-Torres, “[w]hile Hegel attempts to delineate the eternal figure of
Spirit in time, Fanon takes the opposite road: situated in time he focuses on the ruptures with
what presents itself as the universal or eternal.” He will go on to assert that “Fanon opposes the
move to an abstract universalism with an emphasis in concrete particularity.” What Maldonado-
Torres fails to recognize is that this gesture is Hegelian at its very core; it follows the precise
Hegelian road of concrete universality. Maldonado-Torres, 104, 152.
⁵⁰¹ As Fanon states regarding psychoanalysis, “[i]n response to the dialectical demand, we should
now ask ourselves to what extent the finds by Freud and Adler can be applied in an attempt to
explain the black man’s vision of the world.” Fanon’s ultimate answer to this question is that
they cannot be applied without translation. See Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 120.
⁵⁰² Ibid., 196.
⁵⁰⁴ Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 196.
And at the top of this monument I can already see a white man and a black man hand in hand.²⁵⁰ This image of a monument commemorating mutual recognition won on the battlefield represents one of Fanon’s most authentically Hegelian moments.

Yet for the black Frenchman Fanon maintains that it is “too late.”²⁵⁶ Likely recalling his own military service as a soldier of the Free French army fighting against the Vichy regime, Fanon notes that “[f]rom time to time [the black Frenchman] fights for liberty and justice, but it’s always for a white liberty and a white justice, in other words, for values secreted by his masters.”²⁵⁷ The black Frenchman fights for the values of the master because he is “acted upon. Values that [are] not engendered by his actions, values not resulting from the systolic gush of his blood, [whirl] around him in a colorful dance.”²⁵⁸ Whereas the violent dialectical struggle for recognition creates universal values, it appears that this valence of the dialectic is closed off to the black Frenchman. *Le Noir* remains either cloistered in blackness or forced to serve white universalist values that do not actually extend to him.

How does Fanon conceptualize a way out of this impasse? What comes after the historical short-circuiting of the master-slave dialectic? Fanon, remarkably, turns to Nietzsche for help:

The I posits itself by opposing, said Fichte. Yes and no [Oui et non]. We said in our introduction that man was an *affirmation* [que l’homme était un *oui*]. We shall never stop repeating it. Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity. But man is also a *negation* [Mais l’homme est aussi un *non*]. No to man’s contempt. No to the indignity of man. To the exploitation of man. To the massacre of what is most human in man: freedom.

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²⁵⁰ Ibid [original emphasis].
²⁵⁶ Ibid.
²⁵⁷ Ibid., 195. For information on Fanon’s military service, see Macey, *Frantz Fanon*, 89 – 109.
²⁵⁸ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 194.
Man’s behavior is not only reactional [réactionnel]. And there is always resentment in reaction. Nietzsche had already said it in *The Will to Power*. To induce man to be actional [actionnel], by maintaining in his circularity the respect of the fundamental values that make the world human, that is the task of utmost urgency for he who, after careful reflection, prepares to act.⁵⁰⁹

Fanon’s playfully dialectical response to Fichte on the positing of the “I” leads into his own dialectical conceptualization of man as both a “yes” and a “no.” Yet Fanon’s Nietzschean call to induce man to be actional, to free himself form the resentful and the reactional, invites the reader to imagine an alternative to the dialectical struggle for recognition. During his conjunctural analysis of the United States, Fanon asserts that the black American’s actions represent a scream against the curtain of the sky, a collective “no” to limiting the boundless, a moment of absolute negativity towards that which inhibits freedom. But this kind of action, Fanon suggests, is closed off to the black Frenchman, so the urgent task is to pursue a different type of action, an actional action that is yes-saying and non-dialectical.⁵¹⁰

Fanon moreover calls for the creation of new values that are generated not by the self’s struggle with the other but by the self-affirmation of that which is most human in the self. Instead of a dialectical movement that concretizes universal values, in other words, Fanon

