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Revolutionary Constellations:  
Seeing Revolution Beyond the Dominant Frames

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Niall Ivan Twohig

Committee in charge:

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Professor Dennis Childs

2016



The Dissertation of Niall Ivan Twohig is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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University of California, San Diego

2016



## DEDICATION

For  
Lianne, Mollie, Luis, Page,  
Da, Ma,  
Jeff and Jay—  
you pointed the way

## EPIGRAPH

Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus of various moments of history. But no state of affairs is, as a cause, already a historical one. It becomes this, posthumously, through eventualities which may be separated from it by millennia. The historian who starts from this, ceases to permit the consequences of eventualities to run through the fingers like the beads of a rosary. He records the constellation in which his own epoch comes into contact with that of an earlier one. He thereby establishes a concept of the present as that of the here-and-now, in which splinters of messianic time are shot through.

*Walter Benjamin*

A monument does not commemorate or celebrate something that happened but confides to the ear of the future the persistent sensations that embody the event: the constantly renewed suffering of men and women, their re-created protestations, their constantly resumed struggle. Will this all be in vain because suffering is eternal, and revolutions do not survive their victory? But the success of a revolution resides only in itself, precisely in the vibrations, clinches, the openings it gave to men and women at the moment of its making and that composes in itself a monument that is always in the process of becoming, like those tumuli each new traveler adds a stone.

*Deleuze and Guattari*

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As I reread this dissertation I see so little of myself. Word by word, I see myself dissolving, like those bubbles my nephew blows in my sister's backyard that float, for a time, and then burst back into air, grass, trees. What comes into relief as I dissolve are all of you that stand behind my words, the background without which there would be no foreground.

I see my cohort. I see us on Day 1, fresh faced, not knowing what's to come. I see us before we took our different paths. We stand together at a rally. We put down our books and march with the community for a justice our words can only gesture toward.

I see the ragtag among us, The Villagers, lit by a light far more honest than the glow of laptops and office bulbs. In this light, I see Megan pouring herself into manifestos. She is a reincarnation of Emma Goldman or some forgotten anarchist who altered history for the better. I see June surrounded by a diamond sky, each sashay breaks the chains. I see Rosi and Anthony on the streets of Paris in '68 and Havana in 1959. I see Dennis breathing life into drowned slaves and entombed prisoners that History tried to forget. I see Chris and Joo Ok towering above the academy and shaking apart its walls to reveal something new. I see Meli and Esteban shape-shifting into cats whose upturned brows suggest a skepticism and playfulness with the world.

I see the Dimensions of Culture community. I see Sue, holding the ship together with fluorescent post-its and multicolored sticky notes. I see Ash,

Genevieve, Linh, Jorge, and Jeff. I see what we cannot see: the ripples of our teaching that extend outward in our students' wakes. I see those students—Allyson and Gracie and so many others—who carry the DOC tools along with the joys and sorrows of their communities. I see them becoming our teachers and our hope.

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I see Mollie, a beacon that guides lost pups and lost brothers home. I see Ma and Da for all they are—good and bad—and I thank them for it all.

I see the dead. I see Uncle Trae, Uncle Derm, Liam Breen, and Dom Columba Breen. I see a pinch of their rebelliousness and holiness sprinkled into my words. I see my forgotten ancestors in Ireland and the Philippines who lived a hard life of commoners under colonial rule. I see and honor their labors. But I also see and honor the unfathomable depths of their inner worlds, which were real even though they were unattainable in the material world. I see George Winne Jr. and Melanie Kenny. I see them in the trees and clouds. I see them in the protests and the prayers. I see them in these pages.

Finally, I see my beloved Lianne. I see the snowy peaks of eternity reflected in her and in the critters we keep. I see those peaks, but I also see the blood on the snow that we must wipe away day by day, word by word, and in our own small ways.

It's been nice seeing all of you!



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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Revolutionary Constellations:  
Seeing Revolution Beyond the Dominant Frames

by

Niall Ivan Twohig

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Page duBois, Co-Chair  
Professor Luis Martín-Cabrera, Co-Chair

The dissertation looks beyond the dominant frames of Western epistemology and philosophy that largely determine the ways revolution and revolutionaries are conceptualized and remembered in modern society. Rather than focusing on historically grounded political projects that conform to a particular revolutionary doctrine, our focus will be on common people whose praxis posed, and still poses, an alternative to a social order premised on the separation and stratification of the commons and its people. The revolutionaries we will meet in these pages see through what we will unravel as the myth of separateness. They see through a

mythic reality that veils people's interconnections with each other, with the commons, and with the cosmos from which all life emerges. Their praxis touches this deeper reality.

To ground our discussion, we will look deeply at three flashpoints of revolt against the myth as it manifested itself in the liberal capitalist regimes of the 19th and 20th centuries: The Paris Commune of 1871, the student protests of 1968 in Paris and Mexico, and a self-immolation in protest of the Vietnam War that occurred in 1970. We will thread these flashpoints together to see how, despite the distance that separates these revolts in time and space, they illuminate an alternative way of being that stands in contrast to the atomized, competitive, and militant existence that is formed in the crucible of liberal capitalist empire. Threading these flashpoints together, we will begin to reconceptualize what is meant by success and failure, beginnings and endings. Though these revolts may end with defeat and death, the way of being that they touched continues on past their historical or biographical endpoint. Like the light from a dead star or from an extinguished candle, their revolution travels across space and across time waiting for the right conditions to manifest itself again in renewed praxis. Cultural production, particularly art and literature, will serve as our vehicle for illuminating this revolution and its continuations.

## INTRODUCTION

### Re-Membering the Way of the Revolutionary Dead

“The way you can go  
isn't the real way.  
The name you can say  
isn't the real name.”

- Lao Tzu, *The Tao Te Ching*  
(Translator Ursula LeGuin)

### **Myth Becomes Reality**

With this dissertation, I attempt to write against an old, yet still dominant, myth that structures our lives, our interactions, the ways in which we remember the past, and the ways in which we envision our shared future.<sup>1</sup>

This myth, which grows out of Aristotelian philosophy and later extends into the pastoralism of the Roman Catholic Church, offers a dualistic story to sort out, and order, the messiness of the universe. The story goes like this: human life is the most sacred and precious thing. It is the central point of the cosmos that stands *apart* from all other things in the cosmos including animals, plants, and minerals. As such, it is to be secured and made to flourish against all the hostile external forces of the universe that threaten extinction.

On the surface, this might seem a benign myth to live by. The problem, however, is that when the myth is taken as reality, people begin to live their lives

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<sup>1</sup> To outline this myth, I draw upon the work of several thinkers including Alan Watts, Ram Dass, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Herbert Marcuse, and Achille Mbembe. Though I don't cite them at every turn, I, instead, try to lay out their theories in plain language.

under the assumption that nature, the inexplicable flows of the cosmos, and death itself are an enemy to be contained or conquered.

To follow the roots of this myth, we need move forward in Western historical time to the Enlightenment. Though Enlightenment thought and praxis deposes God and King from the cosmic and social hierarchies, it does not do away with the myth. Just the opposite. The enlightened Western subject now perceives himself as the center of a hostile, yet *knowable* and *malleable*, universe. Once again, he embraces the myth and uses it as a justification to superimpose a fully rational order on the world. Approaching the hostile world outside himself, the Enlightenment thinker dons a rational lens in order to make the unknown known. He attempts to know the universe by making it some *thing* that is measurable, a *thing* that can be studied and classified on tables and timelines. Thus, time becomes a linear line that can be broken down into seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, decades, and epochs. Space becomes a measurable dimension that can be broken down into inches, feet, and yards, etc. Likewise, the world of animals and vegetables become divisible into kingdoms, phylum, classes, orders, families, genus, and species.

The problem with this rationalization of the world is, again, that these measurements are not taken as representations of reality but as *reality* itself. For example, the map, with its lines of longitude, latitude, and neatly-demarcated borders, becomes more real than the uncontainable terrain of the environment. It becomes a way of navigating space and knowing who or what belongs and does not belong in a given territory. This same logic extends to all domains of individual and

collective life in the Western world. For example, the biography of one's life, that written sequence of events from birth to death, replaces the complexity of an entire existence. Likewise, the history of societies and events *becomes* the reality that condenses all the immeasurable flows of data that exist between two dates on a timeline and that would require an infinite number of encyclopedias to record.

The myth leads to an even more contradictory reality when we reach what is marked in Western historical time as Modernity. Going beyond empirical studies of nature, the bourgeois class discovers how nature can be turned into instruments that can be bent to its will. They see how technology, when paired with a rational organization of space and time, can add to this project. During this epoch, not only are modern institutions organized around the instrumentalization of nature, but life itself becomes an instrument, a means toward a class-specific end—that of capital accumulation. Bodies are made to move in time and space to maximize productivity. Their gestures are directed and normalized so that the process of production can be standardized and regulated to produce a surplus.

Somewhere along the way—perhaps in route to the colonies or frontiers of the Western empires or perhaps in urban cities in Europe that were ordered along lines of race, class, and gender—the myth takes on a new expression. It becomes this: *Our* life is sacred and all that is *Other* brings with it the threat of our death. When cast in this light, those groups of people that look or act differently from the “us” are perceived as being just as hostile as the plant or animal world, just as deadly as the desert sands or stormy seas. Therefore, the logic follows that “we” must civilize, enslave, or exterminate “them.” “We” must do so for the sake of our

lives and for the survival of “our” society. Here, we must recognize the hard truth that this myth cannot be pinned to one *-ism* such as capitalism, fascism, imperialism, or colonialism. Rather, it is *the* myth structuring reality as we know it, a myth capable of being adopted by Communism and Liberal Capitalism, Socialism and National Socialism alike. This myth knows no party lines.

### **New Clothes**

As we begin this journey together, we will consider how liberal capitalism and the Western empires born from liberal philosophy and capitalist practice are entangled within this myth. To see this, we will first focus on a crucial flashpoint at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: The brief but vibrant emergence of the Paris Commune of 1871. A century before the Commune, liberal capitalism in both its French and North American incarnations was seen by the masses as the revolutionary alternative to the old European monarchies and the sacred order that undergirded them. On many levels, this is true. The Western revolutions deposed God and king by breaking apart the sacred and monarchial hierarchies that structured everyday life. A new figure took center stage in the cosmic order: the rights-bearing individual. Along with this, the cosmos itself seemed to undergo a sea-change as the sacred universe was supplanted by a malleable universe that could be studied, measured, and ultimately harnessed to men’s will.

In *Chapter 1: Through Fleeting Time*, we will consider how the life and writings of the communard Louise Michel expose the limits of the Western revolution of liberal capitalism. One of the central questions that Michel and the

ghosts of the Commune beg us to ask is this: How revolutionary can a regime be if it simply dresses up the old myth in new clothes? This is precisely what happens in the revolutionary order of liberal capitalism. It invests itself in the old hubris that sets man apart from the cosmos. The rights-bearing individual takes the throne at the center of *his* universe—and, what can he do, but act the role of God and King? Space and time becomes his to *know*, his to *conquer*. Those who exist outside the pale of his Western order (women, foreigners, slaves, colonial subjects, abnormal or unruly “individuals”) are seen as a threat that must be conquered and made to fit into the spatial and temporal order and the atomized subjectivity constructed by that order.

At the same time, Michel’s writings illuminate hidden revolutionary pathways that exist beneath the cobblestones of empires past, present, and future. Her days in the Commune and her path of exile, as we shall see, explode the divisive and atomizing spatial and temporal boundaries that liberal capitalism strives to superimpose upon the world and upon its life through *imaginary* and *material* measures.<sup>2</sup> Throughout her life, she inhabits a space-time liberated from the liberal capitalist stratification of space and its linear progressive measurements of time, a space-time where the undivided cosmos and unbroken commons shines through all

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<sup>2</sup> “Imaginary measures” include geographical boundaries on a map, spatial and temporal measurements that carve up space and time, as well as words and names that mark a person, place, or thing off as distinct from the background upon which its distinct form depends. “Material measures” includes the physical technologies that keep the human “herd” moving in the “proper” way (or that lock those in place who refuse to move with the herd). This might include borders, gridded streets, subways, roadways, trade routes, and enclosures. Material measures might also include physical force exertions that compel bodies to move through space and time in a certain way and to a certain rhythm. It might also include those technologies that liquidate bodies that refuse to fit in to the spatial and temporal order all together.



man's superimposed constructs and concepts, a space-time where the supposed separate self is revealed as *undivided* from the Other of nature and those brothers and sisters separated by space, time, culture, or genetics. In other words, Michel trod upon a space-time liberated from the myth of separateness. If we accept her invitation into this space-time, we will begin to catch sight of a more luminous shape of revolution than the ones cast by the history books. And if we do gaze upon it, we can only hope to bring a trace of its shape back through imperfect words.

### **Revolution Out of Bounds**

Throughout our journey, we will try not to limit our vision to the dominant historical frames that determine what events and what lives we see as revolutionary and how we measure their success or failure. In other words, we will not seek revolution out in those historically grounded political projects and social movements that sought to re-mold society to the will of the proletariat or to the will of another group sanctified as *the* revolutionary agent of history.<sup>3</sup> Instead, we will look for revolution in those spatially and temporally disconnected desires, stories, thoughts, and practices that brush up against the myth and that strive to free life—not just *my* life or *our* lives, but *all* life—from its stranglehold. In this regard, the

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of revolution I develop is set against the background of thought from a diverse constellation of thinkers. I draw from the anarchist tradition as expressed by Rosa Luxemburg, Louise Michel, Walter Benjamin, and more recent thinkers like Alain Badiou and Kristin Ross who attempt to rethink revolution beyond the bounds of The Party. Specifically, I find inspiration in their notions of a revolutionary consciousness that emerges and is transmitted through praxis (though I do not limit my discussion to “class consciousness”). I also draw inspiration from an anarcho-pacifist and nonviolent tradition that extends through the works of Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Thich Nhat Hanh, Fr. Daniel Berrigan, Martin Luther King Jr., and other spiritual thinkers and liberation theologians who are not often read alongside the radical political thinkers. These thinkers are in conversation behind these pages.

revolutionaries we will encounter will not fit a typical mold. They will not be Marxist doctrinaires, charismatic leaders, vanguards, or masses who were vocal and visible during an event that *succeeded* in altering the course of history. Rather, the revolutionaries we will encounter in these pages are, to put it simply, those who refused to operate according to the mythical boundaries (physical, geographical, and philosophical) that are superimposed upon all life. They are those who saw into, and acted within, a dimension where the Self is indivisible from the Other, where the “I” and “us” is never separate from the “you” and “them,” where human life is never separate from the cosmos from which it emerges and depends.

### **Through Space and Time**

In order to bring this revolution into relief, we will need to avoid the restrictive demarcations of liberal biography and historiography that mark off lives and events with neat beginnings, middles, and endings. We will not rely on the historical record of political victories and defeats, material achievements and losses, as our frames for sketching the faces of these revolutionaries, for those frames cannot capture the hidden pathways by which this furtive revolution extends beyond the failure of the movement and beyond the death of the body. We will also need to break from all those disciplinary imperatives that say we *must* limit our sights to subject matter grounded in a particular place and time. Instead, we will follow a different imperative. Perhaps “imperative” is not the right word. We will follow an intuition, a faint flutter of remembrance, that tells us the end is no end at all. To follow this intuition, we will unground our vision in space and time. We will feel for

the “vibrations, clinches, the openings” that extend well beyond the death of the body, the failure of a movement, or the dissolution of a party. We will turn our eyes in scattershot directions, looking beyond the *end* to see the various hands that lay stones upon the tumuli of those who saw a world beyond myth.

Let’s consider where this intuition will lead us. In the second half of Chapter 1, we will slip through time to 1968 to find the kin that Louise Michel anticipated a century earlier. The Paris uprising of ’68 came at a critical juncture in the history of an empire that Michel saw in its earlier stages. At this moment, the regime of liberal capitalism was vying for planetary control with the Communist blocs. Both regimes were proposing their systems as the *true* revolutionary road to freedom, the *true* path for the planet. Our concern will not be with the validity or falsity of either sides’ theories or practices. Rather, we will focus on people who saw through the myth adopted by both sides, those who refused to see the “I” as separate from the “you” and the “us” as separate from the “them.” When we travel to the Paris uprisings of ’68, we will encounter students and workers who broke from the superimposed spatial and temporal physics that the myth exerted on their bodies and upon the planet. We will see them discovering cracks in the superimposed space-time and unearthing a buried ground—a common ground—where they meet each other and reconnect with the revolutionary ghosts of the past. In *Chapter 2: Beyond the Violence of History*, we will leap across space to the student uprisings in Mexico that same year. We will see how the students’ demands and gestures tapped into a rhythm that beat against the divisive walls erected by a political party that had hijacked the name of the revolution to expand a liberal capitalist framework that

atomized the people, bolstered social hierarchies, and put profits above the people. *Chapter 3: A Gesture in May* will take us on the final part of our journey. We will slip across time and space to the tumultuous month of May 1970 in the United States when students across the country struck against the war machine and against the hegemony of violence.

### **The Violence of the Veil**

Though the three points on our map are spread across time and space, they emerge against a common background of violence. In each context, a nation state that touts liberty, freedom, and equality for *all* contradicts these beliefs by turning its weapons on those outside the pale of its espoused rights and liberties. Rather than seeing this violence as anomalous to the regime of liberal capitalism, we will see how it is built into the mythic structure of its philosophies and practices. These philosophies and practices superimpose the veil of *the nation state* over an indivisible commons and the mask of the *individual* over an undeniably interconnected planetary community.

What is born from this veiled reality is an unnatural state of insecurity, warfare, and competition. In this constructed state, the “war of all against all” is seen as the only possible path. Those nations and subjects who maintain an inequitable hold on power and resources are more than happy to walk that well-trodden path; they continually exert their force to accumulate profit and to secure *their* nation or *their* lives against all the hostile forces beyond their borders and

beyond their skin. This isn't a new path, by any means, but it does have unique manifestations. Let us consider the most recent.

From the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, the liberal capitalist nation state and the liberal individual have become the dominant fictions that determine what a *state* and *subject* can be. It must be noted here that both emerge within historical formations of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Out of these formations, the majority of power and resources has come to rest in the hands of an elite class that structures institutional practice and belief around the ideologies of white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and ableism. When people are trained to see the world through these lenses, they see only certain states as legitimate state (i.e. the militaristic nation state that extends rights via force) and only certain subjects as legitimate rights-bearing subjects (i.e. the productive, competitive, and self-reliant individual). The closer a state or subject conforms to the hegemonic standards, the more that state or individual is valued in the eyes of the liberal beholder. All the rest is constructed as a *thing* apart from the nation and apart from the self. Of course the thing is sometimes offered sanctuary, perhaps out of a sense of benevolence or paternalism. More often the thing is allowed into the whole only if its incorporation is profitable for the wealthiest individuals and the “corporate persons” that the liberal law has conjured into existence. When it is not, which is often the case, the thing is deemed disposable or threatening, an object to be barred from entry, imprisoned, disposed, or exterminated.

## Lifting the Veil

“All men are interdependent. Every nation is an heir of a vast treasury of ideas and labor to which both the living and the dead of all nations have contributed. Whether we realize it or not, each of us lives eternally ‘in the red.’ We are everlasting debtors to known and unknown men and women. When we arise in the morning, we go into the bathroom where we reach for a sponge which is provided for us by a Pacific Islander. We reach for soap that is created for us by a European. Then at the table we drink coffee which is provided for us by a South American, or tea from a Chinese or cocoa by a West African. Before we leave our jobs we are already beholden to half the world. In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother’s keeper because we are our brother’s brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In each of the chapters, we will see what comes to light when revolutionaries lift the veil of separateness and see into a realm that exists beyond the false divides superimposed upon the planet, upon its people, and upon the commons.

In *Chapter 1*, we will see how Louise Michel lifts this veil even as the liberal justice system attempts to force her into isolation in the penal colony of New Caledonia. Those attempts are futile, for Michel has already discovered a dimension that exists beyond the spatial and temporal cages of the empire. She can never be separated from that realm. During her exile, she continues to thread herself to it, to her dead kin, who linear progressive time would have her leave behind in the past, and to new kin in the colony who the dominant frames of liberal capitalism construct as alien in the eyes of the Western beholder. In *Chapter 2*, we will consider what outlives the violence of the Tlatelolco Massacre. Turning to oral histories and Roberto Bolaño’s novel *Amulet*, we will tune into the rhythm of a people who discovered their inter-connections and whose song of freedom cannot be silenced by the force of the bullet or the word. In *Chapter 3*, we will look at a

self-immolation that took place in May 1970, a turbulent month when students in the United States rose up against the hegemony of violence that undergirded, not only the war machine, but the liberal capitalist institutions. Looking deeply at the self-immolation, we will consider how it is rooted in a non-violent ethic that sees life, not in terms of dualistic divisions, but as a continuum where the sufferings of one have cosmic ramifications for all.

There are many names for the dimension that these revolutionaries see behind the veil. None of the names or concepts are sufficient. Yet, they all point toward an uncontainable dimension that exists beyond the false reality of separateness that man has attempted to impose upon the world through the force of his will, his weapons, and his words. Following Martin Luther King, we might say these revolutionaries open their vision up to a dimension—or better, a reality—of “interdependency” or “inter-relatedness” (King 191). Taking a cue from my final chapter, *A Gesture in May*, I’d like us to consider a related term used by a friend of King and longtime proponent of nonviolence, the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh. He uses the word *interbeing* to point toward a dimension where all the apparently distinct forms in the material world—be they human, plant, animal, mineral, or artificial—appear for what they really are: an ephemeral part of a continuum where each individual form is inexorably bound to, and dependent upon, all that exists beyond its visible boundaries and borders.

Interbeing reminds us of the inadequacy of *all* the signs that we assign to people, places, and things. To see this, let’s consider an example often discussed in semiotics: that of a tree. When we hear or read the word *tree*, or when we see an

actual tree in front of us, we risk missing a deeper reality of that thing that is before our eyes as either a representation or an actual object. The linguistic or visual sign becomes our way, not just of naming the tree, but of boiling down its being to that of an independent living thing separate and distinct from all other things.<sup>4</sup> A passage from Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Heart of the Buddha's Teachings* shows us the wonders we close our vision to when we focus on the sign in this way:

We touch the water when we break through the signs of the water and see its true nature of interbeing... To see the wondrous nature of water, you need to look beyond the sign (appearance) of the water, and see it is made up of non-water elements. If you think the water is only water, that it cannot be the sun, the earth, or the flower, you are not correct. When you can see that the water is the sun, the earth, and the flower, that just by looking at the sun or the earth you can see the water, that is 'the signlessness of signs.' (149)

Taking this passage as a guide, we might say the same of the tree. The tree *is* the water, the sun, the earth. It cannot exist without each of these non-tree elements. Likewise, for the paper upon which these words are written. It is the tree, the water, the sun, the earth. At the same time, it is the labor of workers who cut the tree, brought it to the mills, manufactured it, and carried it to shipping warehouses. Likewise, for the worker. She is more than her name or title. She contains the cosmos. She cannot be without the food she eats, the trees used for shelter, the sun, the earth, the water that went into those resources, the other workers who honed those resources into usable things, the kin who gave her the emotional nutriments to

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<sup>4</sup> This is a larger misrecognition than the one described by the linguists, i.e. the sign being mistaken for the signifier.



rise each day and work.<sup>5</sup> We can follow the web of this worker's being further back in time: She cannot be without her mother and father, the resources and kin upon which they relied, and the entire web of life that gave rise to those resources and kin. If we follow the web further back still, we can see that the worker, and the whole line of her kin, could not be without the billion year old elemental particles of which they are composed. When she dies, her form will decompose, but every particle of her being will continue on in new forms, new life.

What we can gather from this reality of interbeing is that the signs we use to mark off beings as separate and independent are a fiction, for they block out the deeper web of being upon which these fragile and transitory forms depend. How foolish, then, are man's attempts to cordon off parts of that web so that he can reap profits from that to which *all* of us are inexorably bound! How foolish to forcefully atomize beings and treat them as disposable, when in reality, each is spun out of the common web!

I submit that those who we will encounter in these pages understood this deeper reality. This is a bold claim, I know. One might say that I'm imposing a totalizing spiritual construct—the construct of interbeing—upon disconnected struggles and diverse beliefs. But, I don't feel this to be the case. Let's consider the criticisms to understand why. First, let's analyze the critique of my possible appeal to spiritualism. This critique is off the mark because interbeing is a view rooted in

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<sup>5</sup> When we explore the self-immolation through this open lens of interbeing, we may see similarities with Western counter-traditions. Marxism, teaches us to see the dead labor that belies the fetish object of the commodity. Interbeing pushes us beyond this tradition.

*reality* rather than in spirituality. Like Martin Luther King Jr.'s notion of interdependence, interbeing can be seen and felt in a "real sense" if each of us look deeply at where we emerged from and upon whom and what we depend for life. An awareness of interbeing is not to be mistaken as utopianism, for it is grounded in a reality obscured by the divisive and hierarchical structures man has placed atop it and labeled as reality. In response to the criticism that I am superimposing interbeing upon the individuals and movements, I would say this: I am not attempting to say that this view of reality was embraced by all, or even a majority, of people in the movements and struggles we will consider. Some people, I'm sure, sank into their separateness even as they called for unity, freedom, revolution, or peace. Our concern is not with them, nor is it with judging their efforts or beliefs. Our concern, rather, is with a few who woke to the reality of interbeing, interdependency, or whatever imperfect word we might use to describe a reality freed from the myth of separateness. Their practices, stories, and gestures testify to that wakefulness. *They tell us* that some people saw beyond the signs that the masses mistake as reality—the sign of the nation, the sign of the self. *They tell us* that they are part of something larger, something almost inexplicable, that exceeds all signs. Calling this "something" a movement or a class seems too limited. So, for now, let's leave it open, undefined.

### **Dis-Membering the Revolutionary Dead**

In each of the chapters, we will see how those who lift the veil face the State's physical violence. What we will also see is how they face a more insidious

form of violence—the violence of forgetting. By this, I don't mean that they are utterly erased from the historical record or institutional memory. They *are* there, but only as thin shadows of what they actually *were*. What we are left with are traces, chalk outlines that block out the whole, for the ways in which they are “remembered” are limited by the dominant frames of liberal thought. Those frames, which are themselves forged from the myth of separateness, shift focus depending on the type of person being framed. Those who seem to conform to normative standards of race, gender, sexuality, and other identity categories, are framed in terms of individualism. They are remembered as heroic or flawed individuals who were, at most, part of a movement from a dead past. On the other hand, those who deviated from the norms are constructed as part of an imaginary hoard that constantly threatens to break down the walls surrounding the nation and the self.

What this means for the revolutionaries, regardless of the complexities of their identities, is that they are *dis-membered* from the reality they saw and touched behind the veil. They are not remembered to history as revolutionaries. Instead, they are posthumously constructed as either individuals or stand-ins for the barbarians at the gates. Their lives become dead stories that have legible beginnings, middles, and endings. And because their lives ended, they can be absorbed neatly into the fabric of liberal history or discarded for the dustbin of history. We should recognize a great irony of history in this: Though these revolutionaries saw themselves beyond the bounds of the nation and self, liberal history can only read and rewrite their lives through the myth of separateness that defines them as either good or bad subjects who contributed to, or challenged, the course of liberal history. It will be up to us to

look past this old lie of history by remembering—really *remembering*—the dimension these revolutionaries touched. It will be up to us to remember, too, that this dimension cannot be closed off by physical violence or the violence of history.

### **Revolutionary Constellations**

How are we to remember the revolutionary dead when we, who stand across the gulf of time, are left with such imperfect sketches of them in our present? To do so, we will look back upon history as stargazers rather than historians. I say this because the night sky offers a stargazer a profound insight on reality that disrupts the historical understanding of the past as a closed book and historical figures as dead characters in that book. When we gaze upon the night sky with certain lenses, we can see that the end of a star's physical form is not the end of the star. Long after its collapse, a star continues to cast its light on the present. If we have the right tools, we can even hear a dead star sing beyond death, its singular resonance beating across time and space. With more precise instruments, we would see its waves and particles surrounding us, moving through us, becoming part of us.<sup>6</sup>

When we look deeply at the flashpoints of revolutionary life that burn against the backdrop of the historical universe, we reach the same insight. Their physical collapse is never their end. Rather, the ripples of the revolutionary life continue beyond the death of the body or collapse of the movement. To see this, we need to look past the earthly sketches of a biographical life and historical event

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<sup>6</sup> This insight into the reality of the star brushes up against so much of what is familiar to us in a dualistic Western ontology that says things either *are* or *are not*. Thich Nhat Hanh counters that binary when he writes, "To be or not to be, that is *not* the question."

constructed within the dominant frames of a liberalism. Once we break our view from those frames, we will be able to reconnect the revolutionary dead to their named and unnamed kin who are scattered across time and space. We will be able to form a constellation from their spatially and temporally disconnected flashpoints to see that they are never alone, that they are never merely a footnote from a dead page of history.

What our efforts will bring into relief is a revolutionary constellation that burns through the myth of separateness. In a way, we will be like the stargazers of old who found the shape of gods and sacred beasts in the stars. Some might say that those stargazers were merely being superstitious and foolish for seeking connections amid the obvious chaos of the universe. Yet, another way of looking at the drawings they found in the night sky is to say that they grew out of a longing, a faint flutter of remembrance, for the reality of inter-being that has been overshadowed by myth. We will find the same as we look deeply upon the historical universe. Drawing threads between these historical flashpoints, we will re-member the revolutionary dead. Re-membling, here, does not mean simply calling them to mind as an act of nostalgia or melancholy. It means that we will see them as they *were*: a flash of life that shone through the spatial, temporal, and ontological boundaries imposed upon the self. We will see them as they *are*: a flash of life that continues to touch the present even after its physical form has turned to dust.

## **Cultures of Remembrance**

When we look at the night sky in search of constellations, it helps to have star maps as our guides. The same can be said as we explore history in search of revolutionary constellations. We need maps. We will not look for these maps within the realms of liberal and neoliberal discourse. That discourse is, after all, premised on the myth of separateness. It can only see the past in terms of recorded and recordable facts, events with clear beginnings and endings, and individuals who stand apart from the crowd.

Rather than turning to history, we will look to the realm of culture for our maps. This is not to say that culture is a pure site for remembering what liberal discourse forgets. Some cultural production is firmly grounded in the myth of separateness. As examples, we might think of all the biographies and literary texts that construct the self-reliant individual as the center of his or her narrative universe. We might think of all the monuments and memorials to those *heroes* who stood apart from the crowd. We might also think of the cultural production that reflects and reinforces the worst ideologies that have emerged from the myth of separateness: white supremacy, misogyny, homophobia, and militarism. There is, however, another form of cultural production—a revolutionary form—that helps us remember what is dismembered by the dominant frames. This cultural production plays with material form to construct a deeper view on reality than what is seen by the naked eye, a view that reflects the reality of inter-being rather than the myth of separateness. When it turns its focus on the revolutionary dead, it remembers them,

not as individuals who stood apart from the crowd but as beings who saw beyond their separateness to see the threads that tie all beings together in a single garment.

In our exploration of these cultures of remembrance, we will avoid a dualistic trap that says that only certain cultural forms *capture* reality (non-fiction and social analysis) while others merely *represent* an artist's perceptions or impressions of the world (fiction and art). The cultural productions we will explore in each chapter disrupt that binary. They show us that fiction and art often paints a more accurate depiction of reality than what is visible to the eye and recordable for the historian or social analyst.

In chapter 1, we will turn our attention to Louise Michel's memoir *The Red Virgin*, a text that blurs the lines between biography and fantasy in a way that cuts against the grain of history. The memoir's proto-surrealism gives us access to a reality that is invisible to liberal historiographers and biographers. We see this in two respects: For one, it displaces Michel from the central point in the biographical universe and puts her in a horizontal relationship with the animals inhabiting the countryside, with the legendary ghouls haunting the hills, with comrades who stood with her on the barricades, with the rebellious kin separated from her by time and space. She emerges, not as an individual heroine, but as part of a tableau. Secondly, the text opens a window on the outgrowths of revolution that extend beyond the collapse of The Paris Commune of 1871. These outgrowths would be impossible to recognize if Michel equated the visible signs of death and destruction that surrounded her in May 1871 to "the end." We will find something similar in the

cultural text when we turn to a work of fiction by the Chilean novelist Roberto Bolaño in Chapter 2. His novel *Amulet* will provide us glimpses of what outlives the State violence unleashed upon the student activists in Mexico during 1968. Like Michel's memoir, the de-centered protagonist of *Amulet* has a deep-vision that cuts through the superimposed realities that a State transitioning to liberal capitalism places on space, time, and subjects who are bound to its law. By lifting these veils for the reader, the novel itself offers a deeper form of remembrance of the revolutionaries of '68 than what is possible in histories and memorials that see Tlatelolco in terms of individuals who should be laid to rest or elevated to the status of martyrs.

In the second half of Chapter 1 and in Chapter 3, we will move beyond the written cultural production to visual culture and memorials. We will look at photography beyond the standard frame. By this I mean that we will juxtapose photographs from different historical epochs in order to illuminate a community threaded together across time and space. Though their biographical lives may never intersect, the figures in these photographs stand upon the same ground, a common ground freed from the myth of separateness. In a way, our approach to photography will extend Roland Barthes approach by seeking the punctum—that element that draws our gaze into the frozen crystal of time—not in a single photo but in several corresponding photographs. In other words, we will look for the common element in the photographs that draws us, not *into* the scene, but *across* time and space to several connected scenes. In Chapter 3, we will explore the limits and possibilities of memorialization, focusing especially on memorials that break our view from the



individual by giving us a glimpse, not only of the movements that surrounded the individual, but of the reality they saw beyond the veil.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Through Fleeting Time<sup>7</sup>

Louise Michel and The Reblooming of a Conquered Lineage

“Through fleeting time  
Everything belongs to the future  
... the livid-browed conqueror  
can die more surely than the conquered.”  
- Louise Michel

#### Introduction: Red Scarves

In this first chapter, we will examine a revolutionary reimagining of space and time that comes to light in the Paris Commune of 1871 and that outlives its violent collapse. Our investigation orbits around the life and writings of the communard Louise Michel, whose demolition of liberal capitalist time, both on the barricade and page, illuminate alternative temporalities that resist the closure marked-off in liberal historiographies by the *tick-tick-tick* of emptied bullet cartridges or the dull and deadened *tock* of billy clubs or the hands of a clock. Once we distill a concept of revolutionary time from Michel’s memoir *The Red Virgin*, we use it to shed light on the global uprisings of 1968 and the period after their collapse. We will then consider how these uprisings momentarily fulfill the exiled communard’s vision of time by bringing the inheritors of a conquered lineage onto the stage of history, thus temporarily restoring what was foreclosed by the violent

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<sup>7</sup> For Melanie Kenny Twohig, who peeked through the cracks and who, for too brief a moment, lived in a different time and space. And for Erlinda Legaspi whose lilies of the valley continue to blossom every Spring as a reminder that she is always here.

reconstitution of capital and the superimposition of its spatial divisions and temporal rhythms onto everyday life.

A moment from Michel's memoirs makes the concept of time that we will unravel more material. The moment occurs seven years after the collapse of the Paris Commune, in 1878. At this point, Michel and hundreds of communards are exiled in the prison colony of New Caledonia. There, Michel's path converges with members of the indigenous Kanaks who are staging a revolt against French imperial administration. Threading cautiously over the terrain of her memories, Michel invites us into this moment:

The revolt of the tribes was deadly serious, but it is better if I say a little about it. The Kanakas were seeking the same liberty we sought in the Commune. Let me say only that my red scarf, the red scarf of the Commune that I had hidden from every search, was divided in two pieces one night. Two Kanakas, before going to join the insurgents against the whites, had come to say goodbye to me.

They slipped into the ocean. The sea was bad, and they may never have arrived across the bay, or perhaps they were killed in the fighting. I never saw either of them again, and I don't know which of the two deaths took them, but they were brave with the bravery that black and white both have. (112)

At first glance, gifting a scarf seems an inconsequential gesture, but if we look closer, we see that it is saturated with meaning. The red scarf marks Michel as a communard. It was worn by her comrades who, as we will see in Part I, attempted to break free of their "proper" place in liberal capitalist space and time. Many of them wore it defiantly in the Commune's final days, marking them off for the mass graves and grave sites of historical memory. Some, like Michel, were able to carry the scarf with them past the last days of the Commune, into exile, where they

clutched it as a material reminder of what swirled to life in the streets and was then forced underground.

In that light, the scarf becomes more than a scarf, and Michel's gesture takes on a deeper resonance. It threads two struggles and subjects together, links them in a revolution that stretches across borders, a revolt against liberal capitalist empire and the myth of separateness, a revolt that unveils a form of being freed from the spatial enclosures and temporal rhythms set by liberal capitalist law and economics. The passage of that scarf across space and time, its exchange from one rebel's hand to two others, is also a sign that this revolution cannot be crushed. In stubborn resistance to the violence that seeks to unravel it, revolution spreads and multiplies.

## Part I.

### Cracks in the Space-time of Liberal Capitalist Empire

Because The Paris Commune and the global uprisings of 1968 emerge from a diverse set of historical conditions, it would be a mistake to draw causal links between the events. Doing so would flatten out the historical contexts surrounding the uprisings, and it would erase the various re-assemblages of liberal capitalism that have occurred in the hundred years separating these uprisings. Similarly, it would be a mistake to point to the Commune as an origin point in a filial chain of global revolution that begins in Europe and spreads *its* revolutionary seeds through time and space. Such a view only reproduces a colonial fantasy that canonizes France as a secular saint and progenitor of struggles for *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*, which given the long histories of non-European liberation struggles, especially indigenous and slave uprisings, is simply untrue.

As an alternative, we can bring the 1871 and 1968 uprisings together to see how they are bound under the same sign of an unfulfilled, yet never wholly liquidated, revolution within and against empire, that is, against the political economy, ideologies, and governmental form that maintains a divisive and hierarchical dominion over the planetary commons in a given epoch. Specifically, what we are dealing with in both moments are revolts within and against liberal capitalist empire—revolts against capital, against liberal understandings of reality and subjectivity, and against a nation state model that maintains, not only capital's uneven growth across space and reproduction across time, but also the extension of liberal capitalism's dominion over the commons.

There is, then, a shared thread that links these uprisings. They are revolts against the atomizing space-time and isolated forms of subjectivity constructed by and for capitalist accumulation and for the imperial expansion of liberalism. My desire to follow this thread does not stem from a need to hammer disparate events or practices into a neat theoretical framework. Instead, I hope we can chart what is lost when history is viewed through a frame that tells a teleological story of liberal capitalist nation states. According to such histories, the revolutionary struggles of the past are part of a dead record that has no bearing on the present or future. What is lost in that liberal frame is the ways in which common people—bad workers, rebellious students, and colonial subjects—have taken up the revolutionary call to break from a rhythm that keeps subjects divided and marching toward private ends. What is lost, too, is the way that their revolutionary rhythms continue to live on past the death of the individual or collapse of the movement. Before following that thread further through the works of Louise Michel and towards '68, let us turn to one of Michel's contemporaries whose desire to change life ("changer la vie"), momentarily aligned with the Commune.

### **Space Torn Apart**

In *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and The Paris Commune*, Kristin Ross emphasizes the first dimension of a revolution within and against imperial space-time, which is to say that she deals specifically with a revolt against the organization of liberal capitalist space. Let's unpack this argument as it will be a

crucial point of departure as we track the emergence of revolutionary time through, and beyond, the works of Louise Michel.

Ross looks to the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud as a reflection of the spatial revolt that was occurring in society. His poetry, like the Commune itself, is formed within a whirlwind of oppositional desire that seeks to tear apart a commodified “landscape” where all individuals have their “proper place” and where everything is for sale. That desire is reflected in the eponymous *Drunken Boat* that floats lazily through space without any trade ports on its horizon. For Ross, the boat’s demolition of “proper” movement and its uninhibited drift through space mirrors the literal demolition of constructed space that occurred with the toppling of The Vendôme Column (39). Demolition, in both the literary and literal instance, explodes the walls and borders of the liberal capitalist spatial order, and in doing so, it opens hitherto unseen passageways and possibilities for atomized subjects who are caught up in the crushing gravity of capital that keeps them separate and locked in place. Ross highlights the contradictory nature of demolition when she describes it as “the creation, through destruction, of a positive social void, the refusal of the dominant organization of social space and the supposed neutrality of monuments” (39). Seen in this light, Rimbaud and the Commune emerge, not as signs of libertine chaos or an abstract utopianism, but as a lightning strike that magnetizes existing atoms, frees them from their separate and sedentary place in space, and pulls them together into a spark that demolishes the monumental structures, of poetry and society, while marking reality with a new fluidity, a new horizontality of existence.

### **Filling The Void**

Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have use of the room.

– Lao Tzu

The lightning strike emergence of Rimbaud and the Commune exposes what is hidden by the spatial order of liberal capitalism. What comes to light is space as *social space*. According to Ross, social space is not “a static reality” rather it is “active, generative... created by an interaction, as something that our bodies reactivate, and that through this reactivation, in turn modifies and transforms us” (35). Social space, in other words, is the reality of space hidden behind a common sense that tells us that space and spatial hierarchies are God-given or intended by nature. In contrast to these feudal and enlightenment notions, social space presents space as historically constructed, contested, and changeable.

It follows from that logic that the physics that governs social space—that gravitational force that separates bodies, locks them into social and spatial hierarchies, and sets their bodies to work in the factory or field—is superimposed by human beings rather than rooted in the fabric of the cosmos. Thus, what the lightning strike of Rimbaud and the Commune sheds light on is the fact that the “dominant organization of social space” can be shattered. They reveal, too, that the physics that the liberal bourgeoisie harnesses for the sole ends of capitalist accumulation and the limited freedoms it affords can be replaced by a radically reoriented physics that allows for, not only more active forms of political participation, but a horizontal form of being that emphasizes the common good over private profit.



For Rimbaud and the Commune, this spatial revolt does not stem from the organized march of the proletariat but from what Ross describes as a “swarm-movement” that rips through liberal capitalist spaces, loosening the very edifice of work, dislodging subjects from their proper roles within the social formation, and freeing up of space for the realization of a communal form of life that the physics of capital and the imperial state form have veiled and marked off as unreal. Ross finds a manifestation of this movement in Rimbaud’s *Drunken Boat*. Drawing a comparison between the terrestrial movement of commodities and the Boat’s unimpeded drift, she suggests that the latter alludes to an “emancipated” subjectivity that is created anew in each instant of movement that occurs after the emptied vessel is liberated from the physics of commodity circulation and exchange. “Terrestrial movement,” Ross writes

is always movement from one point to another, the two points designated and fixed. And, as Marx points out in the *Grundrisse*, it is precisely this movement between points that makes the object a commodity... Sea or desert movement, on the other hand, becomes confused with the displacement of the center of gravity; and the movement of the drunken boat is that of a subjectivity that has thrown off precisely that kind of harnessed, locational movement Marx described. (119)

The *Drunken Boat*’s drift gestures at the movement of a vessel—a *subjectivity*—freed from its moorings and freed, too, from the imperatives that give it instrumentalized meaning within the physics of capital. Its movement is the movement of the liberated subject *par excellence*.

Similarly, the Parisian Communards free themselves from the moorings imposed by capitalism and the state. In doing so, they displace capital’s “center of

gravity” and reorient hierarchical space in ways that reactivate the communal social relations and possibilities deactivated by a social order premised on separation and inequality. These movements are not lost to us. The subterranean record, preserved by such Communards as Prosper Olivier Lissagaray and Gustave-Paul Cluseret and other witnesses, detail how the Communards reclaimed the urban center of the city and built barricades to secure their communities, how they moved cunningly between improvised passageways that connected formerly private dwellings and held assemblies that trespassed into exclusionary political and sacred spaces.

Such movements imbue stratified hierarchical space with an intoxicating aura, a kinesthetic trail lost upon hegemonic history that is colored in the same rippling hues left in the wake of the Drunken Boat. That rippling trail shines through in the following first-hand account of the Commune quoted by Alain Badiou:

One enters, one leaves, one circulates, one gathers. The laughter of Parisian children interrupts political discussions. Approach the group, listen. A whole people entertain profound matters. For the first time workers can be heard exchanging their appreciations on things that hitherto only philosophers had tackled. There is no trace of supervisors; no police agents obstruct the street hindering passers-by. The security is perfect. Previously when the same people went out intoxicated for its *bals de barrée*, the bourgeois distanced itself, saying directly: ‘If these people were free, what would become of us? What would become of them?’ They are free and dance no longer. They are free and they work. They are free and they fight. (*Communist Hypothesis* 177)

Though the author distances himself from the scene by shifting his perspective to the third person singular, we can gather from aural cues (“approach the group, listen”) that he is pulled into the buzzing movement of the crowd, as if some sound has drawn him into a dance hall. Though he strategically distances the Communards

from the space of the *bals de barrire* (“They dance no longer”), he simultaneously retains the kinesthetic rhythms and vibrations of the scene that open up before his eyes in a space akin to one described by Rimbaud in “Bad Blood”: “Ah! Again! I am dancing the witches’ sabbath in a red clearing with old women and children”. Here, in the Communard’s red clearing, the author finds a new dance, one innervated by a revolutionary intoxication that sweeps up the abandoned vessels of capitalism in an unimpeded and sensual drift.

The movement this author witnesses and describes is liberatory in itself, for it breaks the atomized subject from his or her “proper place” within a hierarchical social, spatial, and libidinal order. It breaks the subject, too, from the “structure (and physics) of work” that sets bodies in motions and directs them toward capital’s ceaseless accumulation. Ross borrows the term “action libre” from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe such liberatory movement:

Action libre [as opposed to the “work regime”] has no resistance to overcome; just as much a motor cause, it operates on the mobile body itself, is not consumed in its effect, and is continuous between two instances. The work model is characterized by relative speed and the importance of gravity – the force exerted by the weight of a unified body. “Absolute” speed and the way in which parts of the body escape from gravitational pull in order to occupy a nonstratified, nonpunctual space characterize “free action”. “Work makes life blossom,” writes Rimbaud. “An old idea, not mine; my life doesn’t weigh enough, it drifts off and floats far beyond action.” And in an earlier Commune poem... the spectacular physics of the whirlwind – a word that both literally and figuratively means agitation: the group in rapid movement or that which propels a rapid, irresistible movement – is opposed to that of work. (67 – 68)

If work makes life—a certain form of life—blossom, what, if anything, does the whirlwind’s rapid movement make blossom? Nothing. The whirlwind rips materials

apart, opens a void. Yet, it gives a divided people an open space to reunite and take the creative power back into their own hands. And this is what emerges in the space of the Commune. Moving with the intensity of Rimbaud's swarms, the Communards rip through commodified space. They break apart capital's regulatory boundaries and loosen the prescribed liberal subjectivities that were policed, often violently, by an imperial state masquerading under the tri-colored banners of a republic. What comes to light, like a patch of red carnations hidden beneath a ruined street, are hidden communal relations that have always bound people together and made existence possible. What emerged, for a fleeting moment, was a space where working people broke through the veil of separateness and took back the power to fashion a world where these relations were no longer hidden behind the fetish of commodities. What of that moment is left to us who stand across the gulf yet who find ourselves drifting, as if our lives do not weigh enough to keep us grounded, back toward the void?

### **Time Shot Through**

Time is always imbricated with the arrangement of liberal capitalist space and, consequently, the explosive emergence of revolutionary social space in 1871 signals a break in the temporal rhythms of capital. Though not the central dimension of her analysis, Kristin Ross points to the revolutionary sense of time that emerged in the Commune:

If the city and streets were in fact reappropriated by the Communards, this undoubtedly entailed a Communard reinvention of the urban rhythms: white nights and "revolutionary days" that are not simply

certain days marked off on a calendar, but are rather the introduction to and immersion in a new temporal movement. Journals and accounts of everyday life during the Commune written by people active in the insurrection suggest a particular and contradictory movement of time, a duration experienced as being at once more rapid and more slow than usual... we can describe the sensation as being a simultaneous perception of events passing by quickly, too quickly, and of each hour and minute being entirely lived or made use of: saturated time (42)

What is saturated time? What can we say fills this time if we are to avoid using the terms associated with clocks or calendars? What threads the “white nights and revolutionary days” together if not seconds, hours, and minutes? To begin to answer these questions, we can work in the negative to infer what saturated time is not. It is not the time set by the factory clocks, bells, or timetables that direct the atomized body in stratified space; nor is it the empty hours of travel from the working-class peripheries to and from the city center; nor is it time strung together by a forward-moving yet repetitive sequence of seconds, minutes, hours, days, and months that set the frenzied pace and rhythm of capitalist accumulation. It is neither the workday nor the leisure time that allows the body and senses to recoup for the next day’s labors. Saturated time, in short, is neither the time of capital nor the time of the imperial nation state. Rather, it is a temporality that emerges when the dominant ordering of space-time is loosened and the liberated subject finds herself or himself cast adrift but never lost. We might think of it as a temporality of pure undivided presence.

We catch a memorable glimpse of the saturated time of the Commune in the following anecdote that could have easily slipped through the cracks of history, but that instead, managed to find us in its own time:

Louise Michel has recounted the circumstances in which the communard Cipriani suddenly felt like stopping the time on the clock of the Hotel de Ville. Unwittingly repeating the gesture of rebels of 1830, he shot at the clock-face, which shattered. It was five past four on a lousy January day. At that very moment, his friend Sapia was killed by a bullet straight in the chest. (Bensaïd 69)

This anecdote, preserved in memory by Louise Michel and whispered across time by critic Daniel Bensaïd, provides a window into saturated time. Read in isolation, Cipriani's gesture may seem commonplace for a time of siege: he takes aims and squeezes the trigger. However, presented as it is here by Bensaïd—that is, amid a constellation of corresponding gestures—Cipriani's bullet pierces time itself. It bores a hole in linear time that allows us to peek through a neatly compartmentalized past, present, and future.<sup>8</sup> The gesture, in other words, brings Cipriani into alignment with revolutionaries separated from him by time passed (the rebels of 1830 who also fired upon the clocks) and by space (his comrade Sapia whose anatomic clock is shot through).<sup>9</sup>

What are we to make of these corresponding gestures that float as stars float, that is, beyond the linear flow of events? Perhaps they show us that saturated time is not an interval with duration that begins when one initiates a free movement and that ends when this movement comes to rest. These gestures, linked not by cause and effect but by something more substantial, remind us that saturated time is more than a mere measure of duration as an object or body moves from points A to B. It is more than the time it took for Cipriani to pull the trigger or for his bullet to come

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<sup>8</sup> See Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on Philosophy of History XV"

<sup>9</sup> The gesture brings him into alignment with those separated from him by time yet-to-pass, for example, the surrealists, who envisioned clocks melting or breaking apart to reveal luminous dreamscapes.

to rest. It is more than the time it took for the Communards to topple The Vendôme Column. Saturated time, instead, is a temporality when a being becomes fully present, not in a temporally isolated position in space or in time, but in relation to the Other that exceeds the boundaries of stratified space and linear time: the other of the cosmos and its circular flow of seasons, the other of blood or non-blood kin who woke up to the same reality in the past, the other of those awakened ones who were yet to be born. In Cipriani's case, his gesture pulls him into a constellation that hovers beyond the clock tower.

### **Time Slip**

**We tend to think of time's shape as a circle or straight line, the shape of the clock or the timeline, for instance. If saturated time were to have a representative shape it would be far more multi-dimensional than these shapes. If for a moment we take a distant but not wholly unrelated leap beyond 1871, we find that the surrealist painter Valentine Hugo had a shape in mind with *The Surrealist Constellation*.**



Figure 1.1: Painting entitled “The Surrealist Constellation” by Valentine Hugo

With this painting, Hugo carves a thin crystalline incision in the well-ordered flow of time and progressive history. The hairline curved *S* of her painting threads together representative figures from a community of surrealists.<sup>10</sup> Rather than being linked together as a filial chain or family tree, this community is linked by a green aurora that gives them form and shape against an abyssal background. This enchanted green, more than merely symbolic of the occult practices the surrealists were so fond of, is representative of a shared vision that crackled against the “real” world like match against flint. This green sets Hugo’s canvas ablaze, but we would be wise to remember that it is lit from without, by a wildfire of revolution that burned against the established order, not just of the world of art, but of society writ large.

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<sup>10</sup> A community that would prove to be more transnational in scope than what Hugo maps here, a community that would be more far-reaching than what Breton tried to contain in his manifestos.



The Communard's experience of saturated time gives the revolutionary subject an individual form and collective shape that exceeds the bounds of the established order and the walls it erects around subjectivity. For Cipriani and other Communards, time overflows with the ghosts of 1830 and 1848, with the swarming movement of revolutionaries in his present, with the undreamt dreams of revolutionaries yet to be born. There is simply too much to do, too much to experience, too much to create, and too much to take stock of during these "white nights and revolutionary days". Yet the "too much" of saturated time is substantially different than the laborious "too much" of capitalist time, for the former suggests the overwhelming sensation of collective liberation from the clock while the latter indicates a historical reality of atomized oppression measured in minutes, hours, days, and years.

Entering saturated time, the old subject—that is, the subject interpellated through the capitalist order of work and liberal law—drowns and dissolves. What emerges from the waters of revolutionary time is a subject exposed to the crushing weight of reactionary State violence yet pulled beyond that weight into a long diachronic movement that breaks the subject from liberal capitalism's spatially and temporally isolated constructions of the self. One becomes a communard over and above a capitalist subject, which is to say the Commune activates a form of life where "one" divests his or her body and mind from the isolated space-time of capital and links it into the deeper reality of connectivity and interdependence. The Communard discovers a new rhythm, one in which she moves freely with the Other. Sinking into a long intoxicating movement, the most menial and most disposable of

workers—the nameless vagrant, the drunkard or dance hall regular, the prostitute relegated to red-light districts, the Algerian migrant, the prisoner, or Haitian slave chained to cane fields—breaks from their proper place and threads themselves to something larger than their work, something larger than the wind-up-toy self set in motion by the dictates of capital and the capitalist state. They become part of the commons, part of the cosmos, unraveling and refashioning *the self* in a way that lends the most revolutionary meaning to Rimbaud’s mantra “*Je est un autre.*”

Of course, the reactionary republican government will attempt to violently close off this reality that the Communard has discovered. It will restore capitalism and the imperial State form as the only viable paths. It will restore a subjectivity founded in the myth of separateness. Yet all of this cannot nullify the fact that some reality has been unveiled and can be unveiled again, for space, time, and subjectivity have been exposed as fragile constructs held together by a manmade physics.

### **Oppositional Constellations**

Taking Kristin Ross’s analysis of social space as inspiration, we can look to Rimbaud’s poetry for glimpses of saturated time breaking through the hegemonic timescapes of 19<sup>th</sup> century France. The following extract from “At The Bandstand” makes visible the dominant arrangement of space-time:

On Railroad Square, laid out in little spots of lawn,  
Where all is always order, the flowers and trees,  
All the puffing bourgeois, strangling in the heat,  
Parade their envious nonsense on Thursday afternoon  
In the middle of the garden a military band is  
Playing, helmets jiggling to “Lady of Spain”;  
By the benches in front dawdle the dandies;

The Notary dangles from his own watch chain (36)

In this poem “all is always order,” yet it is the type of order characteristic of what Walter Benjamin calls “homogenous empty time.” The parade of capitalists and consumers march in step to the rhythms of the military band and the clock. They follow this hollow music, moving as a railroad train moves: keeping good time, making pre-determined stops and starts, dropping off commodities and collecting new ones. The hollowness of this landscape and timescape crystallizes in the final image of the notary who “dangles from” his watch; transforming the liberal subject into the object of his timepiece, Rimbaud reveals that apparently “free” subject as a hollow man trapped in time, an appendage of capitalist clock akin to a fourth hand that moves and sways to mechanical rhythms.

The poet seer of “At The Bandstand” observes this hollow space-time from a critical distance. He sees no freedom in the scene, not even in the trees or flowers that dot the landscape. Instead, he sees a wind-up-toy march set in motion by forces beyond the crowd, forces that resonate through the military band’s instruments and notary’s watch. He takes it all in with eyes of a mischievous child that looks at the toy train set with the hopes of breaking it apart so as to free up space, as well as time, for creative and playful activity. Here, however, the critical observer stops on the verge of making a radical break from hegemonic space-time. To witness that break, and to witness the alternative temporality illuminated between the cracks, we can turn briefly to Rimbaud’s writing during a different time, his *Season in Hell*.

In the poem “Bad Blood” the poet seer returns with a vengeance, his gaze shooting through the narrow dimensions of liberal capitalist time. He lights the flint

immediately with the first line, “From my ancestors the Gauls I have pale blue eyes, a narrow brain, and awkwardness in competition. I think my clothes are as barbaric as theirs” (220). With this line, the poet seer immediately breaks from the temporality of “By the Bandstand” and threads himself—his disobedient mind and body—to a “barbaric” time and space populated by barbarous kin. By drawing a line of refusal back to an imagined barbarian history, the poet locates himself within an “oppositional constellation” which Kristin Ross describes as a “rapport based on a kind of acentered, nonhierarchical mobility and alliance” in opposition to a “familial relation of filiation” (63-64). For Rimbaud, this constellational rapport extends back in time to pagan ancestors as well as across space to other “inferior races” who refuse to follow the march of capitalism and an imperial state that measures progress with a clock that strikes in “hours of pure pain” (224).<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere Rimbaud extends this rapport forward in time to not-yet-born subjects who refuse the march. He writes, “other horrible workers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the other has fallen!” By reaching for an imagined past and future populated by other unruly subjects, Rimbaud threads himself to a temporality that exists outside of the “forward march” that characterizes the poem’s final passage and that also characterizes a Janus-faced liberal capitalist modernity that is gripping the planet at the time this poem was written.

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<sup>11</sup> The poet here deploys racist discourse, which could be seen as quite problematic. Yet he seems to do so in an attempt to forge a solidarity that explodes the very categories used to dehumanize, categorize, and order subjects within racial hierarchies. Rimbaud writes, “I am an animal, a nigger. But I can be saved. You are fake niggers; maniacs, savages, misers, all of you. Businessman, you’re a nigger; judge, you’re a nigger; general, you’re a nigger; emperor, old scratch-head, you’re a nigger; you’ve drunk a liquor no one taxes, from Satan’s still. This nation is inspired by fever and cancer... I will enter the true kingdom of the sons of Ham” (223).

Thus, Rimbaud's oppositional constellation is more than a poetic device. It gestures toward a sometimes known, but more often secret, solidarity between those who struggle to break from the divisive gravity of capital and liberal law. The poet seer's ability to connect to other bad subjects beyond the "progressive" march of civilization reflects a dawning temporal awareness among the Communards, a sense that they were part of a fabric that exceeded the individual self constructed by a liberal capitalist regime caught in the illusion of separateness. In contrast to filial lineages, the oppositional constellation to which they belonged stretches across time and space in ways not easily recorded.<sup>12</sup> It expands in an uneven diachronic movement composed of unexpected flows, unquantifiable exchanges, violent disappearances, and unlikely reappearances. Instead of filiation, then, we might speak of a cross-pollination of revolt, a vectoral movement not determined by the spatial and temporal boundaries of capital and the nation state.<sup>13</sup> Instead of death, we might speak of continuation, others beginning at the "horizons were the other has fallen."

Or we might draw an astronomical analogy to actual star-clusters captured so brilliantly by The Hubble Telescope. In such images, like the one we see below, galaxies bloom like flowerbeds exploding across eons of time and spaces so vast that it takes light millions of years to traverse.

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<sup>12</sup> Ross, Kristin. *The Emergence of Social Space*. p. 63. See Ross's discussion of filial lineages.

<sup>13</sup> See Deleuze and Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*.



**Figure 1.2: Hubble Image of “Messier 82” by NASA, ESA, and The Hubble Heritage Team**

Spectacular yet deceptive images! For the telescope only captures a crystal of space-time in a long movement. It freezes a frame in a galactic motion picture where countless particles die and are reborn anew in an outward and contingent flight that has no single origin point.

Such images, as spectacular as they are, point to the limits of what can be seen and captured, especially when one’s vision is locked into positivist or presentist ways of seeing. The counter-revolution relies on such one-dimensional vision. It shores up the counter-revolutionary’s political and social vision, allows him to cast himself as history’s victors, and lets him scatter the ashes of conquered revolutionaries like dust upon the wind. Yet, as much as the counter-revolution tries to crush or contain revolution through violence or deception, it cannot contend with such an explosive movement, for its foot soldiers and philosophers can’t even begin to imagine it. They don’t have the frames.