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 197 [emphasis in original]. For the original French, see Fanon, “Peau noir, masques blancs,” 242, 243 [emphasis in original].
⁵¹⁰ Glen Sean Coulthard is particularly attentive to the Nietzschean elements of Fanon’s “practical reworking of Hegel’s master/slave relation in contexts where the possibility of achieving affirmative relations of mutual recognition appears foreclosed.” Although Coulthard acknowledges the philosophical tensions between Hegel and Nietzsche, his account of Fanon’s use of these antagonistic schools of thought remains ambiguous and underdeveloped. This may be because Coulthard’s aim is not ultimately to offer a detailed analysis of Fanon’s writings but rather to pursue a neo-Fanonian interrogation of the politics of state recognition and indigenous self-recognition in Canada. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 139.
gestures at this point towards the possible articulation of genuinely new universal values that would not be reducible to a translation of previously exclusive or white universals. It is thus not too late for the black Frenchman; it is too late for the misfiring motor of the dialectic. This divergence from Hegel is likewise not an instance of Fanon taking the opposite road of provincialized particularism but rather an example of Fanon’s dedication to finding a new, universalist path once the dialectic leads to a dead-end. Faced with the historical limits of dialectics itself, Fanon translates Nietzsche. The tension of Black Skin, White Masks’s introduction nonetheless remains, for the very Nietzschean ideas that Fanon is translating suggest an alternative to, and at times appear hostile towards, a project of translation.

The Poetry of Social Revolution

The conclusion to Black Skin, White Masks starts with an extraordinarily ambivalent gesture that vividly crystallizes the aforementioned tension. The chapter begins, as in other chapters, with an epigraph, this time extracted from Marx’s The Eighteenth Brumaire:

The social revolution cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all its superstitions concerning the past. Earlier revolutions relied on memories out of world history in order to drug themselves against their own content. In order to find their own content, the revolutions of the nineteenth century have to let the dead bury the dead. Before, the expression exceeded the content; now the content exceeds the expression.  

511 See my discussion of Korsch and Mariátegui in the first chapter of this dissertation.  
512 Marx as cited by Fanon in Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 198.
Citing this passage is a bit like referring to Marx’s famous assertion that he was not a Marxist when asked to clarify one’s own position towards Marxism. It is a performative contradiction, since distancing oneself from the philosophico-political identity of “Marxist” is achieved through the citation, like a good Marxist, of Marx! Similarly, Fanon cites Marx’s poetic analysis of the social revolution to ultimately agree with Marx that today’s social revolution cannot discover its content by drawing from the poetry of the past. This kind of gesture is structurally similar to a disavowal, the psychic mechanism that acknowledges something at the same time that it is denied, and it is symptomatic of a broader ambivalence that can be found throughout Black Skin, White Masks. The ambivalence, once again, circles around the role of the past in the creation of the future, vacillating between a notion of the new as a dialectical reconstitution of the old and a notion of the new as that which emerges once the old has been cleared away. This is ultimately a question of translation, of the time of translation and of time beyond translation.

Marx of course offers his own answer to this question in The Eighteenth Brumaire that is unmistakably dialectical:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

Although the dead may not be of service when searching for the content of social revolution in the nineteenth century, Marx maintains that their determining influence is inescapable. Fanon seems to articulate this same idea when he states that “[t]he black man, however sincere, is a

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slave to the past.” Yet he will go on to contradict this statement and assert that “I am not a slave to the slavery that dehumanized my ancestors.” Indeed, the remaining pages of the conclusion diverge significantly from Marx’s dialectical vision and Fanon’s initial presentation of it by unambiguously maintaining that the past does not truly have the determining power with which it is commonly invested.