This long explosive movement of a galaxy, only implicit in the Hubble image, is also a fitting analogy for the furtive movements of social revolution. Even after its visible terminal point, the revolution blooms. Its seeds are carried past the massacres and beyond the unmarked graves, carried on the near broken back of the political prisoner, in the faded journals of a forgotten revolutionary, on the dirtied boots of named and nameless exiles. It is carried, too, in a poet's verse, a painter's strokes, or a musician's melodies that continue revolution by other means. All of these "lines of flight" extend beyond the bullet or the bayonet. When these lines come into relief, either through renewed action or through an aesthetic that illuminates the invisible solidarities between the living and the revolutionary dead, they explode the empty time of capital and transfigure the everyday, not only with a horizon of unbounded utopian possibilities but with an immanent sense that the conquered revolution has returned to the *here* and *now*.

Such are the moments when clocks and calendars melt. Such are the moments when prison cell walls chip away to reveal an old rouge bloom. Such are the moments of failure's end and beginnings built from debris and ruin.

## Part II. Red Carnation Blossoming

Quisieron enterrarnos pero no sabían que éramos semilla.

They wanted to bury us, but they didn't know that we were seeds. – Mexican Proverb

### Beyond The Wall

Is a date a sufficient marker of an end? By historical standards May 28, 1871 marks the Commune's end. On that date the Versailles government's army routed the heavily outnumbered Communards in the Père-Lachaise Cemetery. The last stand in the cemetery punctuated a week of disproportionate violence unleashed by Versailles on the Commune and all those suspected of having a part in it.

The ghostly bodies protruding from a monument in Père-Lachaise Cemetery attest to the horrors of Bloody Week.



**Figure 1.3: Monument in Memory of the Communards Shot at the Commune's Wall by Paul Moreau-Vauthier<sup>14</sup>**

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<sup>14</sup> Photograph taken by J. Rushing and published on web at <https://amaninparisblog.wordpress.com/>



Look at them now: like bodies frozen in time, their Pompeii mouths hold a final agonized breath, while their rigor mortis hands curl around a fatal wound. Turn to this anti-monument. Brush your hands across it and feel a stone-faced lacuna of history: the impossibility of hearing or touching the vanquished Communard who stands restlessly across the gulf of time.

In the days and months that followed Bloody Week, the army's bullets and bayonets, set in motion by the bourgeoisie's law, worked to restore order. At face value, this succeeded. The spatial and temporal rhythms of liberal capitalist empire were set back on track. The clock faces were polished. The bullet holes were concealed. The Vendôme Column was eventually erected anew. The ground was thus reset for the birth of 20th century France, a thoroughly modern state.

Yet, as always with the case of modernity, the cobblestones of the modern state were built on rivers of blood and tears. For about 30,000 Communards, the restoration of order equated to a mass grave. For 14,000 more, order meant prison and exile. These are a small fraction of the countless faces that protrude from the gilded walls of modernity, a scattering of the hands that grasp the fatal wounds of progress.

Bearing in mind the Commune's violent collapse, let's return to the question that began this section: Are recorded events that transpire in a given time, as well as the causal outcomes of such events, the only factors we must take into account when assessing a revolution's failure or success? *No, there is more that needs to be accounted for and that cannot be wholly accounted for.* A paradoxical statement

that might seem obvious, but let's consider its weight by exploring what is missed when revolutionary events are compressed into neat historical margins like that of March 18 and May 28. Historical positivism of this sort, which is now built into the very algorithms that accumulate and relay knowledge at lightning speed across the internet, sets epistemological parameters around failed revolutionary events that elide both its minor ripples and most far reaching effects. We might, as an alternative, look beyond the date to see what exceeds failure, what passes along paths unseen. To do so, let us turn to the writing of Louise Michel. Her work approaches failure, not as an end, but as a fraught site of recollection where one can recall the social possibilities activated by revolutionary action, the forces that deactivated those possibilities, as well as the desires to reactivate what has been foreclosed. In other words, what we sense in her work, and in the lives beyond the work, is a gravitational pull back to the Commune, as if it resides in exiled memory as a dark beacon that pulses to a buried yet never wholly silenced rhythm.

### **Sound of Muted Thunder**

Do you hear the brazen thunder  
Behind the man who takes no side? – Louise Michel

While Rimbaud and the Commune attest to the lightning strike of revolution, Louise Michel and the exiled Communards attest to a thunderous echo that continues to shake apart the foundations of the reestablished order. That is to say that her work and life testify to the reemergence of revolutionary space-time within the domain of liberal capitalist empire and at its peripheries. This space-time

reemerges through a life tethered irrevocably to the collapsed revolutionary event, a life propelled forward by an unalterable interaction with its dead, a life paradoxically burdened yet liberated by the seeds of revolution.

Still, some echoes risk being silenced. This occurs when the full complexity of a revolutionary life, its uncharted wanderings, unrecorded awakenings, and invisible solidarities, are squashed down to fit into the positivist timeline of an event with a finite beginning and end. Through what is often an unconscious process, a revolutionary life is made into an abstract representation of itself, a kind of monument forged from basic facts and dates, the kind of which we might find on Wikipedia or other encyclopedic entries that reduce a complex life into something fully definable and utterly knowable. We might reintroduce Michel with these incomplete facts of life:

Louise Michel was born in Vroncourt-la-Cote on May 29, 1830. She trained to be a schoolteacher and eventually moved to Paris in 1866 in the twilight of Louis-Napoleon's Second Empire. In Paris, she and other teachers experimented with unorthodox teaching practices. During the Prussian Siege of Paris and the Commune, Michel took part in the women's and men's vigilance committees, served as an ambulance woman, and fought on the barricades to defend the city from the Prussian forces and the armies of the Versailles government. After the fall of the Commune, the restored republican regime charged her with attempting to overthrow the government, and Michel was sent into exile. From 1873 to 1880 she lived among exiled Communards and the indigenous Kanaks in the French colony

of New Caledonia. She supported the Kanaks in their 1878 revolt. In 1880, she and the other Communards were granted amnesty, and she returned to Europe where she became an outspoken Anarchist and defender of the Commune. Her participation in smaller scale revolts led to her arrest and incarceration. She died in 1905 and her funeral drew massive crowds and touching orations. Several decades later, the State recognized her life by naming a metro station and courtyard after her. The sign over the courtyard reads “Heroine of the Commune”.

A problem with such monumentalized narratives of “extraordinary” lives, when left to stand on their own, is that they affirm liberal notions of the individual that fit neatly into the overarching histories that Louise Michel despised most—the histories of the imperial nation state and capitalism. Such narratives posthumously canonize Michel as a secular saint, the Red Virgin or Red She-Wolf, whose biography is legible *within* the frame of the modern French nation, even when it is cast in line with communist or anarchist traditions. By legible, I mean that her recorded and recordable facts of life, her biography, are discursively reconstructed in ways that overshadow the unrecorded and unrecordable desires, exchanges, and relationships that shaped her, not as a *self* that stands alone but as a singularity bound up in a community that exists across time and space. What is lost in this process of liberal biographicization is that which makes Michel’s life truly extraordinary, a commitment to the people, selflessness in the face of imperial warfare, and an ability to channel, in writing and action, a desire to break from the structures

and rhythms of liberal capitalism that take hold of people's lives and curate their memory well beyond death.

In order to see beyond monumental history—in order to relocate Michel within the time of the commons rather than capitalist imperial time—let us turn to her writing. Her work shifts our focus from the monumental to the constellational and, in doing so, explodes a liberal capitalist space-time continuum that relegates failed revolutionaries to the dustbin of history. In the most basic sense, her writing after the Commune reveals the contingent migrations of revolution set in motion by state violence as well as the unexpected convergences of revolt at the peripheries of Empire. Beyond this, it taps into several oppositional conceptions of time that brush against the linear flow of time. We might think of these as the *contre-temps* of the exiled revolutionary.<sup>15</sup> Time, when seen through these disorienting and empowering lenses, is radically different than the dominant time frames that shape everyday life in liberal capitalist empire and that dictate the bounds within which history can be told and within which subjectivities can be formed. Time, for the exiled revolutionary, is full rather than the empty time of capital. It attains a dark mass, weighed down by the incomplete tasks and unfulfilled desires of comrades separated by time and space. More than a “neutral” measurement of duration, time

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<sup>15</sup> *Contretemps* is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “an unexpected or unfortunate occurrence.” As we will see, Michel's *contre-temps* are “unexpected and unfortunate,” but only from the perspective of a *dispositif* that strives to maintain a rationalized spatial and temporal order. Also fitting is the word origin. The word originates in a failed action, a mistimed fencing thrust. As these *contre-temps* show us, even mistimed uprisings such as the Paris Commune can continue to cut against the fabric of hegemonic time itself in ways that expose counter-revolutionary forces to a renewed and unforeseen assault from those forces thought conquered. See also Derrida's use of *contretemps* described in *Acts of Literature* pp. 65, 415

exists as a relational instant pregnant with militant possibilities and utopian pathways made all the more realizable by the fact that some of those paths were, for a shimmering instant, trodden by the dead. Let us now, if only for a moment, peek into the hidden corridors of Michel's revolutionary times.

### **Contre-Temps 1. Tableaux**

Michel's memoirs, collected as *The Red Virgin*, present readers of the original French text with a challenge: The temporally disjointed narrative and Michel's meandering style make the text very slippery. Just when a reader thinks they've grasped a stable narrative thread, it unravels in many directions and recollects in far-off dreams, distant events, related or unrelated memories. In the introduction to their English translation, Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter address this challenge, explaining that the original memoirs "oscillate wildly among nostalgia, exaltation, narrative, and prophecy" (xvii). The translators, anticipating the bewilderment of their readers, treat this wild oscillation as a problem to be fixed, noting that they "decided that a direct rendering into English would be incomprehensible to modern readers".

The translators thus set out to make the anachronic chronological, the discontinuous continuous. What if, however, this is a misstep? What if Michel's wild oscillation is not a problem to be fixed but the precise narrative and temporal movement that the reader needs to shake apart linear progressive time and, in being shaken, see what resides beyond its narrow and confined corridors?

Despite Lowry and Gunter's attempts to smooth out time in *The Red Virgin*, their translation cannot do away with the temporal oscillation entirely. To see this, let's turn to a rather telling passage from the memoir:

In my class at Audeloncourt, we sang the Marseillaise before the morning's study began and after study ended in the evening. The stanza especially for children:

We'll take over this course  
When our elders are no longer

was sung kneeling; one of the youngest, the little brunette Rose, sang it solo. When we picked up the chorus again, the children and I often had tears flooding from our eyes.

I found the same feeling again at Nouméa during the last year of my exile in New Caledonia. It was July 14, Bastille Day. At this period I was in charge of teaching drawing and singing in the girls' schools in the city. M. Simon, who was the interim mayor, wanted the children to stand in the open bandstand in the Place des Cocotiers and sing the Marseillaise between the two customary evening cannon shots. Night had fallen suddenly. In tropical areas like New Caledonia there is neither dusk nor dawn. The palm trees were rustling gently, swayed by the evening breeze. The lanterns lit the bandstand a little, but left the square in shadow. We felt the pressure of the crowd – a black and white crowd. In front of the bandstand was the military band. Mme Penand, the first lay schoolmistress who had come to the colony, was standing near me, as was an artilleryman who was going to sing with us. Arranged in a circle the children surrounded us.

After the first cannon shot such a silence fell that our hearts stopped beating. I felt our voices soaring into silence, and it seemed as if we were being carried off on wings. The penetrating voices of the children's choir and the thunder of brass instruments between the stanzas thrilled us beyond belief. That song had led our fathers; it was the living Marseillaise and we loved it.

Upon my return from New Caledonia, I found the sacred hymn was being used in all sorts of public spectacles. It had not really recovered from the mire through which the last days of the Empire had dragged it, and wounded once again, the Marseillaise was dead for us.

At Audeloncourt on Sundays, small black wooden shoes clicked hurriedly toward the door of the church, in order to get out by the time the priest intoned "Domine, salvum fac Napoleonem." I had told the children that it was sacrilegious to take part in a prayer for that man. The little black wooden shoes ran hurriedly out of the church,

making a gentle, dry noise like hail, the same little dry noise that the bullets made on 22 January 1871, raining down the windows of the Hotel de Ville upon the unarmed crowd. Later, I heard the sound of wooden shoes again. Those were on the tired feet of the women prisoners at Auberive, and they clumped sadly as the woman shuffled around the prison. (34)

What is striking about this passage is Michel's fluid approach to time. Adopting a frenetic free associative style that anticipates the surrealists, she seems to be carried through time by the sensations and memories elicited by sound—the sound of the Marseillaise, of cannon fire, of palms gently rustling in the breeze, of wooden shoes pitter-pattering down hallways, of hail and bullets. These sounds serve as audible memory-buoys in the waters of time. Michel grabs ahold of one, only to let go, and grab another that pulls her back or forth in time and across vast geographic distances. What this movement allows Michel, as the writer of her memoirs, is the freedom to become unstuck from linear time and unshackled from the teleological frames of history-telling. Embracing that free narrative movement, she forms associative lifelines between people, places, and events that are made unmemorable by liberal capitalist time and history. She peers at the faces of lost students, exiles, and prisoners, lifts them up from the waters of time, breathes form and voice into the dead and lets them stand, once again, against the abyssal depths of a forced oblivion.

The passage reveals a sense of time, not as linear progression, but as a series of historical flashes elicited by sound. The word that Michel uses throughout her memoirs to describe this sensation is *tableau*. In its singular form, the term refers to an aesthetic scene that uses motionless models and stage props to recreate a



historical event while its plural form, *tableaux*, refers to a series of such scenes juxtaposed with each other as in a museum gallery. These terms are a good approximation of what we find if we approach the memoirs purely on formal terms. Like a *tableaux*, Michel's narrative juxtaposes various historical scenes that have been elided from the history books. Despite the temporal fluidity of such scenes, the people in them remain motionless because they exist across the gulf of language and time. The written word can only breathe aesthetic new life into the forgotten dead, which is always a false life. When seen in that light, we might be tempted to say that there is something tenuous, perhaps even melancholic, about Michel's *tableauesque* re-presentation of the past and the dead.

We cannot, however, limit our discussion of time as *tableaux* to the narrow dimension of textual form. Michel's memoirs don't allow us to stop there because they contain curiously visceral moments when her protagonist's—that is, her past self's—sense of linear progressive time shatters and is replaced by *tableaux*, not in the reflective time of writing, but in the lived and relational instant that the text can only represent. When, as one poignant example shows, the narrative is pulled back to the barricades, Michel is struck by *tableaux* visions *in* the heat of the moment. Describing this scene, she first offers a reflection from hindsight: "Some people say I'm brave. Not really. There is no heroism; people are simply entranced by events" (65). In the next sentences, she moves from the reflective to the visceral by describing the sensations that flooded her mind in the moment of danger: "What happens is that in the face of danger my perceptions are submerged in my artistic sense, which is seized and charmed. *Tableaux* of the dangers overwhelm my

thoughts, and the horrors of the struggle become poetry” (65). I do not believe that the appearance of a tableaux here has anything to do with Michel’s desires to embellish her text by making a brutal scene more epic. Rather, she recounts this visceral sense of time beyond time out of fidelity to the sensations and desires that struck her in the moment and that, as we might recall, struck her comrade Cipriani when he fired upon the clock tower.

The sensation of time as tableaux needs to be understood on these visceral terms. In the midst of battle, Michel’s “artistic” sense bears witness to an existence beyond the immediacy of the struggles she is participating in and violence she is witnessing. She sees her moment as one historical scene in a tableaux of revolutionary awakening and a counter-revolutionary violence that restores the illusion. By taking part in the revolt, she writes herself into a long, revolutionary tableaux.

Before stopping there, though, we might note an important lexical shift in Michel’s description when she writes, “Tableaux of the dangers overwhelm my thoughts, and the horrors of the struggle become poetry.” Here, the static term tableaux is replaced by the dynamic term poetry. This shift implies a movement away from a frozen historical image to a world of becoming, of rhythm, movement, sound, and speech. We might understand this shift as a militant philosophical affirmation embodied on the barricades and then affirmed on the page, an affirmation that says, *Yes, one day I will be part of a motionless tableaux, but in this moment on the barricades, I must move.* And by moving freely with other communards, Michel keys herself into a poetic rhythm that exceeds and precedes

her moment and her body, a rhythm that beats well beyond the last communard's heartbeat.

### **Contre-Temps 2. Time *Inside Out* and *Outside In***

For man to be able to live he must either not see the infinite, or have such an explanation of the meaning of life as will connect the finite with the infinite. - Leo Tolstoy

By shifting her analogy from the static (tableau) to the dynamic (poetry), Michel reveals the paradoxical nature of revolutionary time. Time, she shows us, has both an immanent inside filled with motion and a transhistorical outside akin to a tableaux. To envision this, we might imagine ourselves viewing earth from two observational positions: the first, on *terra firma*, observing the flow of life all around us; the second, far out in the solar system, observing a tiny blue dot that appears motionless amid the cosmos. This paradoxical sense of time is described in an earlier episode when Michel discusses her approach to teaching literature within a transhistorical frame:

What Charles and I taught in the courses on literature was the utility of examining cities and peoples in terms of childhood, youth, and decay. That is the real way it happens, although people think it is a romanesque approach. The lives of individuals and the history of humanity show a parallel progression. In every individual's life you can see the same transformations that you can see in our history, in the story of our collective existence that spans the centuries.

Nevertheless, however aware a person is of those centuries-long rhythms of change, he still lives *inside his own epoch*. It is inside his own epoch that he feels, suffers, and is happy; and all the love, all the hate, the harmony, all the power that he possesses – he must throw all this into his surroundings. One person is nothing and yet part of that which is everything – the Revolution. (51-52, emphasis mine)

Michel's metaphysical musings on transhistorical time are tempered by her militant sense that one must act *here* and *now*. Refusing to reject either of these seemingly contradictory senses of time, she unites both within the common term of revolution.

What's unfortunate, but not surprising given the gendered prioritization of "mature" "scientific" "masculine" revolutionary texts, is that Michel's anarchic understanding of revolution has been dismissed for its abstraction and idealism.<sup>16</sup> Yet what we find in this passage bridges the reified gaps separating transhistorical, materialist, and immanent conceptions of revolution.<sup>17</sup> Here, Michel acknowledges that one may be able to recognize "century-long rhythms of change" from a philosophical distance. One might see beyond the self and one's moment. One might feel arcane revolutionary rhythms tingling through one's mind and body. But for the revolutionary, recognition and sensation are not enough. One must bring those arcane rhythms into one's epoch through revolutionary action that strives to make a new form of life blossom here and now. One must connect the finite with the infinite, as Tolstoy writes. For Michel, this means physically struggling with other communards for that which exceeds and precedes their movement. It means joining one's infinitesimal body to an epochal struggle to unfetter the commons from the grasp of empires past, present, and future.

We might refer to this *contre-temp* as Michel's sense of time from the *inside out*. Standing on firm ground in her historical moment, Michel sees beyond her

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<sup>16</sup> See *Red Virgin*. "Introduction"

<sup>17</sup> These approaches are not often squared in the works of revolutionary thinkers such as Marx who leaves behind his utopian work for the scientific writings on political economy.

epoch, threads herself to liberatory rhythms that stretch across time, and moves with these rhythms in the here and now.

There are, however, moments when this sense of time flips and time folds *outside in*. In these moments, Michel is pulled outward, beyond the immanent movement of the present. We see this later in the memoirs when Michel and other defeated Communards are being carted off on what they suspect is a march to their execution. She writes,

People said they were going to shoot us in those ravines, but the soldiers had us climb out, although I didn't know why. I felt no fear, for I was wrapped up in the picture I saw and no longer thought of where we were. Thrilled by my perceptions, I earned no merit at all for despising a danger I wasn't thinking about. Gripped by the tableau I only looked, and now I remember. (70)

Linear imperial time—in this case, time marked by the executioner's bullet—is suspended and replaced by a sense of time, once again, as tableau. The difference between this scene and the earlier scene is that Michel does not inject this tableau with the movement of poetry as she did earlier. Rather, she lets time freeze and allows herself to float, like a cosmonaut, outward to the larger motionless picture beyond the moment of danger, beyond the scene of immanent death. This movement from the *inside* of time to its *outside* is not merely an imaginative game or poetic metaphor, but an existential line of flight that would preserve the revolutionary's dignity in the perilous moment by threading disposable flesh to the indisposable idea that set the flesh in motion.<sup>18</sup> What Michel bears witness to on this outward

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<sup>18</sup> We might bring Michel's words into alignment with Huey Newton's last words "You can kill the body, but you can't kill the soul" and Che Guevara's "Shoot me coward, you are only killing a man."

flight is the timeless part of the Commune and herself that the reactionary State and its forces cannot touch: From that distance, she sees the Commune, a naked singularity that burned and collapsed for liberation. From that distance, she sees herself, an infinitesimal player—*nothing*, as she says—tied to *everything*.

### **Contre-Temps 3. Atavistic Time**

A revolutionary looks outside of linear time just as she looks at the night sky. Looking upward, she finds constellations that hovered over her exiled comrades and kin long turned to bone and dust. Their constituent stars having spread apart, the constellations have changed since the days of old. Yet their basic shapes against the darkness remain the same. And looking upward, a thought might flicker to mind: that the people of the past and future gazing up from the fields of crops or battles saw those stars and told stories of magical animals and gods, of human's precarious struggle with nature and the supernatural, stories that express a desire to dance freely across space without fear of beast, or arrow, or bullet.

In *The Red Virgin*, Michel gazes across time and threads her story to a constellation invisible to a liberal lens. She does so in a way that is remarkably similar to that of Rimbaud. As Kristin Ross explains, Rimbaud's poem "Bad Blood" maps an "oppositional constellation" of bad subjects related, not by the arboreal genetics of the family tree, but by "acentered, nonhierarchical mobility and alliance" poised against the colonial and imperial logics of modernity. This constellation allows the poet to fashion a subjectivity in relation to the real or imagined bad workers and barbarous subjects who spilt blood, or whose blood was spilt, while

struggling against the violent march of civilization. It lets him carve out a secret solidarity with the forgotten ones lost in the tides of imperial time. Michel's sense of atavistic time—that is, her sense of time derived from ancient legends rather than historical “facts” and calendar dates—opens up similar possibilities.

The atavistic *contre-temp* shimmers into view when Michel looks at her surroundings through a folk lens that imbues the land with a magical aura. Where most see emptied country ruins or crowded city arcades, Michel sees spaces haunted by figures from folk history and legend. Witches, ghosts, grizzled wolves, fairies, rebellious farmers, and barbarian tribesmen emerge from the cracks of history. Though the bourgeoisie of that time might dismiss these folk tales as “childish” and of no real import, these tales allow Michel to forge a subjectivity born from the thickets, thatches, and bogs of old. She steps into the firelit time of legend and, in doing so, forms a kinship with the rebellious dead and a fidelity with folk desires that, once upon a time, burned against the grain of the rationalized histories and rigid forms of subjectivity produced by empires past and present.

One of the most beautiful examples of this appears in a passage where Michel lays out a constellation woven together from a temporally unbound form of love:

Deep down in the wellsprings of my life are talks of old legends... My love lies in these atavistic legends. People are always taunting me for never speaking of love. I have to go back to those hours when young women are just learning to dream. From the pages of old books read in the dawn of life many songs of love escape, and within those pages a young woman can be in love with love as much as she wishes. I mean she can look for an ideal person she could love if she were to meet him in real life. Among the sons of Gaul, among the barbarians, she chooses the bravest of the brave. She can look into the far past at men

of the north, the men of the Ghilde who fought for freedom and who used to pour three cups of wine on the flagstones – one for the dead, another for their ancestors, and a third for the brave. The Bagaudes, who died in their flaming tower; the poets; the troubadours; the great leaders of robber bands who stole from the rich bandit in the manor to give to the miserable beggar in his thatched cottage – they are my loves... Such were the banners of the rebels who dwelt deep in my thoughts. The weddings of those who loved each other were the red weddings of martyrs, and they signed their covenants in blood. (Michel 16)

What Michel describes here goes beyond the standard Western philosophical categories of love. It exceeds *éros* and *philia*, comes closest to *agápe*, though even that cosmic notion of love doesn't seem precise enough for what Michel describes. What she gestures at is a temporally unbound form of love for those who revolted, often hopelessly, against the enemies of the commons—against wealthy landowners who robbed the land and its people, against conquering armies who raised the banners of “civilization” while veiling the barbarism of their rule, against a repetitive and monotonous system of work that grinds down people's sensual experience of everyday life and eliminates their openness to play.

For Michel, love is the unwritten and unspoken covenant between those who desire liberation from oppressive rule, whether it be the rule of liberal law, Roman law, or some arcane political economic order. Love threads revolutionary subjects across time and space, binds them together in a blood red constellation that the arrow or bullet cannot touch and that the mills and factory gears cannot crush. The love that Michel describes evades physical touch because it is, like all constellational forms, a story made from the old light of the past. Still, we would be wise to remember that constellations, and the stories told of them, help people



navigate the world. They provide maps that shape people's practices by guiding their paths and providing them with rituals and legends that are outside hegemonic law and order. The practices that continuously emerge from the red constellation unleash common people from their automatism and reveal that they can, not only desire more magical forms of existence, but work together to build worlds that approximate those desires.

#### **Contre-Temps 4. Natural Histories**

Old growth forests, with their ancient canopies and gnarled trees, testify to what photographer and author Rachel Susmann calls *deep time*, that is, a time that far exceeds the miniscule seconds, minutes, hours, years, and decades that measure the duration of a human lifetime—but not just a singular lifetime! The oldest trees in these forests, some of which have lived several thousands years, have longer lifespans than even the most firmly rooted empires of history.

We might picture Louise Michel and other Communards wandering through such ancient forests during their exile. We might imagine them running their weatherworn hands against knotted branches and along wizened trunks as they sense, perhaps faintly, the deep time that dwarfs those who, thinking themselves gods, tried to establish a final dominion over all things.

Though that particular moment never appears in the memoirs, what we do find are scenes that illustrate Louise Michel's love for nature and devotion to plants and animals. These episodes may seem inconsequential compared to scenes of warfare and imprisonment, but if we take them seriously, we find that they open

another window on a time that exceeds the constraining bounds of liberal capitalist empire.

One of these episodes comes from Michel's exile in New Caledonia. During that period, Michel was allowed to devote some time to teaching and other projects including an incomplete study of plant vaccination. The anecdote of this study appears and disappears like a wisp of smoke in the memoirs, but I think it's well worth some of our time:

I was able to get his sympathy for my experiment when [the governor of New Caledonia] came out. I took him inside the greenhouse and showed him some trees standing in the best-lit corner. They were papayas which I had vaccinated with the sap of other papayas afflicted with plant jaundice and I wanted to keep them hidden until my experiment was completed. Governor de la Richerie understood my experiment and gave orders that I be allowed to continue using the greenhouse.

I wanted to succeed with twenty trees before I talked about my experiment. That was important to me because even among the deportees, which all of us were suffering for having loved liberty, prejudice still remained. What would my comrades have said if I had talked openly about using vaccines on vegetables? Even when only very few person knew what I was doing I kept hearing things like, "If it were true that vaccines could be used against all illnesses, professors of medicine would already have done it. Are you some sort of scientist that you are so busy on projects like this?"

Since that time scientists have tried vaccines for rabies and cholera. Just as I tried it for plant jaundice in New Caledonia. Sap is like blood, and the same principles that govern diseases of the blood apply to the illnesses of plants. If boldness is useful to experimenters, it is most useful when it is employed to reason about the analogies that exist among living things.

My four vaccinated papayas contracted jaundice, but they recovered. Perhaps they were the only ones which did not die of plant jaundice that year, especially on the peninsula. Before my experiment was complete, however, a new governor, the brutal and grotesque Aleyron, sent us women to the Bay of the West, and I don't know what became of my trees. (Michel 97 - 98)

What does this anecdote tell us about time? In the most basic sense Michel's investigation is a race against the clock. It exists on borrowed time. Michel must seek the approval of the local colonial governor before devoting her time to the project because, as an exiled convict, both her body and her time belong to the state. She also faces the scrutiny of her fellow exiles. In this regard, we must remember that even the most progressive exiles are operating on gendered ideological assumptions about men and women's roles, especially when it comes to the natural sciences. If they were to catch wind of Michel's experiment, most would question, not only the work, but Michel's sanity for undertaking it. Facing these pressures, Michel does as much work as possible before time runs out. Eventually though, time expires and the investigation comes to an abrupt end.

Yet, even as an unfinished project, Michel's investigation reveals something about science and the role of the scientific investigator that relates to our discussion of time. When we look at the investigation, we see how contrary its logic is to the instrumentalized logic that governs most "scientific" inquiry. For one, Michel's investigation is grounded in an eco-logic that is radically different than the capitalist logic of expropriation or the imperial logic of domination. Rather than treating nature instrumentally, that is as an object with secrets to be extracted *for* a particular class of human beings, Michel's work treats the human species as caught up in a mutual web, an *ecology*, brought about by chance collisions in time and space. What might be called "discovery" is, in this respect, not the product of individual genius but the result of an unforeseen cross-pollination. We see this playing out in the circumstances of the study itself, which stems from a contingent movement and

moment where two species come into contact with each other in a way that allows a hidden mutually beneficial potentiality to emerge between the two that did not exist before the meeting.

This approach to science is unsettling for the rationalized liberal capitalist mind, for it is premised on a relationship to nature that is light years away from the destructive relationship established and sustained by capitalism. As Michel tells us, her approach is premised on an analogical relationship *with* the natural world rather than hierarchical relation *to* it. This analogical relationship, this way of seeing and acting upon the world, decenters the human species from its supposed privileged place and puts it into a horizontal relation with all things. In effect, the human species becomes a tiny branch within the vast forests of time and space, and as such, its will can no longer reside above and beyond the totality of things.

For us, we can find something liberating in this approach. Instead of a science governed by the laws of profit, measured in clock-hours and return on investment, Michel's science is derived from the natural rhythms of growth and decay and ecological vectors that unlock a more harmonious balance between man and nature. Instead of a science governed by a hubristic desire to conquer nature, Michel's investigation gestures at a utopian horizon of cosmic preservation where the secrets that exist *between* species can be distilled, not for profit or for the biopolitical preservation of "man" alone, but for the more encompassing end of preserving unrelated species in a mutually sustained web. These secrets, these *use values*, would emerge as gifts rather than plunder to be bought and sold.

### **Contre-Temps 5. Time of Death**

Through the lens of the dominant strains of Western empiricism and ontology, death is the end, a moment of un-becoming when one's being gives way to nothingness. As for relationship between death and time: In death, time ends. There are no more seconds, minutes, hours, or years. For Michel and others who, in life, already made the connection between the nothingness of their finite existence and the everything that surrounds them, there is more to death. For those who, in struggling together and in fidelity with past rebellions, already loosened the unsteady foundations of the self and shook apart the grounds of linear time, there is more to the time of death than the end of being or time.

In Michel's writings, we find that the time of death has little to do with the measurable instant when an individual subject dies. Instead, the *time of death* is the unpredictable time between the collapse of a body and the re-emergence of that which was thought to be lost. A constellational link is formed between two dates, not in any prescribed fashion, but with the unpredictable emergence of a prefigured community that, against all odds, comes to continue what has come to an end. To get a clearer picture of this we can turn to Michel's writings on death.

As an exile, Michel carries the dead in her memories. This weight shapes her life down to the very words she writes and which we read across the gulf of time:

I must write things as they come to me. They are like pictures passing from sight and going away endlessly into the shadows. Of my old relatives, of my young and old friends, of my mother, nothing remains today but the dreams of my childhood. I see those who disappeared yesterday or a long time ago, just as they were, and I see all that surrounded their lives, and the wound of their absence bleeds just as

much now as it did in the first few days. I have no real homesickness for a country, but I am homesick for the dead. And the further along I get in these memoirs, the more numerous are the images that press close to me of those whom I shall never meet again. (22)

At first glance, Michel appears to be burdened by this wound—this black hole—within the reestablished spatial and temporal order. It pulls her back to the dead. Swirling up from this historical vortex are images of the dead, so numerous, that they seem to overwhelm her.<sup>19</sup> Yet, as we will see, Michel doesn't buckle under the weight of the dead. This reason for this is that Michel doesn't see their deaths as the end. Something of the dead always continues. Perhaps that is why Michel chose a very different image to describe death in one of her most well known poems, "Red Carnation":

If you were to go to the black cemetery  
 Brothers, throw on your sister,  
 As a final hope,  
 Some red 'carnations' in bloom.  
 In the final days of Empire,  
 When the people were awakening,  
 It was your smile red carnation  
 which told us that all was being reborn.  
 Today, go blossom in the shadow  
 of the black and sad prisons.  
 Go, bloom near the somber captives,  
 And tell them truly that we love them.  
 Tell them that through fleeting time  
 Everything belongs to the future  
 That the livid-browed conqueror  
 can die more surely than the conquered.

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<sup>19</sup> It is not just images that float up from the abyss but the very physical reminder of State terror inflicted on the Communards. Michel writes, "And the plain of Satory. If it were excavated, corpses would be found there too. The royalists covered them with quicklime in vain, because plows will uncover them, and every stone upturned will reveal them" (79).

The poem's implied metaphor of a seedling that carries the future carnation reflects the subterranean routes of revolution. With that metaphor, Michel acknowledges and writes against the bloody reality of what the state turned Ferré and many others into—crushed and unceremoniously buried corpses. The poem illuminates the corpse as a seed, a vessel that transmits a way of life that was not allowed to take root and blossom. In the historical dimension after the fall of the Commune, the seed reflects a multitude of vessels that transmit crushed and extinguished desires across time. We might think of their gestures and deeds, finished and unfinished books, scribbled margin notes or stories told around a fire, failed scientific projects and shared meals, red books or red scarves passed to kin.

The metaphor of the seed, and the historical processes of transmission it points to, shed further light on the time of death. Like the length of fallow time before a seed's unexpected blossoming, the time of death is the time between the violent destruction of a community and the unexpected emergence of a new community that grows out of failed struggle. It is a time of rest and unsettled absences that only comes to an end when a newly awakened community sprouts, unexpectedly, from the seeds of death.

The newly blossomed carnation of the poem stands for that community that identifies itself, not in the mirror, but in a death mask or skull of the failed revolutionaries of the past. The reemergence of that community defies the progressive flow of linear imperial time. It does so by restoring a revolutionary sense of awareness thought to be vanquished from the stage of history. A moving example of this comes in Michel's account of her mother, Marianne Michel's,

funeral. Though Michel had already returned from exile at the time of her mother's death, she could not attend because she was in prison on the charge of inciting a starving crowd to steal bread. Still, she was able to get a sense of what happened in her absence from the following newspaper report that made its way to her cell:

After a moment of silence and contemplation, the first speaker was our contributor, Ernest Roche. Here is a summary of his speech, which was interrupted frequently with cheers and applause from the crowd.

'Who are we standing here around the coffin of this simple and good woman who never dreamed of being famous? Why is there such a mixture here of so many different sorts of republicans and socialists? What feeling moves all of us? What attraction draws us here? What unity of spirit inspires in each of us the same respect and gives each of us the same feeling of indignation in front of this dead woman?

Let me tell you. There is one flag sacred to all of us, the flag that people fly only at certain solemn times, the flag that inflames us more than any gorgeous fabric. It is the flag of our martyrs, the flag of our heroes. The corpse of Lucrecia overturned the Tarquins and founded the Roman Republic. The bodies of unknown men who were struck down on 23 February 1848 by Louis Philippe's soldiers brought on the collapse of his throne. The corpse of Victor Noir in the spring of 1870 caused the weakening of Louis Napoleon's Empire and precipitated its fall. The body of Louise Michel's poor mother is our common bond, for in each of our spirits it causes the same feeling of horror against the criminals who have murdered her. [...]

Citizen Digeon spoke next:

'In the name of the anarchist groups, we have come to glorify the heroine of the demonstration at les Invalides two years ago. In front of this tomb, let us bring about the alliance of all revolutionaries. I am willing to bring all revolutionaries into one alliance on the foundation of absolute liberty and without any hidden motives.' (187)

After recounting these speeches, Michel offers the following words, a kind of love letter beamed through the prison walls and across time and space:

That is how the newspapers reported the burial of my poor mother. Thank you, friends, all of you who were there. I shall always picture you that way around my poor dead mother, united without distinctions between factions, *united in a common sorrow and with a common hope*. Your hope is that after our generation, no one will suffer the way



a mother suffered when she was separated from her daughter for two years of agony. (187 emphasis mine)

The only way we can do justice to the intimate, yet communal, moment described here is to think through it in terms of absence and presence. Michel is absent from the scene, yes, but there is a greater absence in the corpse. A corpse, after all, is an assemblage of absences: absence of breath, motion, memory, absence of what *could be* in life and what *could have been* if history had run a different course. Perhaps the absences of Marianne Michel reminded the people gathered, not only of a daughter who remained in prison, but of the state violence that set people apart from their families or the kin they discovered on the barricades and meeting halls. Maybe death reminded them of the desires that bloomed in the streets before the perilous date of May 28 as well as the dignified lives and deaths that *could have been* if those desires had taken full root. As we see here, these absences unleashed a presence. For a fleeting moment, the people came together. They looked through the death's head and saw themselves beyond separateness. From the seeds of death, a community thought vanquished blossomed amid the dust and decay of empire. A disembodied truth found its body.

### **Contre-Temp 6. Exile's End**

Let us move from the macrocosmic perspective described in the previous sections to the materiality of constellational forms of transmission, kinship, and solidarity. To do so, we return to where we started: New Caledonia, the year 1878. We enter Nouméa's coast where, in the distance, we catch sight of seven mountains.

We pass through old forests, run our hands along niaouli trees draped with webs of lianas, till we come to the Ducos Peninsula. Here, we find the deportee colony composed of a few earthen huts, some better maintained than others. We wait for night, when the moon is full and the waves lap the shore. At the appointed hour, we see three people moving cunningly to a copse. They appear magical in the pale blue light. One is Louise Michel. The others are Kanaks who Michel knows from the classes she has established. Though we cannot hear their exchange, we see Michel take a tightly rolled piece of fabric from her pocket and rip it in two. She hands it to the men. We catch a glimpse of its hue in the moonlight—the red scarf, warm against the night.

Michel's gesture signals that her time of exile has come to an end for, far away from the nation state, she has discovered a kinship based, not on filiation or homeland, but on a shared desire that unites common people while honoring their particularities.

This gesture requires a radically different way of seeing one "self" in relation to the colony and the other. In the imperial gaze, the colonies at the peripheries of empire appear as non-places filled with exotic beasts and animalistic peoples who would, to the joy or lament of the imperial observer, eventually give way to the "natural" forces of civilization and progress. Seeing the world through this ideological lens, imperial institutions and governors, like the ones Michel encounters in New Caledonia, inscribed empire's dominion by creating colonial labs where liberal law is either inoperative or where a loose semblance of law is used to mold space-time to the clock and force the rhythms of everyday life and nature to

the rhythms of capital.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, as Kristin Ross explains in *The Emergence of Social Space*, the anthropologists and artists of empire play their part in imperial projects by constructing a racialized mythos that represents the colony as a time-warped “landscape” devoid of history and indigenous peoples as objects devoid of historical agency. These legal, (pseudo)scientific, and cultural ideologies and practices converge to reify empire’s imaginary dominion over its peripheries.

Michel rejects these imperial fantasies. Seeing the world, instead, through the various *contre-temporal* lenses, she forms a kinship with the Kanaks that cuts through the superimposed geographic and anthropological boundaries that striate the commons and divide its people. The red scarf is a sign of that kinship. It is a sign that two distant struggles can be linked by a revolutionary desire that stretches across time and space: a desire to break free of empire and to forge a freer form of life unleashed from the spatial and temporal confines set by imperial law and economy.

That desire threads these struggles together, in and *beyond* failure, which Michel recognizes here:

The Kanakan Insurrection of 1878 failed. The strength and longing of human hearts was shown once again, but the whites shot down the rebels as we were mowed down in front of Bastion 37 and on the plains of Satory. When they sent the head of Ataï to Paris, I wondered who the real headhunters were; as Henri Rochefort had once written to me, “the Versailles government could give the natives lessons in cannibalism. (114)

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<sup>20</sup> At this time, New Caledonia was both a prison colony for 20,000 French prisoners and an extracting site for raw materials such as nickel and copper. In order to set up mining operations, the French governors pushed indigenous Kanaks off their ancestral lands and onto reservations. By the time of the uprising, the Kanaks occupied only ten percent of their land and were ravaged by European disease.

In Michel's account, the failure of the Kanakan revolt, like the failure of the Commune, explodes the binary that sets the liberal capitalist state form—and all it entails, including its fetishism of whiteness and commodities—on the side of civilization and progress while setting all other forms of social and political life on the side of barbarism and regress. Like Rimbaud, Michel reverses this binary by exposing the inherent violence of the “mature” political-economic forms and the “truth procedures” these forms unleash in the world. The forces of civilization are exposed as headhunters, first hunting the Communards like dogs, and later showcasing the Kanakan rebel Atai's head in a natural history museum. Whereas the rebels who died on the fields of Satory and Nouméa are here de-coupled from caricatures that serve as propaganda for empire. They are no longer traitors or savages. They are, rather, revolutionaries who embody a savage desire, “a strength and longing”, for a freer horizon beyond empire.

Warm even through the pale blue light of memories, the red scarf is a sign of a shared bloodline that has nothing to do with genetics and more to do with pulse, a “bad” bloodline threading together those whose desires move them toward a horizon of liberation and death. Its passage across time and space, its exchange from one rebel's hand to two others, is a sign that such desires cannot be crushed. They spread, multiply, and blossom again. To see this, we need only follow the threads toward the future, as author Nic Maclellan does here:

The symbolism of Louise Michel's gesture lives on in the modern Kanak movement for independence. In the early 1970s, a new generation of Kanak students returned home after studying in France during the turmoil of May 1968. To campaign for independence from

France, they formed a group called the Foulards Rouges – The Red Scarves. (16)

### Part III.

## The Re-emergence of Revolutionary Space and Time

### Future Imperfect

The red scarf threads our tale to May 1968. We reach the future Louise Michel never reached. Or perhaps it is more apt to say that we reach the *false future* promised by the emergent liberal capitalist empire of her day. By 1968, much of the planet is enmeshed in the imperial cage that laid—or rather, had working people lay—its modern foundations of steel and wire and industry in the earlier century. The empire of liberal capital finds its nodal points in the “modern” industrial nation states, particularly in France, Britain, and The United States. Within these nations, everyday life looks vastly different than it did in 1871, yet if we scratch just below the surface, we see that this future is a hyper-accentuation of the old rationalized physics of capital where existence is fully instrumentalized, desires are shaped by marketers, progress is measured in facile terms of economic growth, and racialized and gendered violence is hidden behind the false garments of institutional reform and extended rights. Within this setting, the subject no longer dangles by his watch chain. His body and senses, now invested in the rhythm and pace of a hitherto unrealized globalization of capital, are forced to move at the speed of the stock ticker.

Beyond the borders of the imperial nation states, and within their internal colonies, there is another story to be told. Facing anti-colonial opposition, the nations of liberal capitalist empire are, by 1968, using overt and covert maneuvers

to restore and extend their ideological and economic dominion, even as statesmen preach “decolonization” or shift focus to the absurd spectacle of the nuclear arms race. The most powerful Western nation states support brutal regimes in Latin America, Africa, Asia, solely because these regimes promise to open the door for corporations that will exploit cheap labor and expropriate the natural resources of the land. Paired with this, these nation states deploy a media apparatus to export a particular brand of culture, one centered on liberal individualism and consumerism, that works to defuse communal desires and discredit grassroots politics. When colonial subjects resist—when their desires for liberation turn to action—the imperial nation state’s police, war machinery, and prison apparatus turn violent. Such is progress.

By 1968, we have reached a future—but whose future? Or maybe the better question is *who owns this future?* The answer is a global elite class, a miniscule number really, who accumulate vast hoards of wealth while fantasizing about a planet-resort ruled by the dollar and the sacred notion of the individual who can “make it” just as they did. Invested in this mass hallucination, the neo-liberal economic philosophers espouse the myth that the accumulation of wealth shores up national GDP, adds to “our” security, contributes to the growth of the “free” market and technological innovation. All of this is a veil, really, a data-saturated veil, that hides an impoverished reality where governments, banks, and corporations cast lots on the blood and sweat of colonial and indigenous peoples and roll dice that hold the future of working class people in their balance.

Despite what historical revisionists would have us believe, the expansion of liberal capitalist empire and its imperial future does not go uncontested in 1968. We might be tempted to look to the Soviet bloc as the alternative, yet its industrialism, militarism, colonialism, and tightly policed security apparatus make it a shadow twin of liberal capitalist empire. Many who were seeking a more viable revolutionary alternative would look to Mao's Red China because, at this moment, its most utopian elements had not been co-opted by the secret agents of capital.

One might also look to the alternatives blossoming within empire and at its peripheries. Within the U.S. and Europe's capitalist nations, a New Left composed of radicalized Civil Rights activists, workers, feminists, gay rights activists, student activists, and anti-war protestors emerged. Their heterogeneous critiques and struggles found common ground in their challenge to the material and ideological foundations of liberal capitalist hegemony.<sup>21</sup> Looking for an alternative beyond the capitalist nation states, one might focus on the liberation struggles in the "Third World" and "Third World within the First World". This surge of guerilla movements, autonomous strategies of governance, and spontaneous revolts sought to break free of the "necropolitical" worlds that empire relied upon at its peripheries and within its internal Gulag zones. The hope riding in all of these movements is that they might bring counter-hegemonic thought and praxis, long pushed to the

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<sup>21</sup> These movements have different definitions of hegemony, some focusing on the established order determined by patriarchy, white supremacy, heteronormativity, or bourgeois class domination. Other, more nuanced critiques, sees the intersections between modes of domination and envision the path toward liberation as one that breaks through them all.



margins, to the center of social and political life in ways that would be liberatory, not only for the colony, but for a planet and people held in a tightening vice-grip.

We will not attempt an exhaustive study of all of these oppositional points. Instead, let us follow the lineage of revolution, gestured at in the works of Louise Michel, to '68. Rather than letting territorial lines dictate our analysis, let us follow the threads to two situations where common people—workers, students, and artists—break from the spatial and temporal physics of liberal capitalist empire and attempt to grasp a more interconnected form of life beneath its surface. The first situation will bring us to the heart of an imperial nation state. The second, which we will explore in Chapter 2, will bring us in to a room with a view that looks out upon the brightest lights of '68 as they march toward liberation, and death, but *never* oblivion.

### **Paris '68**

“But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.” – Walter Benjamin

A memorable slogan of the May 68 Paris uprising reads “Sous les pavés la plage” which translates to English as “Under the paving stones, the beach.” The slogan has been attributed to the Situationists and other militant art groups, but our concerns are not with who coined the phrase, but with the gesture it calls us back to, and—beyond that—with the desires that move a people to bend to the street, break it apart, and to find joy and hope in the discovery of sand beneath their feet.



Figure. 1.4: Photograph “Under the Cobblestones, the Beach”  
by Serge Hambourg<sup>22</sup>

### *Lightning in Space*

The Parisian protestors, faceless and turned away from us here, will use the bricks to build barricades to slow the lines of shielded and armored policemen. Some will throw bricks at those lines, not out of blind rage, but because of a visceral sensation—a spark— produced by friction between the concrete reality and the utopian imagination, a spark that travels from eyes to minds, down along spines, and finally to finger tips that release themselves from the brick or factory tool.

Putting the barricades skirmishes aside for a moment and focusing on the gesture captured in the photo, we find a crystallization of desire, a collective spark turned to action, that breaks apart stratified space and reveals an outside. Seen through the liberated eyes of '68, the beach offers a glimpse of what that *outside* looks like, not as an abstraction but as a subterranean reality that holds as many revolutionary possibilities as it does grains of sand. In contrast to the “real” world,

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<sup>22</sup> Photograph obtained from NPR: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=90330162>

with its phallic towers and gridded streets, the beach exists as a horizontal space below the built terrain of the modern city—a common ground—where people could come together to shape and be shaped by the nature of which they are a part. Additionally, the beach, with its moving sands, resists clear divisions and territorial lines; it trespasses messily upon the striated world as a reminder that everything cannot be gridded and locked in place.

This simple gesture of digging up bricks and finding sand forecasts other lighting strikes when students, workers, intellectuals, and immigrants will break from their proper place and discover the common ground beneath their feet. Alain Badiou describes one such moment in his account of an “unimaginable” meeting that occurred at Chausson factory:

What happened at the gates of Chausson factory would have been completely improbable, even unimaginable, a week earlier. The solid union and party *dispositif* usually kept workers, young people and intellectuals strictly apart and in their respective organizations... We found ourselves in a situation in which that *dispositif* was falling apart before our very eyes. (59)

Badiou does not mythologize this meeting by turning common people into heroes. Neither does he dismiss its importance by focusing on its ephemerality or the egoism that inevitably seems to arise in political meetings, even imaginable ones. Instead, he focuses on the unlikely convergences of the meeting and the veiled reality these convergences brought to light. With this meeting, divided and atomized people bring down the walls that keep them separate and at odds. They converge into a collective force that shakes the established order, not by winning concessions, but by illuminating the common ground for emancipation and by physically

stepping into it. This force continues to shake apart the mythic foundations of liberal capitalism, as Badiou recognizes here:

[During the ten ‘red years’] Thousands of students, high school students, workers, women from the estates and proletarians from Africa went in search of a new politics. What would a political practice that was not willing to keep everyone in their place look like? A political practice that accepted new trajectories, impossible encounters, and meetings between people who did not usually talk to each other? At that point, we realized without really understanding it, that if a new emancipatory politics was possible, it would turn social classifications upside down. It would not consist in organizing everyone in the places where they were, but in organizing lightning displacements, both material and mental. I have just told you the story of a blind displacement [Chausson factory]. What inspired us was the conviction that we had to do away with places. That is what is meant, in the most general sense, by the word ‘communism’: an egalitarian society, which, acting under its own impetus, brings down walls and barriers; a polyvalent society with variable trajectories, both at work and in our lives. But ‘communism’ also means forms of political organization that are not modeled on spatial hierarchies. (Badiou 60).

What these “lightning displacements” reveal, according to Badiou, is “something completely *new*” (59). Why call this politics *new*? Perhaps because the lightning strike gestures at a political praxis that is radically different from the practices of electoral politics, a praxis that is horizontal and mobile rather than hierarchical and static. Perhaps because the desire that sets people in motion in this example is not born from insubstantial political motivations or mottos, nor is it born from the Old Leftist sense of proletarian class consciousness. Instead, the emancipatory political action of ’68 springs out of a “new” awareness that seeks to break down from the walls—“both material and mental”—that surround and shape the “self” and keep it locked in place.

At this point in our discussion, we might be wary of the newness of this

emancipatory politics. Rather than seeing a politics that emerges *ex nihilo*, we might instead recognize a *re-emergence* of something very old indeed. If that “something” is not apparent, it becomes clearer when we situate these lightning strikes in space within the dimension of *time*. When we do so, they appear not as a breaking of stones and discovery of the beach, but as *re-breaking* of stones and *rediscovery* of the beach.<sup>23</sup>

### *Thunder Across Time*

To tie the gesture that starts this section back to our earlier discussions—or better, to thread it to an earlier historical flashpoint—we can turn our attention to two images of the Paris streets separated by approximately one hundred years.



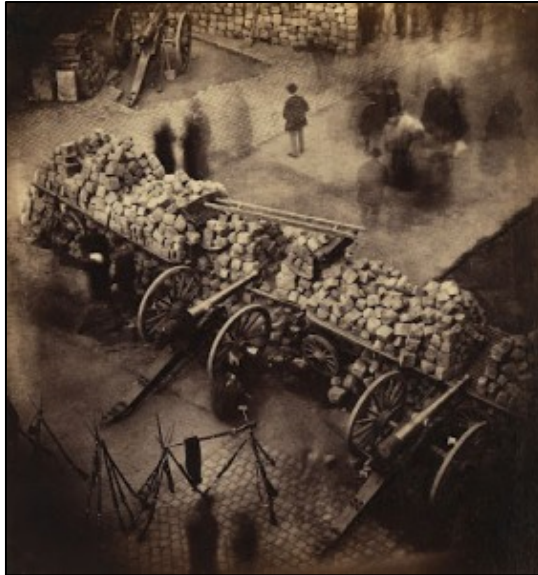
**Figure 1.5: Photograph “FRANCE. Paris. 5th arrondissement. Latin Quarter. Gay-Lussac street. Morning of the 11th of May, 1968” by Bruno Barbey<sup>24</sup>**

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted, that when we extend the frame to talk about time, we add another dimension to Badiou’s general definition of Communism; this might be summed up as follows: Communism means forms of political organization that are not modeled on temporal constructions that keep people moving forward, ever faster and faster, toward a future under lock and key.

<sup>24</sup> Photo obtained from Web at

<http://pro.magnumphotos.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=2TYRYDKRX97X>



**Figure 1.6: Photograph “Paving Blocks in a barricade, Paris 1874” by Pierre-Ambroise Richebourg**

These photos of cobblestone barricades, the first from 1968 and the second from 1871, complicate the newness of what emerges in the more recent moment. When threaded together, they tell us something about the space-time of revolution. For now, though, let’s focus on the earlier flashpoint.

Kristin Ross has already shown us how such scenes are suggestive of the emergence of social space which, if we recall, means that the naturalized space of the city is uncovered as manmade and constructed in ways that achieve the ends of capital. Here, the process of “uncovering” social space takes on a literal meaning as the streets are broken apart and reworked into barricades. What makes this process *revolutionary*, as we have seen, are the desires that innervate the communards as they break and rework the materials that stratify space: they are moved by desires to break, not only from their proper place, but from the atomizing physics of work maintained by the *dispositif*. They are moved by a desire to forge a new space. The

construction of these barricades is an opportunity to realize that desire. By building the barricades, the communard engineers break from the roles required of them by capital. They take back, not only their labor, but their capacity to create for the community as well as the joy of creating. Ross makes this point clear when she considers the engineers who posed in front of the barricades. Focusing on one of the engineers, Napoleon Gaillard, Ross writes: “Gaillard does not choose to celebrate his status as worker. Instead he transgresses what is perhaps the most time honored and inflexible of barriers: the one separating those who carry out useful labor from those who ponder aesthetics.” If we keep that image of Gaillard in our mind as we slip forward in time to the barricades of '68, perhaps we can recognize his face in the faces of intellectuals who put down pens to stack cobblestones or in the face of workers who put down tools to chant “strike!”

If we thread these two temporally disconnected scenes together, we can see that what unfolds on the streets and factories of Paris in '68 is not a new emergence but a *re-emergence* of a revolutionary space-time that was temporarily foreclosed as the forces of liberal capitalist empire re-stratify space and reset time and the subject to the rhythms of the clock. Following that logic, we might think of the lightning strikes that shatter the streets and walls of hierarchical space in '68 as conscious or unconscious re-activations of communal desire to break from the confines of our separateness. Behind each strike, in other words, we might hear the distant thunder of failed revolt.

The spatial dimension of this re-emergence is clear, but what we're calling the re-emergence of revolutionary time needs further clarification. To bring it into clearer focus, we can turn to this passage from Louise Michel's memoirs. Viewing time through her atavistic lens, Michel tethers herself to another time when, not coincidentally, the paving stones of empire were broken:

Even if there hadn't been a little atavism in my blood helping me to write poetry, no one could have escaped being a poet in this country of Champagne and Lorraine, where the very winds sang Germanic war chants and songs of love and rebellion. Through the great snows of winter, past the sunken paths full of hawthorn in the spring, pushing through the deep black woods of enormous oaks and poplars with trunks like columns, you can still follow the paved roads of the conquering Romans, and in many places see where the unconquered long-haired Gauls ripped up the paving stones. (Michel 17)

Here, Michel looks backward, across the historical debris, to show that she and her fellow communards were not the first to break the paving stones of empire, not the first to discover what lies beneath the surface. In doing so, she positions her *self* and the Paris Commune in a constellation composed of long-dead rebels who, once upon a time, broke through stratified space and saw the ground beneath. Looking as Michel looks, we might see the re-emergence of revolutionary time as that instant when the circular time of the clock and the linear progressive time of the calendar come to a halt and are replaced by a constellation of flashpoints that pulse to the same rhythm, the resonance of which breaks bricks and reveals the common ground between the self and the other that time and space marks of as separate. When this constellation comes into relief, the illusions of space, time, and of our separate subjectivity gives way to a saturated instant in which a being feels what has existed across time: the commons, of which it and all other beings are a part—the beach



beneath the street.

In the context of '68, we get a sense of the re-emergence of revolutionary time in those moments when students, intellectuals, workers, and immigrants discover that, above and beyond those superimposed subjectivities, they are historical agents in a long discontinuous cluster of revolutionaries who saw through the cage and felt the saturated “time of the now.” This is gestured at in an anecdote, related to us by Kristin Ross, where she describes a very intimate feeling of connectedness between '68 and the Commune:

The most important French history of the Commune—which was written by a *communard*, Lissagaray—that book was reissued in France in 1967. And so when 1968 erupted in the streets a few months later, you couldn't find a single copy of that book anywhere in Paris. You couldn't find a single copy of any book about the Commune in Paris. And everyone was desperately trying to read about the Commune because they thought they might be living some version of it again. (The Civilians)

What are we to make of this voracious desire to read the history of the Commune? Perhaps the revolutionaries of '68 wanted to read Lissagaray because they had touched that history in their present moment. The barricades had reappeared. The sense of solidarity between separated classes had momentarily returned. Thus, the books on the Commune no longer spoke of history in its dead form. Those books now told the story of the present. History had bubbled back to the surface. The revolutionary dead had risen up like flowers breaking through cobblestones or gravestones. We might say that for these revolutionaries, the Paris Commune had become a *historical* event in the sense that Benjamin describes that term. Benjamin says that an event becomes “historical posthumously, as it were, through events that

may be separated from it by thousands of years” (Benjamin 263). Here, the Commune becomes historical posthumously when this new community emerges to continue what once existed and what had been crushed. In the remainder of that same quote, Benjamin goes on to advise that “a historian who takes this as a point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one.” It could be said that the voracious readers of '68, even when they couldn't find the books, became historians when they grasped the threads that link their moment and their actions with all those revolutionary flashpoints that burst to life and faded into the dark of an ill-documented liberal History. In the absence of books, they grasped the cobblestone and, in doing so, grasped the constellation that awaited its newest point of light.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Beyond the Horror Story of History<sup>25</sup>

The Father State, The Mother of Mexican Poetry, and the  
Unbroken Rhythms of the People

“History is like a horror story.” - Auxilio Lacouture, *Amulet*

#### Introduction.

#### The Wounds of History

“The wound is the place where the Light enters you.” – Rumi

Let us slip across time and space to Mexico City. The date is 2 October 1968. We stand amid a crowd of several thousand people in the *Plaza de las tres culturas*. Many around us are students. Others are there in solidarity with the students or are drawn in by the sight and sounds of the crowd. Regardless of their reasons, they are present. They listen to the student organizers speak about the university occupations, the hypocrisy of the government, the absurdity of the Olympic Games. Then, a *chop, chop, chop* breaks the silence of the heavens, as Helicopters circle overhead. At an appointed hour, a flare cuts through the sky, tracing an ominous scratch across the blue. A line of soldiers and tanks appear

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<sup>25</sup> For Robin Christ and all the teachers who taught me a simple yet profound lesson: That we've lived too long for the love of power, that it's time to live by the power of love.

around the Plaza. There's a collective heaviness—a weighted moment—as if the clouds are about to open. A second flare breaks the sky. Then, two loud cracks like thunder. *From where? Who fired?* It doesn't matter. Not now. There's no time for conspiracies. Conspiracies are for the future. What matters now is who holds the guns with the bayonets. What matters now is the gunfire and tanks. The people around us have a visceral knowledge of this, a spark moving through each and every body. Time stands still. And then suddenly it's moving too fast. They run, some scattering shoes in the rush. Too fast. More whistling sounds. Bodies fall. It's hard to tell who is injured or dead. Screams, curses, blunt thuds, gunfire, more screams. It all carries through the night, a horror scene set to a horror soundtrack.

What our imaginations try to bear witness to here is the historical wound of Tlatelolco, a day when the State turned its guns on the people. It is a wound we will never fully know, not only because the facts and details of the massacre were buried by the Partido Nacional Revolucionario government (PRI), but because liberal history is not kind to revolutions.