Fanon explicitly refers to Sartre when pursuing this line of argumentation, and he is clearly conjuring the latter’s conceptualization of time and freedom in *Being and Nothingness*. Fanon maintains, for example, that the past, when considered within an “inauthentic mode, […] gives form to the individual;” however, when authentically perceived, it becomes clear that “I can also revise the past, prize it or condemn it, depending on what I choose.” This “also” is not dialectical but disjunctive; it signals the split between authenticity and inauthenticity, between the recognition of one’s facticity and the bad-faith denial of individual freedom. Fanon thus rehearses the existentialist doctrine that individuals are necessarily free, which means that conceiving of the past, à la Marx, as a force that conditions the individual is misguided. Fanon will reiterate this point even more radically: “The density of History determines none of my acts. I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical and instrumental given that I initiate my cycle of freedom.” Fanon’s selective citation of Marx is thus intriguingly performative; it functions as a minor demonstration of individual freedom through its very revision of Marx’s textual past.

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515 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 200.
516 Ibid., 205.
519 Ibid., 205.
This purposeful mistranslation of Marx ironically sets the stage for Fanon’s general condemnation of those who draw on the past while attempting to achieve disalienation. Although he does not explicitly say it, Fanon is thinking in particular of certain intellectuals connected to négritude: “The discovery that a black civilization existed in the fifteenth century does not earn me a certificate of humanity. Whether you like it or not, the past can in no way be my guide in the actual state of things.” Fanon will then link the question of time to the liberating mutational process: “The problem considered here is located in temporality. Disalienation will be for those Whites and Blacks who have refused to let themselves be locked in the substantialized ‘tower of the past.’” By alluding once again to Césaire’s refrain in the Notebook that “my negritude is not a tower…,” Fanon clarifies the target of his condemnation, which does not encompass the entire négritude movement but rather is centered on certain intellectuals (e.g. Senghor) who allow their essentialized obsession with the past to sidetrack the present struggle for disalienation.

Fanon will follow the logic of these assertions to their ultimate, Nietzschean conclusion in an impassioned burst of declarations united by their call for total rupture:

I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction. I must constantly remind myself that the real leap consists of introducing invention into life [le véritable saut consiste à introduire l’invention dans l’existence]. In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself.

Much like in the introduction to Black Skin, White Masks, Fanon’s use of language is extremely suggestive here. Disalienation is no longer described as a mutation of the subject but rather as a

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520 Ibid., 199, 200.
521 Ibid., 201.
522 Ibid., 204 [original emphasis]. For original French, see Fanon, “Peau noir, masques blancs,” 250.
moment of (self-)creation and invention. The dialectical process, moreover, is replaced with the temporality of the leap, of an evental rupture. The ambivalence of the conclusion’s epigraph is nonetheless sustained insofar as Fanon, at the very moment when he conceptualizes a beyond to translation and a liberation from past influences, is actively translating Nietzsche and drawing from the poetry of the dead to discover the content of a new life.

The final lines of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* offer no resolution to this tension and instead vacillate between dialectical continuity and eventual rupture, historical determinism and individual freedom, Hegel-Marx and Nietzsche-(early)Sartre:

The black man is not. No more than the white man. Both have to move away [*s’écarter*] from the inhuman voices of their respective ancestors so that a genuine communication [*un authentique communication*] can be born. Before embarking on a positive voice, freedom needs to make an effort at disalienation. At the start of his life, a man is always congested, drowned in contingency. The misfortune of man is that he was once a child. It is through self-consciousness [*reprise sur soi*] and renunciation [*dépouillement*], through a permanent tension of his freedom, that man can create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. Inferiority? Superiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other? Was my freedom not given me to build the world of you [*le monde du Toi*]? At the end of this book we would like the reader to feel with us the open dimension of every consciousness.\(^{523}\)

This passage generally represents a return to the Hegelian dialectic of negativity and self-consciousness after an explicitly Nietzschean interlude. This shift in philosophical perspective is clearest when Fanon dialectically asserts that before positivity can gain expression the liberating

\(^{523}\) Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 206 [translation modified]. For original French, see Fanon, “Peau noir, masques blancs,” 251.
force of negativity must drive forward the process of disalienation. Some of the specific words
Fanon uses nevertheless carry distinctly non-dialectical nuances. The subtractive notion of
s’écarter, for example, is used to conceive of the relationship between different groups and their
pasts, and the second term of the Hegelian dyad cited in the introduction, “reprise” and
“négation,” is exchanged in the conclusion for the less dialectically infused word
dépouillement.  Fanon also alludes to the introduction of Black Skin, White Masks when he
repeats the (misattributed) Nietzschean denouncement of the misfortune of childhood.