Liberal history obscures the deepest realities of the historical dimension in ways that erase those practices and relationships that exceed the bounds of empiricism. This is because the frames of liberal history treat observable and recordable facts as reality. This poses an obvious problem for us as we approach the wound of Tlatelolco. If observable and recordable facts are the only way we can *know* Tlatelolco, then we are already set up for failure. After all, the PRI party buried its official documents regarding the massacre for decades. When ruling party controls the facts, then they control reality. When they bury or destroy the facts,

they are capable of making events unreal. But these aren't the only limits of empiricism. For even if all the details of Tlatelolco were to come to light—even if all the files, footage, and photos surfaced, even if we could magically collect all the facts about the event—we still wouldn't remember the deepest dimensions of the student movement and the violence unleashed at Tlatelolco. This is because empiricism simply cannot see the invisible—yet still very *real*—threads that connect people, that pull them out of their superimposed and fictitious separateness within the established order. A liberal history grounded in empiricism simply cannot grasp what the State attempted to crush through violent force, nor is it capable of seeing what outlives the horror stories of a history it has written in fire and blood.

As we look back on the wound of Tlatelolco, we will avoid two impulses. The first is to treat the historical wound as Western physicians or psychologists treat physical or psychological wounds—that is, as a trauma in need of remedy. When we follow this impulse, we might mistake the accumulation of buried data and facts about the event as the path toward justice. The logic is that the data will provide proof of the injury done. Subsequently, that proof allows us to write a prescription for healing in the form of memorials, public apologies, and reparations. We will not treat the wound in this way. The wound, as we shall see, can never be healed. It will always remain open, not merely as a site of trauma or haunting, but as an opening through which the light of the revolutionary dead reaches us. By this I mean that when we look back at the wound we have an opportunity to remember what a State transfixed by the myth of separateness deems most threatening, what it cannot abide

being in the world, what it tries to crush in its stranglehold without ever being able to grasp.

Another impulse we might follow when looking back at Tlatelolco is to say, in Nietzschean tones, that the wound has made us stronger, that it has given civil society the strength to overcome the bad government. According to this logic, the wound unmasks the violence of a State caught between barbarism and modernity. The sacrifice gives the people the wake up call needed to slowly march toward a truer democracy. We will not follow this impulse. We will not fetishize State violence as a catalyst that was necessary to awaken the people in the *longue durée* of their struggle. The people, as we will see, were already awakened. They didn't need the heel of the State to stir them.

Instead, we can take a different path through the wound. We can take it as our entry point to an old revolutionary wavelength that rose to the surface in 1968, that existed on the day of the Tlatelolco massacre, and that continued on after the movement was physically crushed. This is a departure from the approaches taken by critics who often foreground the discourse surrounding a historical uprising or the aesthetic objects produced in the wake of an uprising over revolutionary praxis itself. Such a focus further obscures what State violence has physically crushed. We will see the limits of both approaches later in this chapter, but for now, we can find an example of the former approach—the emphasis on discourse over praxis—in the following excerpt from Samuel Steinberg's book *Photopoetics of Tlatelolco*:

As Ryan F. Long puts it: “The shots that flare cued, intended to close the book on a period of social conflict, instead initiated a process of interpretation of that conflict and its revelations about Mexican politics

that continues to reverberate almost 40 years after the shots were fired.” The pages that follow capture this reverberation, allow it to intone and resound. (18)

In this passage, Steinberg attunes his criticism to a very specific channel: the channel of interpretation. His task becomes the interpretation of interpretation, a task that could extend *ad infinitum*. Though this approach can be useful, it risks overemphasizing the wave of interpretation and letting the wave of revolutionary praxis recede into the background of the critique. Taking a different approach than Steinberg, we will attempt to attune our analysis to the revolutionary wavelength that beat against the established order of Mexican civil society, liberal capitalist empire, and the narrow constructions of subjectivity available in 1968.

In Part I, we will trace that wave as it rises and crashes. We will begin by focusing on the emergence of the student movement of 1968 (*Movimiento Estudiantil*) and the reactive force of a paternalistic State—a Father State—that attempts to crush the movement and to silence the people’s most revolutionary cry for unity in a forcefully divided and hierarchically stratified world. In this section, we will see how the Mexican students—like their brothers and sisters in Paris, Prague, Chicago and elsewhere across the First, Second, and Third world—were attuned to rhythm that beat against the walls of regimes that keep people separate and atomized. We will see, too, how the Father State turned to unrestrained physical violence when its subtler modes of separation were no longer keeping people locked in their “proper” place. We will consider how this violence had less to do with the resurrection of “the specter of Aztec supremacy,” as Octavio Paz suggests, and more

to do with the State's embrace of a myth adopted by every regime, liberal capitalism included, that attempts to superimpose divisions upon that which is indivisible.

In Parts II and III, we turn from historical violence to the violence of cultural remembering. We will consider how the revolutionary wavelength is obscured and forgotten when cultural critics frame the history of the '68 movement and Tlatelolco within lenses shaped by the same values and ideologies of the Father State, namely that of individualism, fragmentation, and violence. Though it may be difficult to critique those critics who attempt to remember, we must do so in order to reach a deeper form of *remembrance*, one that does justice to the revolutionary power that pulled people together and that allowed them to break through the walls that keep beings divided in space and in time. In the final section of this chapter, we will draw a contrast between the cultures of forgetting and cultures of remembrance. Specifically, we will look at literary work written and recorded in the shadow of Tlatelolco that taps into the wavelength that the revolutionaries attuned themselves to in 1968.



## Part I.

### History of Violence

“We have been tolerant, but everything has a limit, and we can no longer allow the law to be broken as it has been in the eyes of the world.” – President Díaz Ordaz

#### The Wave Rises and Crashes

The situation that led the students to Tlatelolco was not the same situation that led to the uprisings in Paris discussed in Chapter 1. After all, the Mexico of 1968 was the product of a long history of Spanish colonialism, U.S. imperialism, and an often buried history of indigenous, working class, and revolutionary struggles. It would be a mistake, then, to say that the '68 uprisings in Mexico were motivated by the *same* factors as in Paris, since both emerged in opposition to specific conditions and policies in each nation state. What we might say, without losing sight of the historical particularities of each situation, is that the uprisings in Mexico belong within the same revolutionary constellation as the Paris uprisings of 1968 and 1871.

To see why that is so, we might first consider how Mexico's formation as a modern nation is undergirded by the same divisive logic we saw in Chapter 1.<sup>26</sup> After the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the Partido Nacional Revolucionario filled the political power vacuum by consolidating power in the hands of the elite

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<sup>26</sup> In order to flesh out this context I look to the social and cultural histories of the Mexican revolution offered by Margaret K. Vaughn and Stephen E. Lewis (eds.) *The Eagle and The Virgin* (2006), Gilbert Joseph and Jürgen Bucheanau in *Mexico's Once And Future Revolution* (2013), and Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell's *The Women's Revolution in Mexico: 1910-1953* (2006). As background for the context of 1968, I looked to Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith's *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture* (2014), Kevin Witherspoon's *Before The Eyes of The World: Mexico and the 1968 Olympics* (2014), and Elaine Carey's *Plaza of Sacrifices* (2015).

class. Though the Party adopted the title “Revolutionary,”<sup>27</sup> its policies were nothing short of a slow motion coup for capital and Western liberalism. By importing capital goods, investing in education, and developing the nation’s infrastructure, Mexico was molded into an industrial state. By 1968, the results, at least through the liberal capitalist lens, were nothing short of a miracle: Mexico’s GDP reached new heights and ushered the nation into a global economic game hitherto dominated by The United States and Europe. The regime couldn’t have asked for a more fitting symbol of this “Mexican Miracle” than its selection to host the Olympic Games.

We would be wise to remember that miracles, in the context of modernity, no longer consist of transubstantiating water to wine. Instead, they involve a slight-of-hand that hides the transformation of blood into profit and the human being into an individual cog in the machine. This is the fundamental trick of liberal capitalism, one hidden in plain sight, one that rearticulates the myth of separateness in its thoroughly “modern” form. The secret of the Mexican Miracle was that it was contingent upon, and productive of, a social reality where the peasant and industrial working class were divided and used as cheap disposable labor to fill the coffers of corrupt politicians and businessmen. At the same time, young people in the expanding middle class began to question the inequity of the system and the instrumentalized existence that education steered them toward. On top of this, the rigged game of markets would soon lose its luster in the 1970s when the

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<sup>27</sup> The Party is renamed Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) in 1938 and Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in 1946

manufactured crises of capital replaced boom with bust, economic stability with inflation and debt, and exploitation with abject abandonment of poor people and whole swaths of the working class.

The uprising of '68 in Mexico emerged in this context. As in Paris, it began when middle class students—their bodies and minds attuned to the wave of liberatory protests sweeping the world—began to question the massive wealth gap between the rich and poor, the rigged game of electoral politics, the inequitable future that politics was molding for Mexico, and the hollow social roles people were expected to fill. For the students of 1968, there were no miracles. By the summer of '68, they had formed the CFP (National Strike Council), a coalition of students from around the country, which articulated six demands that challenged the Party's uncontested grip on society and the consensus it had forged.

Though the movement began with university students, it flowed outward to meet other oppositional tributaries. By August, a tidal wave of protest rippled across Mexico as people from all strata of society, from the Indian field worker to the middle class housewife, took part in massive demonstrations. At one of the most poignant demonstrations on September 13, three hundred thousand people rose up under the banners of fallen revolutionaries. They marched silently, together. In his observations of the event, Ramón Ramírez writes, “students are confused with workers from various factories and unions; groups of peasants are also present” (qtd. in Steinberg 43-44). We might imagine them now, streaming down the Zócalo, an embodiment of democracy's truest face—an uncontainable wave of people, from

all walks of life, taking back common space and reclaiming a power lost upon the State, a power that nullifies the separateness imposed upon the people, a power that allows people to move united in difference, a “We” with many faces.

This wave crashes against a formation which, as philosopher Giorgio Agamben says, the “revolutions of our century have been shipwrecked”: The modern capitalist nation State (Agamben 12). The crash has its date—October 2, 1968— and a name etched into the sands of time: The Night of Tlatelolco.<sup>28</sup> The State’s violence face had already appeared in the weeks leading up to Tlatelolco. By the end of September, with the Olympic Games fast approaching, the PRI government decided to take a more drastic approach to the student uprising. The State, under the auspices of President Díaz Ordaz, unleashed its armed forces at several campuses including the public university of UNAM and the private Polytechnic University. By the time the smoke cleared, dozens of students were dead, hundreds were beaten and jailed, and the campuses were under a military occupation. Still, the wave rose. The State’s violent occupations of these campuses would not be the physical breaking point of the movement, a fact that PRI government discovered when the National Strike Committee refused to reopen the school on the government’s terms. Instead, the student’s leaders organized a meeting that would bring the movement back to the streets, back into public space.

The meeting was to be held at the *Plaza de las tres culturas* on October 2, 1968.

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<sup>28</sup> Instead of seeking Revolution in movements that usurp the position of the State, perhaps we need to look for it in those movements that never had a chance to become that which they sought to overthrow. Perhaps we need look for it in those movements that were completely broken upon the reef, but which, in being broken, spread outward like a million unpredictable and uncontainable droplets cast upon the shores of the future.

## The Father's Pyramid

We do not need all the details of the massacre to assess the power exerted on October 2, 1968. We need not know who shot first (though most evidence suggests it was the military or its *agent provocateurs*) to know what is at stake for the State. What we see behind the murky institutional histories of Tlatelolco is the full expression of a patriarchal State fully invested in upholding and enforcing the myth of separateness, to the point where its guns turn inward upon those who are awakened to a reality beyond myth.

When I use the term patriarchal with regard to the Mexican State of 1968, I am not referring to the fact that the State was governed by and for an elite class made up mostly of men. Though that is true, the term suggests something more insidious, something more deeply rooted. I use it to refer to a particular physics of power that governs institutions and that molds subjects around ideologies and values rooted in the myth of separateness. In *The Gender Knot: Unraveling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, critic Allan Johnson sheds light on this physics of power when he writes:

Above all, patriarchal culture is about the core value of control and domination in every area of human existence. From the expression of emotion to economics to the natural environment, gaining and exercising control is a continuing goal. Because of this, the concept of power takes on a narrow definition of ‘power over’—the ability to control others, events, resources, or oneself in spite of resistance—rather than alternatives such as the ability to cooperate, to give freely of oneself, or to feel and act in harmony with nature (66).

Two things must be said about the “concept of power” that relate back to the myth of separateness. First, we must call this power *patriarchal*, not because fathers are

innately controlling and dominating, but because history has constructed the father as legitimate only when he exerts muscular strength to master and control a seemingly hostile world that lies outside the walls and borders of the household. This applies to individual fathers, but more importantly to patriarchal institutions and the Father State, all of which are legitimate and valued only when they exert their “power over” the Other. Secondly, patriarchal power is grounded in violence—the subtle violence of naming and enforcing a fictitious separation between Self and Other and the overt violence of incapacitating, exploiting, or destroying the Other who is perceived as hostile and threatening to the Self. This latter is precisely the kind of patriarchal violence that manifested at Tlatelolco when the State lashed out like a mad father at those it had mistaken as *its* unruly children. The Father State did so to preserve its power over the social body and to forcefully divide those that the revolutionary currents had drawn together despite the State’s divisive physics. Like many States before and after it, it deployed terror as a means of preserving a divisive and hierarchical social formation and those atomized subjectivities upon which that formation depends.

There is a tendency, among some artists and critics, to read the overt violence of the State as a vestige or specter of a barbaric past rather than as part and parcel of modern hegemony. This is what the author Octavio Paz concludes when he writes, “The massacre at Tlatelolco teaches us that the past which we thought buried is still alive and has burst out among us” (qtd. in Steinberg 31). Diana Sorenson also seems to accept this conclusion in her reading of Paz’s work. Sorenson writes:

Violence had the effect of unmasking. It lay bare what was hidden behind the mask of progress that the PRI had presented to the world at the time of the Olympic Games; it stripped the sheen of modernity from the archaic face of the nation. Paz's language is rife with the imagery of deceit and its unveiling. Bloodshed operates the effect of this *aletheia* or unveiling the origin, not so much as a ritual cleansing but as a revelation of the code and the origin. From the Aztec beginning, Paz draws a line marking the continuity of Mexico's hitherto misunderstood history, showing that the mirage of colonial rule and independence did not sever the powerful link with the Aztecs. (63)

Paz and Sorenson's genealogical approach to State violence relies on a narrative of progress that misses the truly insidious and continuous nature of patriarchal power. By locating the origin of the violence in its Aztec past, the author and the critic displaces the violence from liberal capitalist modernity, rendering the former as barbaric and the latter as civilized. This is a false binary. What it implies is that a State need only move past its barbaric past in order to achieve a fully realized modernity. This progressive narrative is shortsighted because it masks the face of the Father who has continually had his grip on regimes past and present. The Father is not a specter or vestige of some ancient regime but the eternally present puppet master behind all regimes that define power as *power over* the world and others. Far from a vestige or remnant, the Father lives and breathes through leaders and subjects who embrace this as the only form of power.

To truly unmask the Father, we must break from a progressive narrative that seeks the origin of State violence in a past. We must look deeply at historical violence to see its repetition across time and space.<sup>29</sup> When we view historical

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<sup>29</sup> There's an ethical reason for doing so: Illuminating the recurrence of state violence implies that we might one day break the cycle.

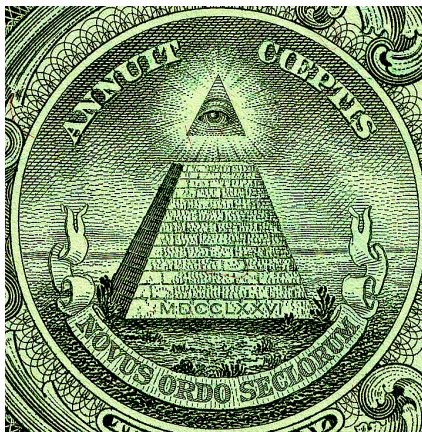
violence in terms of recurrence, we see that both the Aztec “past” and the liberal capitalist “present” of 1968 were structured around the same physics of a patriarchal power *over* the Other, a power that deploys muscular force to mold time, space, and subjectivities to man’s will. In this regard, violence has less to do with origins in a barbaric past than it has to do with the hegemony of patriarchy across time and space. It has less to do with the inescapability of origins and genetic codes than it has to do with each regime’s acceptance of the myth of separateness as *the* reality that necessitates laws, institutional practices, and modes of subjectivity that keep people apart and at war.

Perhaps the Father’s recurrence explains why one of patriarchy’s most phallic structures keeps showing its face on the fetish objects of modernity:



**Figure 2.1: Mexican 20 Centavos, 1966**





**Figure 2.2: Seal entitled “Novus Ordo Seclorum” printed on back of U.S. one-dollar bill**

The pyramid, pictured here on a Mexican coin and U.S. one-dollar bill, is a fitting symbol of the state and subject formations that patriarchal regimes of the past, present, and future superimpose upon the reality of an indivisible commons and cosmos. In terms of the State, patriarchal regimes construct hierarchical social formations that conform to the pyramid structure. Elite groups sit atop the social hierarchy and exert their power over “others, events, and resources.” These groups become the panoptic eye—the ego of the social body—that looks down upon differentially ranked and valued subjects, symbolized here as the blocks that compose each level of the pyramid. The eye/I of patriarchal power is ever present, ever vigilant. It watches to make sure that the hierarchical structure holds together *in* space and *across* time.

If we move down to the level of the subject, we can see the pyramid as an emblem of the “proper” subjectivity constructed within a patriarchal State form. According to Western philosophy and psychology, each one of us resides behind our eyes. We are told that there, amid a tiny mound of gray matter, sits our

sovereign being: our ego, the thing we call “I.” The rest of the body, we are told, must be kept secure against the hostile universe beyond its fragile boundaries. To do so, the body must follow the conceptual-engine of our egos: the rationalized mind. Working within the bounds of our socially constructed reality, the rationalized mind tells the subject to stay locked inside the pyramid. It makes sure that the body does not deviate in time and space. It tells the body that it must continually make its walls stronger, more impermeable, and at the same time more fortified. The rationalized mind tells us that if we break from our proper place in time and space—if we open ourselves up to the Other—we risk dissolution and death.

The movement of 1968 crashes into the Father’s pyramid by challenging both State and subject formations that are structured around the covert and overt enforcement of the myth of separateness. To reiterate, this pyramid is not some spectral form from the Aztec Past.<sup>30</sup> The power it symbolizes is as archaic as the pyramids of old, which we must always remember, were built upon the blood and broken bones of slaves and conquered peoples. Yet, at the same time, the power the pyramid symbolizes is as thoroughly modern as those dollars and coins pictured above. Its shape reflects those modern regimes that attempt to structure reality as a

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<sup>30</sup> This reading differs from Paz’s treatment of the Pyramid (see Sorenson). Sorenson writes, “In his return to the Aztec past Paz can locate the salient features of a terrifying national secret: “The massacre at Tlatelolco shows us that the past which we thought was buried is still alive and has burst out among us.” While it may have, as he claims, a *repelente* (repulsive) quality, the regression it produces grants him both the power of the recovery of a secret and the circular logic of a perfectly sutured explanation. Its master code is the fixity that he attributes to Mexico’s space and time: the central immobility of the pyramid is mirrored in the terrifying presence of the past, which defies any hope of its burial and its perpetual reappearance. (65)

vast and inequitable hierarchy where divided subjects are made to stay in their proper place.

Before we slip across time once more, we might boil the shape of the pyramid down to a related geometry to consider the coordinates within which patriarchal power is triangulated and from where its force emanates:



**Figure 2.3: Triangulation of Patriarchal Power**

Let's consider how the three points in the triangular circuit of patriarchal power operate. On the scale of States and subjects, the locus of patriarchal power—the I/eye—becomes the central point in a hostile universe, a God that can only exist if it maintains its form against the waves that beat against its borders or skin. The I/eye of power works hard to differentiate and separate itself from all that exists outside the solid structure—The State or the Self—it has cordoned off in space and in time. What's fascinating is that the I/eye comes to define space, not as an open field that gives rise to life and that sustains it, but as a striated and partitioned arrangement that secures its solid form against a hostile universe. In a similar sense, the I/eye comes to define time, not as a continuous cycle of seasons and births and deaths, but as a linear measurement used to gauge the physical and material growth of the

regime or the self (Note, how there is no room for physical death and structural deterioration within this triangulation; those are signs of weakness). In Part III, we will look to culture to see how the revolutionaries of '68 broke free of this phallogentric structure, how they escaped its oppressive physics and rediscovered a time and space freed from the myth of separateness.

## Part II. Cultural Forgetting

“What unfolded before our eyes was a ritual, a sacrifice.” – Octavio Paz

For a moment, the revolutionary wave that rose to the surface in 1968 broke down the walls that kept society stratified and subjects separated. The people had awakened. They had discovered a new rhythm, a rhythm that shook the foundations of the hegemonic State and subject formation. The question that we will grapple with in this section and Part III is this: When the revolutionary rhythm is forcefully silenced, as it was on 2 October 1968, can we who stand across the gulf of time find ways to hear it in the present? We cannot look to social science for answers to this question. Relying heavily on empirical fact, social science cannot account for the subtle echo of revolution that beats behind the facts of history and the visible phenomenon of everyday life. Cultural work, on the other hand, has a power to tap into these near-silenced rhythms. It can dredge lost spaces up from the sea of time. It can fill those spaces with color and texture. It can thread us back to those whom the Father State has ground to ash and dust. It can give them life and movement. Culture can pull us to the vantage point of the witness who is able to re-member what is lost within the frames of liberal history: the rhythm of an awakened people whose pulse continues to beat against the walls that keep people separate and at war.

We will see in this section that not all cultural work is capable of remembering. Some forgets even as it attempts to remember. To see this, we will consider an example of the critical reception of two pivotal works that sought to remember the student movement of 1968: Octavio Paz's *Postdata* and Elena

Poniatowska's *La Noche de Tlatelolco*. Rather than examining these two works themselves, we will focus on their critical reception in academic discourse. Our example from academic discourse will be Diana Sorenson's *A Turbulent Decade Remembered: Scenes from the Latin American Sixties* (2007). Our examination of this work is not meant to be an attack on Sorenson. Rather, it is meant to illuminate and critique the frames through which critics often attempt to remember. These frames, as we shall see, bend culture to the very altars that the revolutionaries of 1968 sought to break: the altar of violence, the altar of fragmentation, and the altar of the individual. They cause the critic to forget more than he or she remembers.

### **The Altar of Violence**

The violent and divisive physics of the Father exerts a hold upon States and subjects that is hard to escape, even for critics concerned with critiquing violence and the State. When critics remain trapped in the Father's hegemonic physics, they unwittingly bow down to the altar of violence rather than breaking free of it. Critics who approach Tlatelolco in this way retrospectively inscribe the event into a progressive narrative that consecrates State violence and casts the revolutionary dead as sacrificial lambs who opened the way for liberal democracy. Samuel Steinberg sheds light on this approach in his critique of the historian Mark Kurlansky's popular history *1968: The Year That Rocked the World*:

[Kurlansky's] account ends up repeating the gesture of so many other readings, beginning with what we might call the foundational reading offered by Octavio Paz...Accordingly, the massacre founds or continues a narrative of Mexican history, understood as progress through sacrifice: "Tlatelolco was the unseen beginning of the end of

the PRI.” Such an appropriative reading inserts the violent crushing of a prodemocratic movement into the narrative or progress (toward democracy) and thus redeems the violence at its center. Violence is transformed into nonviolence by mere ideology: “The PRI was voted out of power, and it was done democratically, in a slow process over decades, without the use of violence.” (8)

In this passage, Steinberg brings attention to the trap of teleological historical analysis. The trap occurs when critics read history as a causal chain in which each event is retrospectively understood as a necessary step toward some progressive endpoint. Kurlansky’s analysis falls into this trap. It unintentionally turns the Father State’s violence into a necessary chapter in the progressive history of the so-called democratic nation state. His narrative sets its endpoint as the emergence of a nonviolent democratic movement that deposes the PRI government. This movement, according to Kurlansky, *begins* with the violence of Tlatelolco. It is born from blood and fire. This narrative consecrates the violence of the Father State. It retrospectively turns the revolutionary dead into sacrifices for an endpoint that falls far from the wavelength they tapped into. It also fails to see that a revolutionary nonviolence existed before, during, and after Tlatelolco. It did not require violence to be brought into existence.

It would be a mistake to say that cultural criticism is a purer discipline than history, that it somehow avoids the trap of teleological thinking. This is simply not true. Cultural criticism tells the same stories that redeem State violence even while turning a critical eye on it. We find an example of this in Diana Sorenson’s analysis of Octavio Paz’s *Postdata*. She writes:

[It] is also necessary to see how the revelation of this mythic, foundational violence exerts a productive as well as a destructive

force. For it is through the awareness of its abiding presence that Paz sees the possibility of a recovery of the intellectuals' critical voice... *Postdata* notes the peculiar insight made possible by violence: after Tlatelolco, critical discourse was regained: "The long-kept truce between the intellectuals and those in power, a truce initiated by the Revolution and prolonged by the necessities (the mirage) of development, has now ended. Mexican culture has recovered its vocation as critic of society." (65)

For Sorenson, Paz's reading of Tlatelolco is imbued with the aura of revelation. It illuminates both the destructive and constructive power of violence. We should recognize a kind of watered-down Nietzschean bent in this reading and in Kurlansky's reading. As Nietzsche's oft-stated maxim reads, "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger." This seems to be the logic here. For Kurlansky, the violence at Tlatelolco may wound the people, yet it also gives the people the requisite strength needed to depose the PRI government and push the State forward to a truer democracy (through licit juridical and political channels). For Sorenson, following Paz, the wound gives the emasculated intellectual the muscular strength he needs to pick up his pen and to write the laws or novels that challenge the bad government.

By emphasizing the *power* born from violence and sacrifice, Kurlansky and Sorenson unintentionally bow to the altar of violence. Rather than challenging the physics of a Father State, which defines power in terms of muscular energy and a "power over" others, these critics seek to recover that very same power for politicians and intellectuals. On another level, these readings play into a more subtle violence—the violence of forgetting that occurs when one looks back at history through a lens concerned with finding that causal chain that leads from barbarism to



civilization, from archaic forms of government to modern forms of liberal democracy. In both readings, the authors see Tlatelolco as a necessary step in reaching a revolutionary endpoint defined, in a narrow liberal sense, as the reformation or deposition of the false democratic government (PRI). What is forgotten in that progressive narrative is the revolutionary wavelength that an awakened people tapped into in 1968 and that the Father State sought to silence on 2 October. This wavelength was *revolutionary* not because of the ends it sought. It was revolutionary because it signaled an imminent departure from the physics that divides and stratifies the commons and its people. It signaled a people's shift away from the love of power to something far more revolutionary.

### **The Altar of Fragmentation**

Another trap of cultural criticism is illuminated in Diana Sorenson's analysis of Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971). The trap is that the cultural critic can unintentionally bow down to the very altar that the Father State has set firmly in place through the violence of Tlatelolco: the altar of fragmentation.

Before discussing Sorenson's critique of *La noche de Tlatelolco*, a few words should be said about Poniatowska's work. Poniatowska's chronicle of 1968 and the Tlatelolco massacre resists the liberal impulse to write a smooth and linear narrative that purports to hold the singular truth of history. Instead, it creates something more open, more visceral. The book has a documentary feel to it. It threads together a montage of oral histories, slogans, and photos without an omniscient narrator to guide us from the streets and campuses to Tlatelolco. The

effect is jarring, not only because we know where history is leading us, but because of the ways in which aesthetic form reflects reality: Poniatowska collects a scattered array of voices, snapshots from a social body separated by the fault lines of race, class, gender, as well as by the institutional and ideological boundaries that divide civil society. There is a chaos to it all, but the appearance of chaos often hides a gravity that offered cohesion among forcefully separated parts.

We can bring an image to mind to see what resides, not only behind the aesthetic fragmentation of *La noche de Tlatelolco*, but behind the social fragmentation that Poniatowska's work gestures toward. Let's visualize the broken shards of a blue and green planet. Perhaps this planet was ripped apart by some natural event or perhaps its inhabitants' violence had torn the world asunder. If we were to look at this planet after the violence, we might forget that the pieces were once bound together by a gravity. It is the gravity and cohesion behind the fragments that Sorenson forgets. And it is precisely that gravity and cohesion that an atomized people discovered as they came together despite the stratifications and superimposed boundaries that kept them separate, apart, and at war.

Sorenson's reading of *La noche de Tlatelolco* reflects a postmodern tendency to turn the fragmentary work of art into a fetish object that hides the fact that fragmentation is symptomatic of a social order that enforces the myth of separateness. The following passage from her essay provides an example of this tendency:

The claim and the conceit of [*La noche de Tlatelolco*] is that it merely collects and transcribes—even as it fragments—the oral testimony

obtained from witnesses and participants. And yet, as I will show below, there is a carefully orchestrated composition that wrests it from the chaos of raw information. The logic of fragmentation governs the construction of the book, as if to represent the destruction and the confusion of the massacre, and its effects. (68)

Sorenson treats the “logic of fragmentation” as internal to *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Fragmentation becomes an authorial choice, a way of aesthetically representing the “destruction and confusion of the massacre.” A deeper way of reading the logic of fragmentation would be to say that it is external to *La noche de Tlatelolco*. It governs the construction—not just of the book—but of the social order that was in place before, during, and after the massacre. Thus, fragmentation has nothing to do with authorial intent. These fissures are, rather, reflections of a social formation that relies upon ideologies and institutional practices to keep the world and its people atomized, stratified, and trapped in an illusory reality of separation.

Another problem arises when the critic fetishizes the cultural object: The fetishized cultural object steals the revolution away from the people and puts its power in the hands of the author and the cultural work. Thus, for Sorenson, the artist (not the people) become the conductor who brings cohesion to the fragments, while her work (not the people’s praxis) becomes the orchestra of unity. We see this shift occur here:

While important work has been done on the communal—hence collective, relational—values that underpin testimonial writing in Latin America, I want to eschew the rich debates on it in order to turn my attention to a different question. My reading of *La noche de Tlatelolco* will try to follow the multiple foldings and unfoldings of Poniatowska’s writing so as to pry out of them an aesthetic impulse embedded in the plurality of voices and textual practices. My claim is that one can posit a series of links between aesthetics, justice, and an ethics of reading. In her apparently artless, spontaneous, and

denunciatory impulse to contest the official silence by producing her *testimonios de historia oral*, Poniatowska is actually creating a work in which readers are to be moved by the power of aesthetics and an attendant desire for fairness, justice, and a sense of lifesaving reciprocity. Here is one of the important ways in which art and culture press upon the real... Following Elaine Scarry, I claim that by dint of the double-edged conceit of artfully orchestrated multiplicity, *La noche de Tlatelolco* provides the reader with the rare experience of perceiving actions and social relations that are not usually available to sensory perception. By gathering the numerous testimonios even as she interrupts them, Poniatowska makes available what is too disparate to be apprehended directly. (69 - 70)

What should concern us about this analysis is precisely what Sorenson describes in the first sentence of this excerpt. As she says, her analysis shifts the focus from the “communal values” that “underpin” testimony and places that focus on the artist and cultural object. Though Sorenson is cognizant of this shift, that awareness isn’t enough to avoid the pitfall of such an approach, namely that the very values and practices that *underpin* the object are forgotten by the analysis. This is precisely what happens when Sorenson foregrounds the object and turns her focus from the ethics of the people to the “ethics of reading.” The people and the reality they touched—a reality beyond fragmentation—fade into obscurity.