These subtle interruptions of the usual Hegelian story point to a non-dialectical moment
located within, rather than before or after, the dialectic of self-consciousness and universal
brotherhood. After the absolute negativity of the pure “I” and the withdrawal into particularity
that constitutes négritude, the stalling of the dialectical motor in certain historical conjunctures
requires a moment of non-dialectical rupture, an affirmative expression of individual freedom
that cannot be confined by the individual’s particularity and past (“the black man is not”). This
procedure then makes possible authentic communication, a new relationship with the other, a
world of the You founded on absolutely reciprocal, which is to say universal, recognition of the
open dimension of every consciousness.  Fanon thus arrives at the culmination of Hegel’s

524 Fanon states in the introduction that “[l]’homme n’est pas seulement possibilité de reprise, de
négation.” Fanon, “Peau noire, masques blancs,” 64.
525 “Man’s misfortune, Nietzsche said, was that he was once a child.” Fanon, Black Skin, White
Masks, xiv. Gordon has recently noted that Fanon wrongly attributes this view to Nietzsche and
that it was actually developed by Simone de Beauvoir. See Gordon, What Fanon Said, 29, 30.
This is not an entirely unfounded misattribution, however, since Nietzsche was a thinker of
childhood and its defects, most notably in Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human: A Book
526 I have modified the translation of le monde du Toi, which was rendered by Richard Philcox as
“the world of you, man.” This strange addition of the generic yet gendered category “man”
misses what Butler describes as the potentiality of Fanon’s “world of the You” to articulate a
new universality beyond the strictures of gender that entails a new kind of relationship between
dialectic of self-consciousness but through a very different path that leaps beyond the short-circuiting moment of lordship and bondage with the liberating force of Nietzschean affirmation. Whereas Fanon previously described this movement as one of concrete universality, a movement that must pass through the particular to arrive at the universal, his depiction of the world of You, because it emerges out of affirmative rupture, looks more like a genuinely new universality than a dialectically concretized universality.

It is tempting, given this last move in *Black Skin, White Masks*, to try to map out the dialectical and non-dialectical moments of the mutational process of disalienation. There appears to be an initial non-dialectical rupture with white supremacist Manichaeanism that sets the dialectic in motion and another non-dialectical affirmation that provides an alternative path to disalienation once the dialectic short circuits. This picture becomes considerably murkier, however, when accounting for the less straightforward moments of coexistence and even, at times, outright conflict between dialectical and non-dialectical modes of thinking, so the temptation to neatly systematize or periodize the process of disalienation is ultimately misleading. Instead, a careful reading of Fanon would attend, as I have tried to do, to the unresolved tensions and contradictions that remain between translation and creation, negation and affirmation, appealing to the poetry of the past and inventing the poetry of the future, dialectically concretizing an already-existing universal and articulating a genuinely new universal.

I think it is important to properly account for these tensions and contradictions not in order to undermine Fanon’s reputation as a great thinker but rather to open up his thought once again to new inquiries. Recall Fanon’s “final prayer” in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “O my body, always make me a man who questions!”[527] Fanon’s closing statement is an opening, an appeal to

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his body that he be made to continue, after a long study, to question. It is in this spirit that I have focused on some philosophico-political problems in Fanon’s writings that remain without easy solutions instead of offering yet another commentary that disavows or acrobatically resolves every tension and contradiction in an anxious, anti-Fanonian impulse to find definitive answers. Fanon’s only definitive answer: always question!

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