The result of this approach is that it brings the artist to the center stage she never asked to inhabit. Poniatowska becomes the actor, while the people she interviews become stage trappings in a drama of her creation. This is evident even in the grammatical construction of the excerpt above, where Poniatowska becomes the subject who is doing the action: she is “creating” the work. She is “moving” the reader through the “power of aesthetics.” She is the one suturing the fragmented parts:

Furthermore, there are instances in which Poniatowska draws a narrative line that connects the deliberately dispersed fragments. Urging the reader to piece together the fragments, she separates them even as she constructs the conceptual suturing provided by the proper name. *La noche de Tlatelolco* creates a circulation of short, interrupted passages that can be assembled under the authority of the speaking subjects. (72)

When the artist is treated in this way, she no longer exists as a figure *moved* to record or create by the rhythms of an awakened people. Her connection to the community is severed. The artist is instead constructed as a heroic individual who moves history through the force of will. Likewise, when the cultural object is treated in this way, it no longer exists as a reflection of the community that emerged on the streets and the reality they discovered as they negotiated and bridged the social and ideological gaps that kept them separate. The cultural object becomes a fetish that receives the credit that should be given to the people and all the scorn that should be reserved for the Father State. It becomes the revolutionary thing in itself. It presses upon the real rather than the real pressing upon it. What is lost in this reading is the wavelength that actually sutured the people together and allowed them to break from the divisive structures erected by the Father. What are left untouched are the real fractures that the State has forcefully reimposed upon the social body.

### **The Altar of the Individual**

Another impulse among critics who look back on the wound of Tlatelolco is to bring the individual to the center stage of the analysis or the memorial. This impulse has a radical edge to it: It brings to light those lives that were physically or discursively erased by the Father State's violence. It makes their names, faces, and

stories visible. And, in doing so, it brings the Father State face to face with the violence that has been erased from liberal history. Yet, there is another edge to this impulse: By focusing on the individual, critics and curators risk reifying the very subjectivity that the revolutionaries of '68 were able to break from when they attuned their individual rhythms to the collective rhythm that moved through the universities and streets. In those moments, they saw and felt themselves as more than a proper name, more than an individual body, more than just an "I" or "me" with "my" life and my story.

In the following passage, we can see what a focus on the proper name might obscure:

Through the play of difference and repetition, the reader is led to experience the fissures from passage to passage, from speaker to speaker, but also the step-by-step narrative sequence that can be threaded together from the multiple interventions of the same (repeated) name. The conceit of disjunction, paradoxically enough, contains the resurgence of repetition: names like Luis Tomás Cervantes Cabeza de Vaca, Artemisa (and Eli) de Gortari, Luis González de Alba, Sócrates Amado Campos Lemus, Gilberto Guevara Niebla, Eduardo Valle Espinosa (Búho)—many of them members of the CNH—reappear throughout the book and trace stories that, although constantly interrupted, produce dispersion while suggesting the possibility of integrated plots. (72)

Sorenson threads together the disconnected narrative sequences of *La noche de Tlatelolco* by highlighting the recurrence of proper names, in this case in the names of members of the National Strike Council (CNH). Though it is extremely important to repeat these names, we should question the manner in which the critic repeats them here. To reiterate an earlier point, Sorenson's focus overemphasizes narrative and narrative effect over the social realities that give rise to the narrative. Thus, the

recurrence of these proper names amid these scattered narratives has less to do with social reality than it does with narrative effect (“dispersion” and “integrated plots”).

If we consider these names, not just as names in a book, but as real people who were formed within a revolutionary movement, we might identify another problem with Sorenson’s analysis: The analysis reproduces a shortsighted perspective taken by observers who, even in the heat of the moment, look in on a revolutionary uprising and see it merely as a temporary grouping of individuals held together by the will power of heroic organizers. This view bends perception to the altar of the individual. The revolution only takes form if we can identify its individual actors, the proper names that hold the crowd together. If we are to do more justice to the revolutionaries of ’68, we should break from that altar. We should try to re-situate the proper names within the revolutionary wave which drew individuals into its boundlessness. Instead of seeing these proper names as threading points of disjointed narratives, we would then see them as something akin to whirlpools formed from the currents of a river rather than conduits who, through the force of will, channeled the waters. This analogy implies a loosened subjectivity far different than that of the self-centered individual who defines the world through the force of will; it implies a selfless center that finds momentary definition amid the currents and rhythms that surrounded it.

### Part III. Cultural Remembrance

“What we were seeing was an awakened society.” – eyewitness to 1968

In this section, we will examine cultural work that breaks from the altars of violence, fragmentation, and individualism. To do so, we will take a different approach than Diana Sorenson. As we already saw, her work focused on the “power of aesthetics” rather than the revolutionary power of the people. If we reorient our focus to the people rather than the artists and critics who followed in their wake, we might say that the work of art has no revolutionary power on its own. Rather, it only *becomes* revolutionary by tapping into the rhythms of the people, by conveying those rhythms to the sleepwalkers who are still locked in to the dominant rhythm. Reframing culture in this way might seem like a minor shift. Yet it is crucial because it puts power back in the hands of the people rather than in the hands of the artist or critic who constructs words or objects that can only gesture toward the reality touched by the revolutionaries.

This is not to say that culture is powerless. It does indeed have a power. It has the power to recall and transmit the rhythm of revolution—it *re-members* it—in the same way that a record player threads a listener back to collective rhythms set long ago. This is how we will approach culture. We will look to two narratives as conduits of the revolutionary wave that rose to the surface in 1968. The first narrative is from a Radio Diaries’ radio documentary titled *Mexico ’68: A Movement, A Massacre, and the 40-Year Old Search for the Truth* (2008). The second is the novel *Amulet* (1992) written by the exiled Chilean poet and novelist



Roberto Bolaño. We will read these narratives against Sorenson's statement that "art and culture" presses "upon the real." Instead, our guiding assumption will be that an awakened people pressed upon the real. They were awakened because they tuned into a deeper reality behind the constructed real. They discovered a new rhythm, a collective rhythm, that beat against the divisive and hierarchical world shaped as reality by the Father State. We will look to art and culture for impressions left behind by that undying revolutionary rhythm.

### **Two Sides of the Same Coin**

On the fortieth anniversary of Tlatelolco, the production company Radio Diaries produced a radio documentary titled *Mexico '68: A Movement, A Massacre, and the 40-Year Old Search for the Truth*. In addition to discussing the ongoing investigations of the massacre, the documentary weaves together six eyewitness accounts of the student movement. Most of the speakers were faculty or students in 1968, and they were directly involved in the major demonstrations. One of the most illuminating sequences comes when the speakers' testimonies flow into each other, creating a collective account of the August 27 demonstration at the Zócalo:

Speaker 1: The Zócalo, the main square, was lit with burning tires. There was dancing and guitars, a little bottle of tequila there and over there.

Speaker 2: It was unforgettable. We were dreamers and very happy.

Speaker 3: So we are there, and the doors of the palace opened. And the soldiers come out. And they stand in front of us and said: "You have been allowed to make your demonstration. Now you have to leave." And I remember the whistles and yelling and all of that. And: "We are not leaving!" Holding arms, all of us, saying we are not

moving. And they take out their bayonets and put them in their rifles, and they start walking toward us.

Speaker 4: I remember that some of the students decided that we had weapons in our pockets: big 20 cents coins that were made of copper, very huge coins, and heavy. Some of the students threw those coins against the soldiers. And you know what happened? The soldiers stopped to pick up those coins. It was not really that much money, 20 cents, but for them it was. I mean, the soldiers—our enemies—were the same age as us. If you take the uniform out of the soldier, what you discover behind is a poor young peasant. In a way, weren't we fighting for them? Sort of an eye opener. (Radio Diaries)

Before we look closely at this collective narrative, a few things should be said about the radio program as a cultural production. We must be careful not to overplay the radio program as reality. It is, after all, produced; the individual oral histories we here are woven together by producers and editors to garner a certain reaction from listeners. At the same time, we must be careful not to underplay the power of cultural production. Even though this radio documentary is constructed, it is still capable of tapping into a reality that empirical observation cannot grasp. Even though it is produced, it has a power to cut through the myth of separateness and the constructed social order that is often presented to us as reality. We might say that a cultural production of this sort is keyed into a deeper reality than observable recordable reality. And, in a fascinating way, it allows us to *hear* this reality, not just consider it from an intellectual distance.

Both the form and content of the production allow us to hear this reality. Let's first focus on the former. The form of this radio broadcast invites us to break from the altars of fragmentation and individualism. When we hear the wash of voices presented in the medium of radio, we have a difficult time focusing on the

fragmentation of the narratives as Sorenson does when analyzing *La Noche de Tlatelolco*. This is because radio, as a medium, allows for a fluidity between individual voices that is often impossible to capture in traditional print forms. When we listen to the quoted segment, we hear one voice flowing seamlessly into the next. We hear a collective voice. Since the speakers only introduce themselves at the beginning of the program—and since the medium of radio broadcast does not give us a face to go along with the voice—we have a difficult time identifying who is speaking. This is not to say the individual voices are abolished. Their unique cadences remain, even as they flow into the collective narrative.

In one respect, the fluid form invites us to see beyond the individualized psychological concepts that depict memory as a spark that occurs inside an individual's skull. Instead the form reflects the collective flow of memories. It lets us *hear* the act of remembering as a communal act where one individual's recollections of a historical event flow into, or brush up against, the next individual's memories. There is something revolutionary in this audible revelation: The collective rhythms of memory, captured here by the documentary form, remind us that an awakened people do not experience the joys and sorrows of the revolutionary past alone. Instead, they maintain a solidarity in shared memories that cannot be destroyed by the bullet or erased by the victor's histories. The documentary reminds us that each individual holds memories that are, in essence, waves in the ocean of revolutionary memories. Even when these speakers have departed this world, the ocean of their memories will remain in a place where the Father State cannot touch.

In another sense, the fluid form provides a window into a temporality that exists outside the flow of linear progressive time. As the speakers' memories flow into each other, we hear—between the intervals of their speech—archival recordings from the actual day of the August rally. We hear the murmur of the crowd, laughter, speeches, and music. Hearing these sounds, we might feel as if we're flickering between 2008 and 1968. We might feel as if we're meeting the witnesses amid the crowd on August 27 of the latter year. We might feel as if we're getting each witness's quick interpretation of the event before he or she rejoins the crowd.

This juxtaposition of contemporary oral histories with archival sounds blurs the temporal boundaries between the past and present. We hear the sounds of revolution, not just as a dead object, but as a song that still resonates in the present despite the violence that tried to silence it. Again, we shouldn't mistake this as a mere aesthetic effect produced by the radio program. Instead, the aesthetic choices made by the producers, archivists, and editors reflect a lived reality of time that brushes against dominant conceptions of time. These witnesses, through their act of remembering, resist the linear march of time that is continually exploited by Father States and Empires as means of forgetting the revolutionary struggles and the wounds they have inflicted. The past exists as the background music of the present, a song that still marks their words and practices with a collective resonance.

In addition to the radio documentary's form, the content of the oral histories reveal how the students broke from the Father State's altars of fragmentation and

violence. The final speaker's words, in particular, illuminate the most revolutionary side of the student movement. In that testimony, the speaker pinpoints the "eye opening" moment when the veil of separateness lifts. This moment occurs when the students fling their coins at the peasant soldiers. We can see the irony in this exchange: The students try to turn the fetish object of the capitalist Father State into a weapon. Yet, in doing so, they get caught in the violent physics that the State uses to divide the commons and keep the people separate and at war. Even more ironic still, the coins-turned-weapons allow the speaker to see a deeper reality beyond the separateness that he and the other students had played into in that moment. His eyes open when the peasant soldiers pick up the coins that the students had just used as their weapons. In that moment, the witness realizes that, beyond the material conditions of a stratified and atomized existence, there is little separating the students from the peasant army. There is little that truly separates self from other, friend from enemy. Those divided camps are, in the deepest sense, two sides of the same coin held firmly in the grip of the father. The only division between the warring parties is a manmade division accentuated and deployed by the Father State. The speaker's final question, then—"In a way, weren't we fighting for them?"—becomes an articulation of that which defined the revolutionary wave of 1968 and that set it against the Father State. That wave was fighting free of the gravity of the Father State. It was fighting to free itself from a grip that kept the collective social body fractured and at war.

### Roberto Bolaño's *Amulet* & The Gravity of The (M)other

“Chirico says: thought needs to move away from everything called logic and common sense, to move away from all human obstacles in such a way that things take on a new look, as though illuminated by a constellation appearing for the first time. The infrarealists say: We’re going to stick our noses into all human obstacles, in such a way that things begin to move inside of us, a hallucinatory vision of mankind.”

–Manifesto of Infrarealism, 1976

As we already saw, some writers and critics treat Tlatelolco as a wound that gives people the requisite strength to overcome the PRI government or to find one’s critical voice. This approach, as we saw, bows down to the altar of violence and does little to break from the dominant conception of power. Roberto Bolaño’s novel *Amulet*, which we will explore in the final pages of this chapter, approaches the historical wound in a radically different way. The novel taps into a field of power that breaks from the hegemonic conception of power as “power over.” To bring us closer to this field of power, the novel pulls us into the gravity of a body continually overshadowed by patriarchal power. What it pulls us toward is the cosmic body of the Mother, a selfless body no longer trapped within the spatial and temporal physics of the Father who, throughout history, has attempted to divide the cosmos and bend its parts to his will. What we will discover when we finally reach the Mother is that she looks as ordinary and as ragged as the young people, men and women alike, who woke up in 1968 and who continued to wake up amid a festering wound.

The setting and narrative pivot point of *Amulet* is a bathroom in occupied UNAM that resides in a twilight zone outside of time and space. This bathroom is occupied by a woman who secretly resists the army occupation of September 13,

1968 by hiding away in a stall and refusing to eat for twelve days. The woman's name is Auxilio Lacouture, an Uruguayan exile referred to by a motley crew of young poets as the Mother of All Mexican Poetry.<sup>31</sup> Though Auxilio narrates the tale from an unspecified moment after '68, she remains tethered to the bathroom stall. Linear time marches on, yet a part of her never escapes the occupation and the massacre that follows a month later. She becomes a time traveler—or better, an exile lost in time—pulled into the black hole at the center of Mexico City. That wound in time and space exerts a gravitational pull on our narrator. Like Louise Michel, who we met in Chapter 1, Auxilio is pulled into it. Yet, she is not crushed by the history of violence. Instead, she lets herself drift into the abyss where she finds pearls formed from the revolutionary waves of 1968. Our task will be to follow Auxilio into those labyrinthine depths, to attempt to bear witness to what she retrieves from the abyssal depths.

### *Common Heroes Reborn*

Let's first follow Auxilio as she escapes the tidal pull of '68 and travels to a future that, at first glance, seems bereft of revolutionary possibilities. Slipping to the year 1974—and slipping into a skin aged by history and a face that bears a toothless smile—Auxilio witnesses a minor epic that testifies to the reemergence of a rhythm that the Father State attempted to foreclose on October 2, 1968.

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<sup>31</sup> Lacouture is likely a fictionalized version of Alcira Soust Scaffo, who the author met in Mexico City in 1970.

This episode revolves around a Chilean exile named Arturo Belano a veteran of the 1968 student movement who, like Bolaño himself, has escaped a second violence unleashed by the Pinochet coup in Chile in 1973. Auxilio charts Arturo's return to Mexico City. Reading between the lines of her friend's silence, she notes a subtle change come over him: "Although he was the same Arturo," she explains, "deep down something had changed or grown, or changed and grown at the same time" (77). The signs of his change are apparent as Arturo drifts away from old friends, the young poets who lived through '68, and into the orbit of the motley young poets who have "sprung from the open wound of Tlatelolco, like ants or cicadas or pus" (77). In the absence of a social movement, these "children of the sewers" drift aimlessly between seedy bars and dank cafés. Arturo is pulled into that orbit. He descends into an underworld ruled by all kinds of lusts and pleasures. As we will see, it is precisely this descent that allows Arturo to put his hand on the open wounds of Mexico, to feel the pulse beneath.

Belano's most important journey into the underworlds of Mexico City begins when one of the children of the sewers, a queer youth named Ernesto San Epifanio, comes to him for help. Auxilio witnesses and recounts the situation:

I listened as Ernesto San Epifanio told a terrible story about the King of the Rent Boys in Colonia Guerrero, a guy known as the King, who had a monopoly on male prostitution in that picturesque and indeed charming neighborhood of the capital. The King had bought Ernesto's body which meant, so our friend told us, that he now belonged to that monarch body and soul (which is what happens if you're reckless enough to let yourself be bought), and if he did not accede to his new owner's demands, the judgment and wrath of the King would fall upon him and his family. (82-83)



We can recognize a familiar face in the visage of the King. He is a reflection of patriarchal regimes and patriarchal subjects that seek to exert a *power over* the other. Here, the King molds Ernesto into an absolutely unfree object, a *slave*, who is locked in place. If Ernesto deviates from the King's law—or, to be more precise, if he breaks his contract, he faces death. The King's contract reminds us that we shouldn't mistake this figure as a vestige of the past. By exploiting a contract signed under duress, he exerts a force emblematic of liberal capitalist regimes that extend the illusion of free choice to exploit or enslave those on the bottom of the social hierarchies. At the same time, the King's royal title reminds us that modern regimes maintain that older monarchial power to kill or depose the subjects if they deviate from their proper place in society.

The drama that ensues between the King of the Rent Boys and the poet Arturo takes on epic aura while still maintaining its dank and dirty realism. We see this in Auxilio's account of Arturo and Ernesto's quest into the underworld:

What am I supposed to do? Asked Arturo. You're not afraid, said Ernesto. You've just come back from Chile. Whatever the King can do to me, you've seen it multiplied a hundred times or a hundred thousand. I couldn't see Arturo's reaction but I guessed that the slightly vacant expression on his face until then was subtly unsettled by a small, almost imperceptible wrinkle, in which all the world's fear was concentrated. Then Arturito laughed and Ernesto laughed and in the ashen spruce of the Encrucijada Veracruzana at the late hour their crystalline peals of laughter were like polymorphic birds. Then Arturo got up and said, Let's go to Colonia Guerrero, and Ernesto got up and went out with him, and thirty seconds later I too deserted the moribund bar and followed them at a careful distance, because I knew that if they saw me, they wouldn't let me come along, because I was a woman and they were on men's business, because I was older and didn't have the vigor of a twenty-year-old, and because at that uncertain hour before dawn Arturito Belano was assuming his destiny as a child of the sewers and setting out to confront his ghosts.

But I didn't want to let him go on his own. Him or Ernesto San Epifanio. So I followed at a careful distance, as I walked I felt in my bag or my old satchel from Oaxaca, looking for my lucky knife, and this time I found it straight away, and put it in a pocket of my pleated skirt...And right then I didn't think about what I was doing and the consequences it could have for me or for the others who would not no doubt be affected. I thought of Ernesto, who was wearing a lilac-colored jacket and a dark green shirt with stiff collar and cuffs, and I thought about the consequences of desire. And then I thought of Arturo, who had suddenly been promoted to the rank of revolutionary veteran and had, for some obscure reason best known to himself, accepted the responsibility entailed by that error. (85-86)

What Auxilio bears witness to here is the unexpected rebirth of revolutionary heroes amid a world where revolutions have been crushed by the Father's violence. These new heroes reappear without magical interventions. They reappear when the invisible threads of solidarity are felt in their skin and bone. For Arturo, this occurs when he hears Ernesto pleas: "Whatever the King can do to me you've seen it multiplied a hundred times or a hundred thousand." With this line, Ernesto reminds Arturo that the violence he is facing is the same as the violence Arturo witnessed in '68 and again in '73. He faces a figure that embodies the power of the Father, a power that cages bodies, that molds subjects into separate unfree shadows of themselves, and that disappears those who refuse to be molded. Realizing this, Ernesto and Arturo see each other as comrades, age-old friends who are allied against an enemy who has worn a hundred or a hundred thousand different faces. There's not a more fitting way to punctuate this realization than with laughter, pure laughter from the belly, the kind that cracks the "you" and "I" up and sends the two fluttering into each other. The laughter of "polymorphic birds," as Auxilio says.

Their laughter does *not* negate the dank reality of their world, yet it does alight that reality with a revolutionary glow. The two men are no longer isolated individuals. They are brothers keyed into a timeless rhythm that beats against the walls and bars erected by the Father. In this light, Ernesto's plea comes to echo a timeless cry for liberation from the shackles of the Father. Likewise, Arturo's seemingly aimless drift through the underworld of Mexico City is now cast as an extension of crushed revolutions, a tributary of a wave that beat against the walls of the Father State. Where once Arturo appeared as a husk-man that stunk of cigarettes and cheap booze, he now appears as a revolutionary hero who stinks all the same. The only change is that he now sees that the revolutionary struggle has not ended in '68 or '73. It is ongoing. It continues beyond the violence of Tlatelolco. It continues in him and in Ernesto.

After this epiphany, Arturo no longer drifts aimlessly. He moves to a familiar rhythm set long before him: The hero and his comrades fly into the desolate layer of the evil King; he takes the knife from The Mother; he spirits away the captive. If we were to read these events in mythic terms, we might say that Arturo ushers in spring and redeems the wasteland. Auxilio's description, however, refuses to let us mythologize this flight into the underworld of Mexico City. She reminds us of the reality of a situation that has only taken on an epic hue: Arturo is really walking into a pimp's house, the knife is merely her blunted switchblade, the hostage is an ill fed and unwashed sex slave from the streets, and the very real risk of death pervades the scene. Even still, Auxilio's narrative begs us to find myth in the everyday and the epic in minor events.

We can see the episode as a kind of profane myth that tells the story of those who continued the revolution after Tlatelolco, those who saw behind the veil forcefully dropped over their eyes. In this myth, the hero carries a seedling for the future into the layer of the King. That seed is not magical. It is, quite simply, the untellable story nestled away in memories, a poem of fallen revolutionaries who saw and acted for a world beyond the Father's pyramid that keeps people separate and at war. The poem becomes real, not when the hero puts it into words, but when he begins to live its rhythms viscerally, in flesh and deed. When the poem comes to life—when the poetry of a crushed revolution is set in motion again—The King doesn't stand a chance, for he faces something he cannot grasp or kill, something magical yet as commonplace as a wrinkle on a madman's brow.

### *The Mother of Poetry*

We might be tempted to say that there's a machismo to *Amulet*, especially with the focus on strong male heroes who *act* as opposed to Auxilio who, at times, seems a passive onlooker. However, when we follow her time travels and take seriously her role as witness, we will see how revolutionary her title is.

The Mother in *Amulet* has no basis in patriarchal gender constructions that assign value to biological difference. Instead, the Mother in the novel is an antithetical force to a power adopted by States, empires, and subjects who mistake the myth of separateness for reality. The shorthand Bolaño uses to describe patriarchal power is the "Kingdom of Order." The logic that governs this kingdom is this: If *we* are to survive and expand, then nature must be tamed and enclosed,

unruly subjects must be set in order, space and time must be striated, stratified, and made productive. In short, all things must bend to man's will, or else. The Mother that we see outlined in the novel is a reflection of that which resides in the shadows of the Kingdom of Order. She is a reflection of matriarchal societies and subterranean philosophies that are not premised on a "power over" the other. She reflects suppressed and repressed ways of seeing and being in the world that are horizontal rather than vertical, that place the common good of the community at the center of social life, and that see nature, not as a thing to be molded for our interests but as an ambivalent cosmos that we might learn to move *with* rather than *against*.

Auxilio, as the mother figure of *Amulet*, lies in the shadow of the Father in all his forms, including that of the Father State. As the Mother, she represents a field of power radically different from his "power over" all things. In contrast to its bullets and machines, her only weapon is a silent unwitnessed act of refusal and of love. In contrast to the Father's obsession with securing order, she attunes herself to rhythms that break people from their proper place in the social order. In contrast to a Father state who treats young people as unruly children that must be forced in line, she adopts the disorderly "children of the sewers," watches them drift without judgment, listens to their sorrows, guesses at their longings, and hands them blunt knives when the situation means life or death. In contrast to the Father State's superimposed histories, she threads together surreal fictions that touch a deeper reality than history itself.

For now, let us focus on that last aspect of the Mother as one who touches a deeper rhythm of reality that beats behind the Father's violent march of History. We see this in the following dreamlike scene described by Auxilio:

I felt as though I was being wheeled into an operating room. I thought: I am in the women's bathroom in the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature and I am the last person left. I was heading for the operating room. I was heading for the birth of History. And since I'm not a complete idiot, I also thought: It's over now, the riot police have left the university, the students have died at Tlatelolco, the university has opened again, but I'm still shut up in the fourth-floor bathroom, as if after all my scratching at the moonlit tiles a door has opened, but not the portal of sadness in the continuum of Time. They have all gone, except me. They have all come back, except me. The second affirmation was hard to accept... Still the vague certitude remained as my trolley was wheeled down the corridor, a forest-green corridor with stretches of camouflage and bottle green, toward an operating room dilating in time, as History announced its birth with raucous cries and the doctors diagnosed my anemia in whispers. (151-152)

What Auxilio is "attending" to here is the birth of History with a capital H—the Father's History, the state's History, capital and empire's History. This is History held out as a pristine baby after the blood has been cleaned and the record of the rape erased. This is a History that attempts to cordon off the messiness of time and space, and the complexity of people's lifeworlds and relationships. Such History is born on October 2, 1968 with the bullet. It is further inscribed as truth with the word that speaks of reality with no mention of the "fire and blood" that made such a reality possible.

The novel suspends the birth of History. Though Auxilio foresees that birth on her horizon, she refuses to be wheeled along the linear path dictated by the Father State. Like Louise Michel she slips outside of time in the moment of danger:

I'm not going to have a baby really? I'm not pregnant? I asked. And the doctors looked at me and said, No, Ma'am, we're just taking you to attend the birth of history. But what's the hurry doctor? I feel dizzy! And the doctor replied with the patter they use for the dying: The birth of History can't wait, and if we arrive late you won't see anything, only ruins and smoke, an empty landscape, and you'll be alone again forever even if you go out and get drunk with your poet friends every night... When we reached the operating room, the vision misted over, cracked, fell and shattered, and then the fragments were pulverized by a bolt of lightning, and a gust of wind blew the dust away to nowhere or spread it through Mexico City. (152)

The lightning strike breaks Auxilio's vision from a linear path that leads to the operating room and to the birth of history. It sends her mind rippling along the multitudinous lines that revolution might take after it has been dashed upon the reef of the Father State. Auxilio maps this flight in the following prophetic vision:

I'm still in the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature, and the moon is melting the tiles on the wall one by one, opening a hole for images to flow through, films about us and the books we read, and the future moving at the speed of light, which we shall not see. And then I dreamed idiotic prophecies... These are my prophecies. Vladimir Mayakovsky shall come back into fashion around the year 2150. James Joyce shall be reincarnated as a Chinese boy in the year 2124. Thomas Mann shall become a Ecuadorian pharmacist in the year 2101. For Marcel Proust, a desperate and prolonged period of oblivion shall begin in the year 2033. Ezra Pound shall disappear from certain libraries in the year 2089... Virginia Woolf shall be reincarnated as an Argentinian fiction writer in the year 2076. Louis-Ferdinand Céline shall enter Purgatory in the year 2094. Paul Eluard shall appeal to the masses in the year 2101. Metempsychosis. Poetry shall not disappear. Its non-power shall manifest itself in different form... (158-159)

With this schizoid list of authorial transmigrations and rebirths, Auxilio is not only prophesizing that art will live on after the death of the artist. She illuminates a subterranean story that is cannot be told by a History grounded in empirical observation. She exposes a constellational flow of being that cannot be stilled by

death and that cannot be captured by the frames of liberal history and biography. In Auxilio's hallucinatory view, the artist—the momentary bearer of a proper name or posthumous monument—is merely an antennae for tuning into a wavelength that exceeds his or her physical form. The artist's written words are not the *real* Poetry. The real poetry is the rhythm of a wave that laps against the surface of the canvas or page. Thus, even when an artist's work is pushed into oblivion, the rhythms behind the words or canvases will be reborn when one least expects it. We might extend Auxilio's hallucinatory view beyond poetry in the strict sense to consider the revolutionaries of '68 in a light that exceeds the bounds of liberal history and individual biography. We might say that the rhythm that guided their praxis never disappears, even when it is met with bullets. That rhythm will manifest itself in new forms—in new bodies with eyes that see through the veil of separateness, with new tongues that sing a song that breaks apart the walls and words that keep us separate. That is the revolution's non-power.

### *Beyond the Father's Triangle*

Two slogans from the Infrarealist Manifesto, a document penned by Bolaño and a circle of young poets, help us to see what kind of poet Auxilio, the Mother of Mexican Poetry, really is. The first slogan describes the poet as “the hero who reveals heroes, like the fallen red tree that announces the start of a forest.” We've already traveled alongside Auxilio as she charts the journey of common heroes into the underworld of Mexico City at a time when heroes seemed impossible. But does witnessing the birth of these scrappy heroes make her a poet? A quick and careless



thinker might say no; after all, one has to *write* to be a poet, and as far as we can tell from the novel, Auxilio doesn't have any written poetry to speak of except for a few scribbled verses written on toilet paper. We will see later that this is precisely where we need to look— directly into the black hole as the verse swirls downward into shit and anonymity—to see why Auxilio is the poet *par excellence*.

In order to give Auxilio recognition as a poet, we can turn to the second slogan from the Infrarealist Manifesto:

The best Latin American painting is that which is still being made on unconscious levels, the game, the party, the experiment that gives us a real vision of what we are and opens us to what we can be; the best Latin American painting is what we paint in the greens, reds, and blues of our faces, to recognize ourselves in the incessant creation of the group. (*Infrarealist Manifesto*)

Though painting is the subject here, the slogan could be extended to poetry that is “still being made on unconscious levels.” In Auxilio's case, this poetry doesn't come in the form of the game, the party, or the experiment, but in the form of a refusal: her hunger strike during the occupation of UNAM. Her hunger pangs, not her written words, are the real poetic rhythm of Roberto Bolaño's novel. Written in the synecdoche of Auxilio's starving body, we find a revolutionary rhythm thought silenced. Inscribed in the absence of her hollowed out smile, we see the faint outline of a community that moves, laughs, sings, cries, and shouts to joyous rhythms that shake apart the foundations of the Father State.



**Figure 2.4: Patriarchal Triangulation of Power**

Auxilio's strike defies this triangulation of power and, in doing so, points the way to an experience of space and time that is no longer cordoned off within the Father's rigid coordinates. Her revolt against the spatial order of the Father is the most obvious. It begins with a spontaneous yet committed act of refusal. Going to the bathroom at the moment of the military occupation, she serendipitously avoids the eyes and clubs of the soldiers. Realizing she has been overlooked, she sees her course laid out as clear as the moonlight that cuts across the bathroom tiles:

I knew. I knew I had to resist. So I sat down on the tiles of the women's bathroom and, before the last rays of sunlight faded, read three more of Pedro Garfias's poems, then shut the book and shut my eyes and said: Auxilio Lacouture, citizen of Uruguay, Latin American, poet and traveler, resist. (32)

Even before this moment, Auxilio's desires pushed her out of her "proper" place and sent her moving on a different rhythm. A working class immigrant with little formal education, she made the Philosophy Department and bohemian cafes of Mexico City her home, though these spaces were never meant for someone of her class or ethnic background. During the occupation, she continues to transgress prescribed borders. Her quiet refusal, sitting on a toilet and not moving, defies the

force of the Father State that attempts to empty space, not only of its inhabitants, but of the rhythmic pulse of the youth movement. She refuses to let that happen. She takes out a book of poetry and reads, breaking the silence, breathing life and speaking the rhythms of the people back into a space marked with the hollowness of the coffin.

Auxilio's next act of refusal breaks the eye and "I" from the temporal grip of the Father State. She begins a hunger strike, a willed hollowing out of the physical body, that paradoxically opens up the mind's eye to a time liberated from the clock and calendar. We might describe this as a hollowing out of hollowness, which interestingly enough, brings substance back to the world. To get a sense of this, let's bridge the gap between fiction and reality and imagine ourselves sitting by Auxilio's side as she lives, in long stretches of saturated time, what we read in minutes:

To endure hunger and solitude. For the first few hours I slept sitting in the stall, the one I was in when it all began, because in my destitution I believed that it would bring me luck, but sleeping on a throne is extremely uncomfortable, and in the end I curled up on the tiles. I had dreams, not nightmares but musical dreams, dreams about transparent questions, dreams of slender, safe airplanes flying the length and breadth of Latin America through skies of brilliant, cold blue. I woke up frozen stiff and ravenous. I looked out the window over the sink, and saw the new day dawning in pieces of the campus like pieces of a puzzle. I spent the first morning crying and thanking the angels in Heaven that they hadn't cut off the water. Don't get sick, Auxilio, I told myself, drink all the water you like, but don't get sick. I leaned against the wall and let myself slide to the ground, and once again opened the book by Pedro Garfias. My eyes closed. I must have fallen asleep. Then I heard steps and hid in my stall (it was the nun's cell I never had, my trench and my Duino Palace, my Mexican epiphany). I read Pedro Garfias. Then I fell asleep. Then I looked out of the bull's eye window and saw very high clouds and thought of Dr. Atl's pictures and the most transparent region. Then I started thinking pleasant thoughts.

How many lines of poetry did I know by heart? I started reciting, murmuring the lines I could remember, and I would have liked to write them down, but although I had a ball-point pen, I didn't have any paper. Then I thought: Silly, you have all the paper you need. So I ripped off squares of toilet paper and began to write. Then I fell asleep and dreamed, and this is really funny, I dreamed of Juana de Ibarbourou and her book *La rosa de los vientos* (The Compass Rose), published in 1930, and her first book too, *Las lenguas de diamante* (Diamond Tongues), such a pretty title, exquisite, it could be the title of an avant-garde book published last year in French, but Juana de America published it in 1919, at the age of twenty-seven. What a fascinating woman she must have been then, with the world at her feet and all those gentlemen gallantly prepared to do her bidding (they are gone now, although Juana remains), all those modernist poets prepared to give their lives to poetry, so many glances and compliments, so much love.

Then I woke up. I thought: I am the memory.

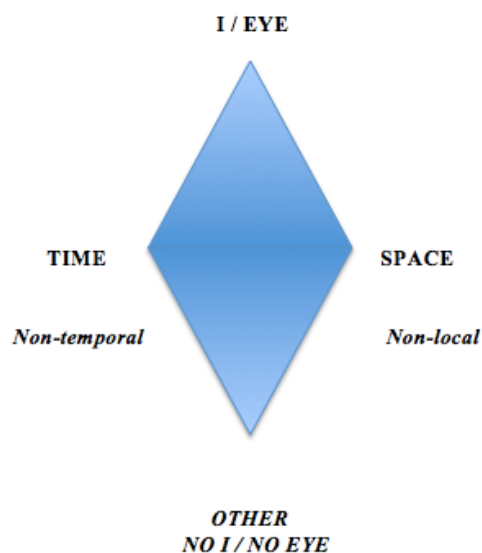
That's what I thought. Then I went back to sleep. Then I woke up, and for hours, maybe days, I cried for times gone by, and for my childhood in Montevideo, for faces that disturb me (even now, more than ever, in fact), faces of which I prefer not to speak.

Then I lost count of the days I'd spent shut up in there. From my little window I saw birds, segments of tree trunks or branches growing from somewhere invisible, shrubs, grass, clouds, walls, but I couldn't see people or noises, and I lost track of the time I had been shut up in there. Then, maybe remembering Charlie Chaplin, I ate toilet paper, but only a little, I couldn't stomach more. Then I realized I was no longer hungry. Then I picked up all the pieces of toilet paper on which I had written, threw them in the toilet and pulled the chain.  
(173 - 175)

As we see in the passage, Auxilio's hunger strike has as much to do with a sense of time as with the physical body. This might be obvious because the act of eating is always connected to time. Eating preserves the body *across* time. It brings nutrients from the outside world into an organism, which are transformed into energy that allows the body to function and survive for a given time. The power of the Father instrumentalizes this and other life sustaining processes. One eats, sleeps, drinks—not simply *to be* or *to become*—but to be in the service of a superimposed end. For

instance, under the regime of liberal capitalism, one eats to reproduce the atomized self as worker, as a functional body that can do another day's work and earn another day's wage. By depriving herself of food, Auxilio steals the life sustaining processes back from the Father State. Moreover, by not leaving her stall in search of food, she takes time back into her hands and refuses to reenter a temporality that the State has reconstituted through violence.

The hunger strike is not about destruction of the self, but about a discovery of the higher self that exceeds the bounds of the "I" and the "eye." It is about liberation, and though it is an individual act, it speaks to a connection between the Self and Other that shatters the myth of separateness. We might say that the hunger strike reveals the repressed coordinates that are hidden in the shadow of the Father's pyramid:



**Figure 2.5: Beyond the Patriarchal Triangulation of Power**

The hunger strike awakens a sense that touches a deeper reality than what is seen by the eye and experienced by the I. Looking through her mind's eye, Auxilio remembers the true nature of being. She sees that she is not merely the crumbling temple of the Self locked away in the bathroom stall in UNAM. That temple, as she discovers, is nothing without the earth upon which it stands. It is nothing without the people who have formed its edges. Looking through her mind's eye, Auxilio sees beyond the veil that marks her body as separate and alone.

Through the hunger strike, Auxilio discovers that her Self is inexorably bound to the Other. In the most immediate sense, Auxilio feels hunger pangs, a painful rhythm that can only be satiated when one brings external nutrients from the environment into the body. But beyond this, her mind's eye breaks from the clock and calendar during the hunger strike. This eye, which is paradoxically no eye, leads her backward in time and in space. She recalls books once read and faces once seen or touched. The vibration of these memories doesn't stay in her mind. It echoes outward. It becomes Auxilio. "I am the memory," she says, as her hand jots down verses that were never hers alone.

The hunger strike also allows Auxilio to break free from the temporal and spatial structures superimposed by the Father State. She is no longer locked in time and space. Her mind's eye drifts outward to align with the moon as its light dances across tiles, the sun as its light peeks over the built campus, the clouds as they drift through the skies. Her awakened senses bear witness to all of these cyclical motions. She keys herself into these rhythms, *becomes* the playful and poetic rhythm of all that lies beyond the Father's pyramid. She surrenders her Self to the rhythms of the

commons and the cosmos that the Father State has sought to secure itself and its subjects against.

Through the hunger strike, Auxilio becomes the cosmic body of the Mother, a body composed of all things, those who are asleep and who awake, those who are dead and who are yet to be born, the self as well as the other. Her starving body becomes the *medium* for feeling, within and beyond its hunger pangs, those rhythms that shake the foundations of the Father's secure structures. Her gateway to these rhythms is a final gesture of refusal where Auxilio refuses to eat the last scraps of toilet paper where she scribbled her verse. She tells us:

I ate toilet paper, but only a little, I couldn't stomach more. Then I realized that I was no longer hungry. Then I picked up all the pieces of toilet paper on which I had written, threw them in the toilet and pulled the chain. The sound of the water gave me a start, and I thought I was finished.

I thought, in spite of all my cunning and self sacrifice, I'm finished. I thought, How poetic, to destroy my writings like that, I thought, It would have been better to swallow them, now I'm finished. I thought, the vanity of writing, the vanity of destruction. I thought, Because I wrote, I endured. I thought, Because I destroyed what I had written, they will find me, they will hit me, they will rape me, they will kill me. I thought, the two things are connected, writing and destroying, hiding and being found. Then I sat on the throne and shut my eyes. I fell asleep. Then I woke up again. (175)

After this final refusal, Auxilio's mind's eye brings her to a place outside time and space. She arrives in the *non-local* and *non-temporal* dimension that exists beyond the veil of separateness. This dimension is imagined as the valley of death, where she alights upon those who have been destroyed by the march of progress and hidden away by the horror story of History. These shadow people form a motley army who, even though their differences, are united by their "courage and

generosity.” This army is the shadow reflection, not just of the people who marched silently on September 13, 1968, but of the armies of the revolutionary dead whose only weapon was that of a boundless love that saw reality in terms of unity rather than division. Auxilio bears witness to this army as it marches toward the abyss:

The children, the young people, were singing and heading for the abyss. I raised a hand to my mouth, as if to stifle a shout, and held the other hand out in front of me, fingers extended and trembling, as if trying to touch them. My mind endeavored to remember a text about children intoning canticles as they marched to war. But it was no use. My mind was inside out... I held out both hands, as if imploring the sky to let me embrace them, and I shouted, but my shout was lost among the heights and did not reach down into the valley. (182)

After the army has disappeared, Auxilio still hears their song resonating from the void. Though she cannot touch them, their song of “war and love” escapes the wound. The Mother of Poetry attunes herself to its rhythm, she amplifies it for us:

Although the children were clearly marching to war, the way they marched recalled the superb, theatrical attitudes of love. But what kind of love could they have known, I wondered when they were gone from the valley, leaving only their song resonating in my ears. The love of their parents, the love of their dogs and cats, the love of their toys, but above all the love, the desire and the pleasure they shared with one another. (184)

Herein lies the power of the Mother. It is not a power that seeks to destroy or depose the Father State by exerting a “power over” him. It is not a power of will or of violence. Rather, it is a non-power that simply listens and remembers what has been forgotten: that boundless love that lies behind the walls that keep us separate and at war. Try as he might, the Father can never master that love or silence that song, for it is the very ground of reality upon which his fragile structures have been built, it is a rhythm that even the most securest structures cannot stand up against.



*Unbroken Rhythms*

The unbroken rhythms of an awakened people are contained in Auxilio's final gesture of flushing her scribbled verse down the toilet. This is the gesture of one who knows that the written word of poetry, like the body itself, is less important than the rhythms that beat behind it. Her simple gesture foreshadows a poetry and a people that will blossom amid the shit of a thoroughly modern Mexican State. Others will emerge who embody what was lost in 1968. Perhaps they will bring back poems and paintings fit for the dumpster and trashcan. The poems themselves will be less important than the rhythms that beat behind them and that give them an emerald shape that catches in the eye of new beholders. Their visible isolation and madness will pale in comparison to the oceanic rhythms that link them across time and across space.

**Time Slip**

**In *Amulet*, Auxilio Lacouture, the fictionalized time traveler and “mother of Mexican poetry” slips back several years from 1968 to the early 1960s where she encounters the para-surrealist painter and anarchist, Remedios Varo. Both women are time travelers: Lacouture returns to the past seeking an account for the horrors of the present, as Varo paints past the horrors of the present seeking a way towards a liberated time and space.**

**Let us slip, for a moment, back to Varo's time.**

**Like Lacouture, Varo followed a path of exile. In 1939, at the age of thirty-one, she left Spain for France with other Leftists to escape the Fascist violence unleashed by Franco's military during the Civil War. The freedom she found in Paris was short**

lived. In 1941, Varo fled Nazi-occupied France for Mexico, where she settled until her death in 1963. Although her new home provided her a place to perfect her painting style, Mexico, like Spain and France, remained a place of oppression. Here, as with all the points on her map, was another world where people were kept in rusty or gilded cages, only now those cages were erected by capital and kept in the shadow of European colonialism.

When we turn to Varo's paintings from her Mexican years, we see a desire that burns against the established order. Many of these paintings focus on fantastically exaggerated women floating through rigidly enclosed spaces.

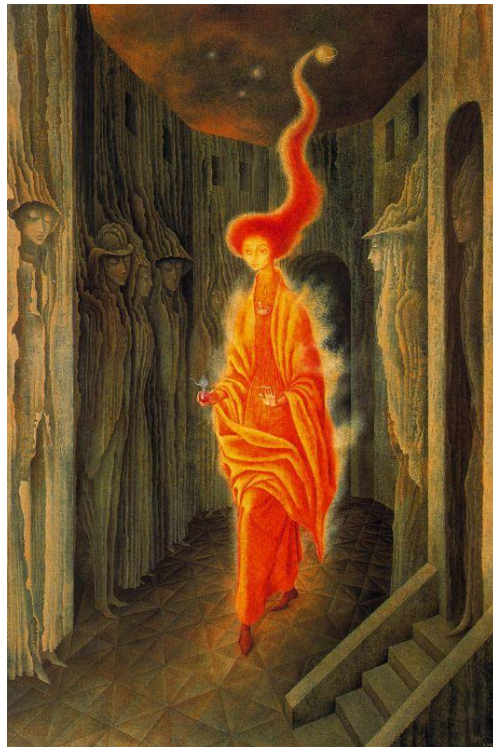


Figure 2.6: Painting entitled “La Llamada (The Call)” by Remedios Varo

In *The Call* from 1961, a woman in fiery reds and oranges walks through a gray fortress or valley where sleeping figures line the stone walls. She appears beatifically, bearing two talismans: a glass vial in her hand and an amulet around her

neck. She walks cautiously with her left hand up, as if just wakened, while holding the vial in her right hand as if to light her path. Her presence gently bathes the sleepers in her light, as if confident her call will dispel the sepulchral silence and wake them from a petrified state.

With her hair tethered to a star, the luminous woman first appears to have descended from the heavens to bring her boon of life and light to this tomb-world. But another look reveals that she may have been one of the sleepers who has heard the call and stepped free from the niche or cave behind her. From this perspective, maybe, her hair has not come down from above but has instead reached up to wrap the distant orb, or better, perhaps she has created the orb as a projection of her desire and her hair is the path of her coming. If this is the case, then she is both the awakened and the awakener, the called and the caller.

Floating through the deadened landscape, she reveal incandescent lines of movement that were previously unimaginable. She illuminates a freer existence than that which is allowed by the built order on the ground, an existence in which the subject is intertwined with the cosmos rather than being relegated to the space of the tomb. And it is this movement, that free movement through space, that reflects the boon offered the world by the liberatory struggles beyond the painting: a movement that pulls the sleepers and sleepwalkers out of their place and into a freer gravity.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **A Gesture In May<sup>32</sup>**

Looking Deeply at the Self-Immolation of George Winne Jr.  
to See the Continuation of a Revolutionary Tradition

“We are each other’s continuation.”

-Thich Nhat Hanh

“It is a hidden politics—a politics without words, a politics of symbols, a politics of gestures.”

—Robert Barnett, on self-immolation

## **Part I.**

### **Beyond The Memory War**

On May 10, 1970, a young man named George Winne, Jr. walked into Revelle Plaza at UC San Diego and left us with a gesture. Though the Plaza was the center of student activity at the time, it was empty that day, not only because it was Mother’s Day weekend, but because Governor Ronald Reagan had closed the University of California school system to quell the student protests against the Vietnam War.

For a moment, let us imagine Winne as he enters the empty Plaza. We might see him from a distance, as Keith Stowe did that day. Stowe, now a physics professor at Cal Tech, was meeting with a small group of fellow student activists,

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<sup>32</sup> For Hilda Gracie Uriarte, Allyson Osorio, and Jorge Mariscal, who helped me see that some struggles continue long after the end.

many of whom were members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), in a building adjacent to the Plaza. Foregoing the Mother's Day festivities and refusing the governor's order, they had remained on campus to plan the next anti-war action.

Let our eyes follow Stowe's as he looks out the window onto the plaza. We squint in the San Diego sun and see, from a distance of two hundred yards, a tall slender man with a shock of black hair walking across the concrete. Our eyes stay with him as he stops at the Southeast side of the plaza and sits. What happens next is almost impossible to process: In a quick motion he douses himself with liquid, strikes a match, and moves the flame to his body. He is ablaze. And, without thinking, we are out in the full sun of the plaza. Things are happening too quickly. The burning man is in front of us, and we are uncertain about what to do next.

Let us freeze that moment as if it is our present and ponder that question: What are we to do next?

We know what history has in store for the moment. Tomorrow, when George Winne Jr. has passed away and Keith Stowe is in the hospital suffering from burns, the newspapers will have stories of a psychologically troubled young man—too sensitive, too depressed and isolated. A local paper will show Stowe convalescing in a hospital bed. His eyes cannot hide the shock and anger he felt toward the man he tried to save. Stowe's bandaged arms hide the singed muscles that had moved, almost instinctively, to beat the flames that engulfed the burning man. In two-day's time, these stories will fade to the bigger news of the day—more bombings, more massacres, more violence and suffering. When students return to

the Plaza, they will be left with the singed bricks, but those markings will fade in time as well.

For now, though, we can work against the unrelenting flow of history. We can look back, freeze the moment and the imperialist proxy war that rages around it. We can turn our eyes to the man on fire and his burnt sign with its almost illegible words “In God’s Name, End the War”. We can perk our ears up to listen deeply for the message that his gesture is telling us beyond its silent tongues of fire.

### **Memory War**

This is the gesture I hope we can turn back to together, but to do so, we must dig through the debris piled atop it. A war has buried such gestures, and it is up to us to look for the liberatory seeds beneath the dust and debris of history.

Before looking for those seeds in history, which we will do in Part II, we should grasp the terrain of the war. It is a war for memories, memories that could have an ethical bearing on our practices in the present. We will thus use the term *memory war* as shorthand to describe a covert war waged against individuals and groups who committed their lives or deaths to practices of peace, freedom, and justice that pushed beyond the contradictory, often hollow, form these concepts take in Western liberal capitalist hegemony.<sup>33</sup> This memory war, unlike the overt wars we see on the news or read about in history books, is not waged with guns, bombs, or drones. It is fought through dogma and ideologies that erase these individuals or

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<sup>33</sup> In this established order, these terms are relative and are usually premised on their opposite; they imply peace, freedom, and justice for some (the exclusive “us”) at the expense, exclusion, and death of others marked as different, foreign, threatening, or inhuman.

communities from collective memory. Sometimes, in fact, the memory war's weapons are the very news sites or history books that we read.

Writing from a different, but not wholly unrelated moment, the philosopher Walter Benjamin gets at the heart of this covert war when he writes: "Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious." What does Benjamin mean with these cryptic words? We will ponder this aphorism throughout this chapter, but for now, a few preliminary thoughts: It is easy, far too easy, to see how individuals and groups who oppose state or imperial violence face physical death on the streets or living death in prisons. Such suffering is all around us, though those committed to social justice as well as the kin of those who suffer are usually the ones who see, hear, and feel its most palpable presences and absences beyond the news headlines. What is easier to miss is how certain individuals and groups whose thoughts, practices, or gestures pose revolutionary alternatives to the established order, face a second death in the memory war. This war dismembers these dead ones.<sup>34</sup> It does so, not simply by forgetting them, but by posthumously constructing them as either pathological individuals or ideological zealots when in reality they saw or felt themselves beyond the bounds of individualism and dogmatism. The memory war buries these dead ones by relegating their struggles or gestures to a period of resolved history that has no bearing on our present and future. It leaves us with propaganda, which we would be wise to remember, doesn't only come in the form of political pamphlets.

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<sup>34</sup> It also scapegoats those whose crimes stem from the injustices and inequalities of the liberal capitalist system or whose violence is made possible by the violent conditions of the system.

## **Dismembering the Dead**

We can turn back to the reception of Winne's gesture to see how the memory war dismembers those whose lives or deaths touched upon the path of non-violence. In 1990, the editors of UCSD Guardian, led by editor-in-chief Ben Boychuck, offered the following reflection on Winne's self-immolation from across the gap of twenty years:

Winne's death is an extreme example of what happens when national passion reaches a fever pitch. 1970 was an irrational turbulent era. America was embroiled in a very unpopular war in Vietnam – a war which has left deep scars in the minds of millions who witnessed the turmoil of the time... Today we reflect with sorrow on such tragedies as Kent State, where four students were shot and killed by national guardsmen attempting to disperse protestors. By 1970, everyone knew the U.S. participation in Vietnam was an exercise in futility... Just as American participation in Vietnam was futile, so, too was Winne's passionate act. Winne's protest, though symbolic of the prevailing anger of many Americans, accomplished nothing. The bombs continued to fall in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Thousands of lives continued to be lost... Winne's death, though futile, was not entirely meaningless, and it has not been forgotten. Twenty students gathered in a candlelight vigil last night at Revelle Plaza to reflect on the significance of Winne's death. To many in attendance Winne's death was a profound statement about something he truly believed in. To some students, he will be remembered as a martyr to the anti-war movement – a man who died for a cause he truly believed in. To others, he will be remembered as someone who died a horrible death for no reason. One cannot help but wonder if Winne would have better served his cause fighting for peace instead of dying for it. It's 15 years after the end of the war, and people are still divided about whether or not we should have been involved in the first place. Winne is a tragic symbol of that debate. As George Bush said in his inaugural address, Vietnam continues to divide us, but now it's time to heal. (*UCSD Guardian*, 14 May 1990)

It is curious to see what gets forgotten when one strives to tell history, even from a vantage point of apparent neutrality. Though the editors begin in a benign fashion by laying out different perspectives on Winne as either a martyr or misguided youth,



their piece works to construct him as a hollowed-out everyman figure, a symbol rather than a human being. His agency disappears as the editors insert him into their narrative of history as a tragic symbol. Overwhelmed by passion, Winne falls over the precipice of reason, takes his life rather than actively working for peace. But this narrative arc isn't really about Winne. Rather, the editors deploy him as a stand in for a national debate, nothing more. He symbolizes a nation's divided sentiments and the unreason and irrationality that comes from *witnessing* a war that the common man is powerless to stop.

In addition to taking the focus of Winne's historical agency, the piece also hides the historical violence to which Winne's gesture and the protests are a response. The spotlight turns from the violence of the war machine to the actions of the protestors. In this light, the "irrational" agent in history is not the war machine that is inflicting the violence on minds *and* bodies. Rather, it is the protestors who, in the eyes of the editors, do not have healthy and productive channels for directing their anger. In this tragic narrative, they begin to do self-defeating things: refusing to disperse when ordered under threat of bullet and bayonet or lighting oneself on fire. The editorial constructs these acts of protest as *futile*. The editors use shortsighted criteria (action as a means toward an end) to reach this judgment: These actions did not end the war or stop the bombs; they only added to the body counts. Therefore, they were futile. This assumes that the protestors mistook themselves as gods who could bring about peace through a single action or sacrificial act. As we look deeply at Winne's gesture, we will see that Winne was not acting hubristically but in good faith toward others who were burning in the

napalm fires or who were, knowingly or unknowingly, complicit in the creation of that firestorm.

Turning the spotlight on a pasteboard version of Winne and the anti-war protestors, the editorial blurs the complexities of feelings and practices, reducing them all to a singular emotion of anger. Again, this focus on the protestors' internalized anger pushes external state and imperial violence into the shadows. Turning all attention to the witness's "scarred mind" (which we must remember is symptomatic, not productive of, violence), the editorial also buries the scarred and burnt bodies produced by state and imperial violence. Moreover, it represses the complex array of feelings and practices that are inspired by the violence. In regards to Winne, a focus purely on anger loses sight of an ethic that finds form in his gesture: an arcane and often dismissed ethic of love, an awareness of the interconnectedness of the *self* with all things beyond its imposed physical, existential, and political borders. Winne's gesture is not an act of passion but a profound gesture of compassion that uses the body to touch the suffering of the other and to silently call people to act for the common good rather than forms of self or national interest premised on violence and suffering. This dimension of self-immolation, too often buried in the memory war, actually brings Winne closer to the "progressive" movements than some, even among the ranks of the political Left, might admit.

The final thing lost in a "tragic" historical narrative are the continuities of State and imperial violence that are still with us in the present. The editors take as a given that the warfare Winne and so many others opposed has, as a fact of history,

come to an end, and that it was purely rational means that halted the firestorm. When we look deeply at the roots of the American war in Viet Nam, its outgrowths, its ongoing effects on communities in the United States, Southeast Asia, and the lands of refuge and exile in between, we would see that this particular imperial war has not ended. Beyond Vietnam, the fires of war have spread elsewhere, in and beyond the liberal capitalist nation states that now dominate the global order. Of course there have been victories for peace, often won through “irrational” or illegal strategies such as civil disobedience, but imperial war continues in new guises, sometimes overtly militaristic but more often economic.

But there is another continuity that is missing from this narrative, a continuity related to Winne’s gesture itself. The editorial fails to see the possibility that gestures like this find power in their continuation, in the continuation of an ethic well beyond the physical death of the body. It is this shortsightedness, above all others, that I, along with a small group of students at UCSD, attempted to remedy with a project that will be the focus of the final part of this chapter (Part III).

### **Fault Lines**

Before proceeding, I think it would be useful to see the outer limits of the memory war as it is waged from the political Right and Left. In a letter written ten years after the editorial, Ben Boychuck, now a writer for the neoconservative think-tank The Claremont Institute, drops the mask of neutrality and comes out firing ideological bullets at Winne and at those who gathered to remember his message:

On May 10, 1970, a 23-year-old graduate student named George Winne walked onto Revelle Plaza carrying a placard and a can of gasoline... Winne was emulating the Buddhist monks, but Winne lacked an essential monkish characteristic – discipline. Winne wanted to immolate himself... however he did not burn stoically. He flailed. He screamed. Then he collapsed. He succumbed the next day to the second- and third- degree burns that covered 95 percent of his body. So why remember Winne at all? In part, because he is a window to the tragic duplicity that made the 1960s an ideological nightmare, from which America still has not quite awakened... Many people probably do not remember Winne on the anniversary of his death, and surely the next one will have but a wisp of the confusion and ideological opportunism that made him a tragic hero. (*UCSD Guardian*, 15 May 2000)

Focusing obsessively on Winne's physical body, Boychuck attempts to bring Winne down to earth. In this account, he is not the hero some have made him out to be. He is mortal, naïve, and easily influenced by counter-cultural ideologies and images of burning monks circulating at the time. What we must remember, according to Boychuck, is a young man's confusion, his screams, and the physical burns spread across his ruined body. For Boychuck, there is nothing heroic in all of this. To argue otherwise is to use Winne as a pawn in an ideological game.

What is misleading about this account, though, is that its author presents his view as above and beyond ideology. But is it? By focusing solely on the isolated body in pain, Boychuck weaves a narrative that conforms to neoconservative ideology. This narrative erases the context of violence that surrounds Winne and the clear-minded vision that motivated Winne and the student activists to act heroically. By *heroically* I don't mean to say that they acted as gods who could change the global situation by sheer force of will. Rather, these young people woke up from an atomizing common sense that would have them march in step with the war machine.

They woke up and acted compassionately, that is, with a deep sense of their interconnectedness to the other. Sometimes they flailed and screamed. Sometimes they simply laid down in refusal. But the physical limits of the individual or collective body do not negate the fact that they woke up and saw a more peaceful world for themselves and for those others, beyond the borders of self and country, who were caught in the fires of war.

Ideological shortsightedness is not only a fault of the political Right. If we turn back to archival documents surrounding his self-immolation, we see similar ideological fault lines on the political Left.

Though most views from the Left are sympathetic toward Winne, there is a sense of unease when talking about his self-immolation. We will later see that this trepidation stems from a deeply rooted ethic that shapes the ways people in liberal capitalist societies speak about a subject who takes his or her own life. For now, we only need to keep a basic point in mind: Most views of Winne from the Left sympathize with his feelings of disdain for the war, but they draw a clear line. They cannot condone or speak favorably about his method. Instead, they toe the line that Winne was a loner and that his gesture stemmed from a psychological problem, an internal flaw, which divorces his gesture from reasonable or radical forms of Leftist protest.

To get a sense of these views, let's turn to two written reactions. The first comes from UCSD's Chancellor at the time, William McGill. McGill was a middle of the road liberal who grudgingly accepted (without really taking seriously) the unprecedented forms of activism and protest that were shaking the campus and the

streets beyond the ivory tower. In a letter to the campus community after Winne's immolation, he writes:

This super-heated atmosphere would be hardly promising for reasoned debate and rational analysis, and now we have added to it our own tragedy. The anguished death of a young man, part of no protest movement, but seeking only to capture our attention in his protest against the war, must make us stop and think. This is what he sought to have us do. It is the ultimate tragedy for us that he should have felt so ineffectual in reaching us that such means he thought necessary, and it is the least we can do in his memory to deescalate the rhetoric and avoid the cheap gestures. In a university the objective he sought can be developed only by rational means. (*Chancellor's Files*, "Statement to the San Diego Division" 12 May 1970)

McGill, a Western psychologist by training, offers a diagnosis of Winne as an isolated young man whose environment had a negative impact on his mind and behavior. In his account, Winne acts irrationally because he lacked a community and a rational channel for his emotions. McGill places the blame for this squarely on the activists. If they had offered students like Winne healthier forms of dissent, not such childish acts as building occupations and marches, perhaps Winne could have taken part and felt effectual. Following this psychiatric logic, McGill uses Winne's gesture to lay out what he considers a healthier path of protest. Winne's anguished death, according to McGill, should make people "stop and think" rather than act and scream. It should make the protestors "deescalate" rather than intensify their protests. It should defuse the squabbles between administrators and activists, so that they could work together to develop rational means to voice one's opinions and purge negative emotions.

By following this line, McGill desecrates the dead just like his conservative counterpart who stands across the political aisle. Like Boychuck, he uses the gesture

to make an ideological point that is quite contrary to Winne's message. The point being this: In order to avoid tragedies like the death of Winne, university students should act rationally, as if the external realities of imperial warfare did not touch them in mind and body. They should still their bodies, silence their voices, and go about business as usual, as if the institution they inhabited was not directly complicit in a machinery of death.

Let us push slightly further to a view that could have been adopted by people positioned on the radical Left. In a letter to the UCSD Triton Times, an anonymous writer offers the following critique of Winne: "How many more days of active work in anti-war activities could George Winne have performed after the date of his classical theatrical resignation? The anguish gripping America (and UCSD) in spring 1970 was caused by loss of life; it is sad to commend a very sick young man for fighting fire with fire" (*Triton Times*, 16 May 1974). The writer perceives Winne's gesture as wasteful because it leads to yet another death. There is an ethical calculus to this perception: Taking his life, Winne steals away all the "active work" he could have given to the anti-war movement. In death, he is no longer *here* to plan and act. He is, to put it bluntly, dead and gone.

Though I don't want to dismiss the sentiment of this letter entirely, especially its espousal of nonviolence and support for active anti-war work, I do want to consider how the particular ethic it uses to judge Winne's gesture sends us down a misguided path. That ethic, a love for life and abhorrence of death, leads to a judgment of Winne. He takes life, therefore his act is immoral. As we will see, a

judgment of Winne within this dualistic frame misses two things. For one, it loses sight of the possibility that his gesture exposes the paradoxical limits of an ethic that attempts to secure life by waging warfare on the life it deems other. Secondly, a judgment of Winne within the ethical frames of life (as good) and death (as bad) prevents us from hearing the deepest resonance of a message that does not die with the body and that finds a continuation in people's practices here and now.

### **Middle Path**

The fault lines laid out thus far beg two questions of us: Can we remember George Winne Jr.'s self-immolation with eyes that aren't clouded by ideology or dogma? Can we listen for its call with ears that are open to a resonance that goes beyond what we are usually attuned to hearing? In this chapter, I hope to take a path that allows us to look and listen in that way.

To find this path, I draw from the writings of a number of thinkers, most important among them the Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh. Though I have been reflecting on Winne's self-immolation for several years now, mostly through the lens of Walter Benjamin's and Herbert Marcuse's writings, my introduction to Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings and practices of engaged Buddhism have offered the most fitting perspective on Winne's gesture that has been missing from all accounts, my own included. What Thich Nhat Hanh gives us is a middle way of looking at the gesture that saves it from the memory war and the judgments people make when latching on to dualistic ethical frames that deem his gesture a waste. By "saving" I don't mean that our goal is to recover the gesture so that the historical record can be



set straight. Instead, I hope we can illuminate the ways such gestures as Winne's bear down upon our present moment, how they continue to shape the practices of peace activists long after death. My hope in focusing on this particular self-immolation is not to deify Winne, but to develop a methodology and practice for looking beyond those gestures and events that are often deemed wasteful or as failures.

My reason for turning to Thich Nhat Hanh's teaching and practice lies, at least in part, in his own historical journey and the ways in which his path shines a profound light on gestures such as Winne's self-immolation. Born in Vietnam in 1926, Thich Nhat Hanh had a calling to Buddhism at an early age when he saw a drawing of a smiling Buddha on a magazine. He was awestruck wondering how someone could smile like that with so much suffering around him. He joined the monastery at the age of 16 and was ordained in 1946 in the Mahayana and Zen tradition. In the early 1960s, as the United States and U.S.S.R were intensifying their proxy war in his home country, Thich Nhat Hanh traveled to the U.S. where he studied and taught Buddhist philosophy and psychology at Princeton and Cornell. At this time, he became deeply committed to the peace movement. He returned to Vietnam in 1963 to work with his fellow monks for a peaceful resolution between the North and South and their various supporters.

Thich Nhat Hanh and his fellow monks chose an unpopular path during this period of imperial war and ambition. Much like Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Merton, and many other religious activists from various traditions, Thich Nhat Hanh's road led between Communist and Liberal capitalist ideologies at a time

when the Cold War superpowers were deploying these ideologies to rip Vietnam and its people apart. Instead of choosing sides, Thich Nhat Hanh and other engaged Buddhists walked the razor's edge of nonviolence between the warring parties. The hope was that the middle path could show the warring camps that these superimposed distinctions could give way to a practice of peace grounded in the interconnectedness and interdependency of all things. Choosing this path, Thich Nhat Hanh and his disciples were forced into a forty-year exile from Vietnam. Only very recently, in 2005, was he able to return to the land where he is still shunned for not taking either side.

Some might be wary of turning to religion for a critical lens on history, or they might doubt the idealism of a middle path. For now, let us consider the former fear. I hope the latter trepidation will fade as we think through the limits of views that refuse to budge from the political lines demarcated by Left and Right doctrine.

Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings and practices have little to do with the socially disconnected and exclusionary dogma associated with institutionalized religion. Instead, engaged Buddhism is grounded in everyday life. What it offers people is a non-political and non-dogmatic practice that looks deeply at the roots of suffering, both individual and collective, with the hope of transforming that suffering. To phrase this in a way that might be more familiar to activists, engaged Buddhist practices divest individuals, communities, and institutions from the sources of suffering. They cultivate a compassionate way of seeing and acting that sees through the spectacle of the material world to what Thich Nhat Hanh calls the

ultimate dimension, a reality that cannot be trapped by word or perception, a reality where all things are connected and where the suffering of one has cosmic ramifications for all. Seeing and approaching life in this way, engaged Buddhists seek to make the conditions of human misery and planetary destruction obsolete.

For the engaged Buddhist, the roots of suffering lie in toxic patterns of consumption that destroy the body, mind, planet, and community. These toxic patterns might include eating unhealthy or unwholesome food. But, on a deeper level, these patterns consist in consuming commodities or toxic beliefs that sell people hollow images of happiness and freedom built upon violence, war, and genocide. What prevents people in these nations from seeing the sources of suffering is that their minds are not *in* the present. Their bodies move according to the clock, calendar, and stock ticker, while their minds remain elsewhere—locked on what happened yesterday, on what needs to get done for tomorrow, or on the monotony of routine. Caught in either the past or future, those on the political Right lose sight of, or purposely ignore, the violence and suffering underpinning freedom, security, and economic growth. In the same way, those on the political Left forget, or are too cautious to recognize, what Thich Nhat Hanh calls their *interbeing* with the exploited factory worker in Bangladesh *as well as with* the CEO who sells a product built from stolen labor and planetary resources. From a space of non-judgment, the engaged Buddhist will say that a simple liberatory act eludes people: They cannot come home to the body in the present moment where they can inhabit each step, where they can feel their interconnection to the ground beneath their feet, to the people that touch their lives, to those others that lie outside the fences, walls,

and borders erected around “us” and “them.” This is the awareness of interbeing, an awareness that there is no independent self and the suffering of one is the suffering of all.

We should be clear about what the practice of engaged Buddhism is and what it is not. For one, it is not critical of those who look backward into the past or forward into the future in the hopes of transforming suffering in the present. This is not a critique of those who look critically at history, for example those who see the gnarled roots of slavery and genocide stretching into present institutions such as the prison industrial complex, the immigrant detention center, or the tribal reservation. Nor is it a critique of those whose vision is set on a utopian horizon where the promise of freedom would no longer be contradicted by state violence and economic neglect, where the term justice would no longer be tainted by institutional inequities that expose working class people of color and queer communities to suffering and premature death. It *is* wary of the paralysis that comes when one cannot bring one’s mind back from the past or future, back to the body. It offers them a form of practice, so that their mind returns to the body, so that their whole self—their highest self—is there for each action they participate in or each word they write.

Secondly, the engaged Buddhist perspective is not critical of a particular political camp. It does not come from the Left or Right. Nor does the alternative path—the middle path—find its foundations in the moderate or radical ideologies associated with Left or Right. As the first precept of The Order of Interbeing tells us, the path is built upon a compassionate view that looks at both camps from a

distance, attempting to see a path that would transform the violence and suffering that structures the lives of *all* who are caught in the war:

Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance, we are determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones. We are committed to seeing the Buddhist teachings as guiding means that help us develop our understanding and compassion. They are not doctrines to fight, kill, or die for. We understand that fanaticism in its many forms is the result of perceiving things in a dualistic and discriminative manner. We will train ourselves to look at everything with openness and the insight of interbeing in order to transform dogmatism and violence in ourselves and in the world. (“Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings of the Order of Interbeing”)

What engaged Buddhism *is* critical of is a way of being that mistakes doctrine as truth and ideology as reality. This way isolates people, disconnects them from their communities and planet, and misleads them into believing that they are independent *selves* that come and go, live and die. At its worst, this way leads to fanaticism that strives to replace all other doctrines and ideologies with a superimposed order that masquerades as truth, liberation, or the only way. This *way*, of course, is endemic to liberal capitalist empire, but it is also endemic to all the previous political regimes that have imposed a top-down order on the world. It will be helpful to trace its roots before seeing how gestures such as Winne’s point to another way entirely.

### **The Enemy**

To unearth the roots of this divisive way, let us revisit Walter Benjamin’s aphorism with fresh eyes. To reiterate, Benjamin writes, “Even the dead will not be safe if the enemy wins. And the enemy has not ceased to be victorious.” Taking the

middle path, we would say that the enemy is not of the political Right or the political Left. It is not the conservative or progressive. It is something common to both camps, a myth taken as reality.<sup>35</sup>

The myth, which grows out of Aristotelian philosophy and later extends into the pastoralism of the Roman Catholic Church, is the belief in the sacredness and centrality of human life in the cosmos. The myth offers a dualistic story to sort out, and order, the messiness of the universe. The story goes like this: Human life is the most precious thing in the universe. It stands *apart* from all other things including animals, plants, and minerals. Human life is to be secured and made to flourish against all the hostile external forces of the universe that bring death.

On the surface, this might seem a benign myth to live by. The problem, however, is that when the myth is taken as reality, people begin to live their lives under the assumption that nature, the inexplicable flows of the cosmos, and death itself are an enemy to be contained or conquered.

To follow the roots of this myth, we need to move forward in Western historical time to the Enlightenment. Though Enlightenment thought and praxis deposes God and King from the cosmic and social hierarchies, it does not do away with the myth. Just the opposite. The enlightened Western subject now perceives himself as the center of a hostile, yet *knowable* and *malleable*, universe. Once again, he embraces the myth and uses it as a justification to superimpose a fully rational

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<sup>35</sup> To outline this myth, I draw upon the work of several authors including Alan Watts, Ram Dass, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Herbert Marcuse, and Achille Mbembe, though I don't cite them at every turn and will instead try to lay out their theories in plain language.

order on the world. Approaching the hostile world outside himself, the Enlightenment thinker dons a rational lens in order to make the unknown known. He attempts to know the universe by making it some *thing* that is measurable, a *thing* that can be studied and classified on tables and timelines. Thus, time becomes a linear line that can be broken down into seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, decades, and epochs. Space becomes a measurable dimension that can be broken down into meters, yards, etc. Likewise, the world of animals, and vegetables become divisible into kingdoms, phylum, classes, orders, families, genus, and species.

The problem with this rationalization of the world is, again, that these measurements are not taken as representations of reality but as *reality* itself. For example, the map, with its lines of longitude, latitude and neatly-demarcated borders, becomes more real than the uncontainable terrain of the environment. It becomes a way of navigating space and knowing who or what belongs and does not belong in a given territory. This same logic extends to all domains of individual and collective life in the Western world. For example, the biography of one's life, that written sequence of events from birth to death, replaces the complexity of an entire existence. Likewise, the history of societies and events *becomes* the reality that condenses all the immeasurable flows of data that exist between two dates on a timeline and that would require an infinity of encyclopedias to record.

The myth leads to an even more contradictory reality when we reach what is marked in Western historical time as Modernity. Going beyond empirical studies of nature, the bourgeois class discovers how nature can be turned into instruments that

can be bent to its will. They see how technology, when paired with a rational organization of space and time, can add to this project. During this epoch, not only are modern institutions organized around the instrumentalization of nature, but life itself becomes an instrument, a means toward a class-specific end, that of capital accumulation. Bodies are made to move in time and space to maximize productivity. Their gestures are directed and normalized so that the process of production can be standardized and regulated to produce a surplus.

Somewhere along the way—perhaps in route to the colonies or frontiers of the Western empires or perhaps in urban cities that were ordered along lines of race, class, and gender—the myth takes on a new expression. It becomes this: *Our* life is sacred and all that is *Other* brings with it the threat of our death. When cast in this light, those groups of people that look or act differently from the “us” are perceived as being just as hostile as the plant or animal world, just as deadly as the desert sands or stormy seas. Therefore, the logic follows that “we” must civilize, enslave, or exterminate “them.” “We” must do so for the sake of our lives and for the survival of “our” society. Here, we must recognize the hard truth that this myth cannot be pinned to one *-ism* such as capitalism, fascism, imperialism, or colonialism. Rather, it is *the* myth structuring reality as we know it, a myth capable of being adopted by Communism and Liberal Capitalism, Socialism and National Socialism alike. This myth knows no party lines. Or, as Walter Benjamin might say, it is the hidden enemy that cunningly moves between camps, a ghost of humanity’s own doing.



## Nonviolence & The Gesture

Throughout this chapter I maintain that the tradition of nonviolence offers the best critical practice for confronting this enemy that is common, not only to all war, but to all social formations that impose atomizing and divisive hierarchies, ideologies, and practices that conceal the interconnectedness of all things. I say this tradition offers the *best* practice, for it is the only approach that refuses to operate by what Michel Foucault calls a biopolitical logic, or what Achille Mbembe calls a necropolitical logic, both of which inevitably infiltrate the opposing sides of a conflict regardless of the asymmetries of power. To put this last point plainly, nonviolence refuses to take life in order to preserve life. It refuses to use violence as a pathway to peace. It is, I believe, this alteriority to the established order and its hegemonic practices that makes nonviolence the most revolutionary strain of a continuous peace movement.

What is at stake in this unyielding refusal of violence? Adopting violent tactics would spell defeat for the nonviolent activist's cause, not on the grounds of the battlefield, but on the very grounds upon which nonviolent praxis hinges. As Mark Kurlansky puts it in *Non-Violence: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, "History teaches us over and over again that a conflict between violent and nonviolent force is a moral argument. The lesson is that if the nonviolent side can be led to violence, they have lost the argument and they are destroyed" (49). Thus, those truly committed to nonviolence, by the very nature of their practice, refuse violence. Some might judge this refusal as impractical or irresponsible, especially when placed in the context of the many hypothetical or historical examples where force

seems justified. I would only advise caution with such judgments because they are often based in the terms, and weighed by the moral calculus, set by history's victors who see no other way but the path of violent action. When viewing nonviolence in that way, we lose sight of the subtle seeds that are spread across time and space by those who take the path of non-violence or who, even in death or surrender, gesture toward another path.

In this chapter, we will look deeply for the seeds spread by a nonviolent peace movement in and beyond the context of the U.S. and U.S.S.R's imperial proxy war in Vietnam. We will try to touch those seeds to see what bearing they have on our present moment. The background of our discussion will be the many marches, sit-ins, and strikes that took place throughout the important month of May 1970. If we look deeply at these protests, we will see that they had less to do with the superimposition of particular ideological dogma than with finding, and alerting people to, a middle path to peace. This path opened up when one, regardless of where he or she stood politically, became conscious of the contradiction between a liberal ethic that espouses the sanctity of life and the freedom of all people, on the one hand, and the realities of mass slaughter in Vietnam, on the other hand. These protests, then, called people to a radical path of compassion not a path of radical dogma. They called people to recognize the interconnectedness between those others dying on the battlefield, the soldiers who took life and had their lives taken, and the people who watched it all from behind their television screens.

While these collective forms of nonviolence form the background of our discussion, Winne's more controversial gesture of self-immolation will be our

focus. This is done, not to turn him into a hero apart from the crowd, but because the reception of his gesture on both the Left and Right exposes a violence common to both camps. This is the violence of forgetting, a violence that dismembers the individual from the community of peace activists and from a deeper vision of an interconnected life that exceeds the narrow bounds of ego and nation.<sup>36</sup> This violence, as we shall see, stems from Western philosophies that see and impose false dualities between Being and Non-Being, between self and other, between us and them, and between life and death. When put into practice, the consequences of these divisions are dire, especially for those who fall outside the pale of Western liberal constructions of the rights bearing human (i.e. the liberal subject). Within a forcefully divided world, the liberal subject is to be secured and preserved against all those outside the pale, all those forces of death that surround its body, gates, and fences.

Reading against the grain of Western philosophies, we will try to remember Winne's self-immolation as an extreme form of non-violence, a revolutionary gesture of compassion that burns away the myth of the sacredness of "my" or "our" life and the fear of "my" or "our" death by illuminating a dimension of interconnectedness and interdependency that exists beyond all of the illusory categories that shape reality, mark the self off as an isolated ego, and govern everyday life in liberal capitalist society. Of course, if we were to view the gesture through the ideological lenses of liberalism, we would reach the opposite

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<sup>36</sup> We are coming up against a secret war waged against the memory of those who destabilized the mythic foundation of Western thought and praxis that holds only a select life as sacred.

conclusion; we would see Winne's act as violent. After all, Winne destroys that which is held most sacred in U.S. liberal capitalist society: a healthy productive body born into a relatively secure position in the social hierarchy (i.e. white, able-bodied, male, middle class, enrolled in school). If we viewed his self-immolation on those terms, we would mark him as a suicide, a lawbreaker in the eyes of Church and State. We will avoid such superficial lenses. Instead, we will look deeply at the gesture and the history surrounding it. A meditation offered by Thich Nhat Hanh provides us with a lens freed of myth that will allow us to do just that.

### **Flame, Cloud, and Paper**

In this section, I adopt an old form of communication not really used in academic discourse. The form I'm referring to is *the sutra*. According to Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, the sutra is a "bare thread of an exposition... unadorned by a single 'bead' of elaboration." Sutras, according to Prabhavananda and Isherwood, were written in a time when teachings were not recorded, therefore they were "intended to be expanded and explained. The ancient teachers would repeat an aphorism by heart and then proceed to amplify it with their own comments, for the benefit of their pupils" (Isherwood).

In what follows, I expand upon a meditation on death and dying offered by Thich Nhat Hanh by threading it to my thoughts on Winne's self-immolation. My hope is that this will create something that the typical excised and partitioned quote cannot: By suturing the two, a new shape will be formed that will serve as our conceptual map for looking deeply at the historical conjuncture of May 10, 1970

and the gesture left to us that day. So, let us first follow Thich Nhat Hanh through this meditation:

Today, I would like to ask to invite all of you to participate in one meditation. It's easy to begin our journey to go home to our true nature because the practice of meditation has the purpose of realizing our true nature, which is the nature of no birth and no death. Nirvana means extinction, extinction of all notions or ideas, the notions and ideas that are at the foundation of fear, despair, suffering. So Nirvana is also the extinction of suffering, of notions and suffering. Among the notions we entertain is the notion of birth and death, Being and Non-Being. There are theologians who have described God as the ground of Being. Well Being cannot be without Non-Being, and if we say that God is the ground of Being people may ask then well who will be the ground of Non-Being. Well hopefully with this meditation we can touch the ground of both, of both Being and Non-Being.

Suppose we look into this matchbox and ask ourselves the question whether the flame that we need is already there, is hiding somewhere there in the matchbox. The problem has to do with Being and Non-Being. We know that if I make a gesture then that will be the manifestation of the flame, but before I make that gesture can we qualify the flame as Non-Being?

“My dear little flame, are you there? Can I qualify you as Non-Being?” And if you listen deeply, you will hear the answer. The answer is something like this: “Dear Thay, Dear Sangha: When conditions are sufficient I manifest. You cannot qualify me as a Non-Being before the manifestation. You cannot qualify me as Being after the manifestation.”

The meditation will be easy if we can get rid of our tendency to think dualistically. We know that conditions for the flame to manifest are inside of the box, also outside of the box. Oxygen, for instance, is out here. And we know very well that without oxygen the flame cannot manifest herself. And it can be hidden in my fingers, because in my fingers there is another condition to help the flame to manifest.

If we ask the flame, “Dear little flame: We know that you are there. Would you please manifest for us?” And then the flame would say, “Sure, I'm glad to do so. Thay, would you help give me the last condition?”

And, I'm going to do that. My dear little flame, please manifest for us. [Lights match and lets it burn all the way through]

The flame is gone. It has come, and it has gone. Now we can ask her, “My dear little flame, where have you come from? Where have you come from?” And if we listen deeply, we will see the answer of the flame: “Dear Thay, Dear Sangha: I come from nowhere. I did not come from the North, nor the South, nor the East, nor the West. When conditions are sufficient, I manifest myself.” And we know that the flame is right. It has not come from the South or the North. And her nature, the nature of the flame, is no coming.

We humans, from time to time, we ask: Where have I come from? And if you listen to the flame, we can get the answer also. I come from nowhere. I have not come from the North, the South...etc. When conditions are sufficient, I manifest myself. And you believe the flame, because we have the seed of truth in us.

And when we ask the flame, “Where have you gone now?” And we hear the flame:  
 “Dear Thay, Dear Sangha: I have not gone anywhere. I have not gone to the South, the North, the East, the West. When conditions are no longer sufficient, I just stop manifestation.” Again, we believe the flame. She is right.

And when we have someone who is very close to us, very dear to us, stop her manifestation (his manifestation) we ask the question: Where has our beloved one gone? And if you listen to her (to him) deeply, you get the same answer: “Darling, I have gone nowhere. Because conditions are not sufficient, I have just stopped my manifestation... in order to manifest again.”

So, looking deeply, we see that the true nature of the flame is the nature of *no coming, no going*. In Plum Village, we have the song “No Coming, No Going.” No after, no before. And what is important here is that we know that before the manifestation of the flame, we cannot qualify her as non-existing. This is very important. We all have our birthday. And we believe that we begin to exist since that day. Before that, we did not exist.

Imagine you draw a line... draw a line representing time. And on the left, we take a point and we call that point B (Birth). So from B on we believe we exist, we are, but before B we were not; we were not there; we did not exist. That is something to be reconsidered because B is only the date, the moment of manifestation. Before the moment of manifestation, you cannot qualify the flame as non-existing. That’s unjust. That’s not true. And because you could not qualify her as non-existing before B, we cannot qualify her as existing after B either. It means that the notion of Being and

Non-Being cannot be applied to reality. It is a notion that we create by our mind. It's a mental construction, a mental creation.

To be or not to be, that is *not* the question. [Laughter]

And therefore adding to the pair of opposites (no coming, no going), we have to add the second pair of opposites: no birth, no death. The true nature of the flame is no birth and no death.

The true nature of a cloud is also the nature of no birth and no death. It is impossible for a cloud to die. Because to die means that from something you become nothing. And it is impossible for a cloud to become nothing. She can become rain or snow or ice, but she cannot become nothing. Her nature is nature of no death. And the cloud hasn't come from nothing.

In our mind, we think that *to be born* means from *nothing* you suddenly become *something*, from *no one* you suddenly become *some one*. And looking deeply into reality, you cannot find anything like that. Before the cloud took the form of the cloud, she had been something else: the trees, the sunshine, the rain, the earth, and so on. Looking into the cloud you see the lakes, the oceans, the heat, the sunshine. And that is her former lives, the former lives of a cloud.

A cloud has not come from nothing. We also have not come from nothing. So our birthday is not exact. That is only the day of our... to deliver us. We had been in the womb of our mother long before. And if you push and push until the day of the conception. We may think that is our real birthday. But the question is whether before that day of conception, there was something before. And looking deeply, we realize that before that, it had been something already, something in our mother, something in our father, coming together. So, we have not come from nothing. We are a continuation.

The word continuation is much better than birth. So instead of singing Happy Birthday we sing Happy Continuation Day.

When we look into this sheet of paper, we see the cloud, the cloud form. We know that without the cloud there will be no rain, no trees. No tree can grow. So we know that the former life of the paper is the tree, is also the rain, the cloud, the earth, and with the eyes of a practitioner of meditation we can see the whole cosmos in this sheet of paper. Can you see the sun, the sunshine? Can you see the cloud? Can you see the trees? The earth? The minerals? All is here.

Not only the paper was the tree in the former life, but it continues to be the tree now, to be cloud now. If we remove all these elements from the sheet of paper, the sheet of paper collapse, cannot be there for us anymore. That is interbeing. And we know that the nature of the sheet of paper is the nature of no birth, because before it took this shape it had been something else like a tree, like a cloud. The nature of no birth.

Now suppose we burn it [the paper], we want to reduce it into nothingness, into Non-Being. You would not be able to do so. During the incineration, well, the sheet of paper continues to transform and manifest in other forms. First, the heat produced by the burning penetrating into me, into you, and into the cosmos. And if we have a machine sophisticated enough, we can measure the energy of the heat. And the heat will continue, continue the sheet of paper. It is the afterlife of the sheet of paper. It is the continuation of that sheet of paper. And then, if you observe, we see that the smoke rising, the smoke rising and become part of a cloud. That is the second form of continuation of the sheet of paper. You can see the sheet of paper continue up there. And maybe tonight it will become rain, and we may receive it on our forehead. We don't know. And then the ash that can be returned to the soil. And maybe next year, or the two years from now, if we have a retreat here, we can see it in the form of a little flower, a blade of grass.

So it is impossible for us to reduce something to nothing, to Non-Being. They thought they can reduce Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, into nothing, but they are wrong, because these people continue to be with us, in other forms. Their energies can be felt, can be touched today. And we are the continuation, their continuation. Therefore, the true nature of the sheet of paper is the nature of no birth and no death, exactly like the nature of the cloud. (*Zencast "Dying"*)

When we practice this meditation with Winne's gesture in mind, we pull our focus away from the individual who, through a sheer act of his will, lights the flame and takes his life. We instead begin to see his gesture within two different dimensions: the historical dimension, into which biographical subjects are born and die, and the "ultimate dimension" that lies beyond all notions of history and biography that mark events and lives with a definitive beginning and end. Let us consider the historical dimension first.



All of the historical forces surrounding George Winne Jr. in May 1970, including the violence of imperial warfare, the suffering of the people in Southeast Asia, the flag draped caskets returning en masse to the U.S., and the protests around the country and world, comprise the conditions of possibility for his self-immolation. His final action, lighting the match and bringing it to his body, is the last condition. We will not mark it off as the sole object of our critique, but instead as a crucial gesture, one that calls us to look deeply at the conditions that led to the self-immolation, the horizons he was gesturing toward, and the continuations of his disembodied ethic long after he and the protestors of May 1970 have passed into the realm of memories.

Looking at the gesture in this way, we see that neither the material conditions of history alone, nor the subject's free will by itself, determine the gesture of self-immolation. Rather, history and the individual's will converge as conditions for the gesture. This convergence takes place on a ground where free will and fate meet. The critic Allen Feldman recognizes this ground in his book *Formations of Violence* with the following paraphrase of Jean Paul Sartre's maxims: "It is not only a matter of what history does to the body but what subjects do with what history has done with the body" (177). In Part II, we will look at the history surrounding Winne. We will see how it sets the conditions of possibility for his self-immolation. We will see, too, what Winne does with that history: how he surrenders his physical form—his life—to become a lasting symbol of a nonviolent ethic that calls some of us to look beyond the boundaries of *selves* that are destined to wither and fade like burnt matches.

When we practice Thich Nhat Hanh's meditation with Winne in mind, we also see his gesture within a dimension that resides beyond Western rationalized ways of seeing that view and order reality around the dualistic terms of Being and Non-Being, life and death, coming and going. Winne's self-immolation burns away the self, but we shouldn't mistake the gesture as a violent movement from Being to Non-Being, from life to death, from presence to absence. That is what the West's rationalized lenses would have us see. That is the taboo Western biopolitics would have us cast judgment upon.

When we consider the historical fact of Winne's self-immolation in light of this meditation, we see that his gesture points toward a dimension not cordoned off by historical or mental constructions and the limits of observability imposed upon us by our all-too human experience of time and space. His gesture points toward the ultimate dimension, the realm of *interbeing*. To understand a concept—which, in a way, defies conceptualization—we can look back to the example from Thich Nhat Hanh's meditation: the sheet of paper. Nhat Hanh asks us to see the paper beyond our mental construction of “paper” and our understanding of it as a distinct object in time and space. If we can look at the paper in this way, we begin to see it as a collection of non-paper elements, for example the labor of the workers in the factory or forest, the tree that was felled, the soil upon which it grew, the rain that watered the soil, the cloud that let off the rain, and so on. All of these non-paper elements

*inter-are* in the paper. Remove one, and it falls apart.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, if we were to burn the paper, it doesn't cease to be. Rather, it continues on in new forms.

Something similar can be said of Winne. Neither fire, nor the memory war, can reduce him to nothing. Like rain from the cloud, his ashes return to the earth and become part of the common ground upon which we stand decades later. Like the energy of the burnt paper, his energies—and the energies let off by all the activists of May 1970—disperse outward into the cosmos, never ending, even after the protests have been forced to a close, even after the burn marks are washed from the concrete. And, like the match flame that touches the eyes of the onlooker and continues on as an afterimage, he *continues* in those student activists who have taken up the call to end war for reasons that are almost impossible to put into words. It is in the space of this impossibility that my writing resides. I can only attempt to read the gesture, not in terms of life and death but in terms of continuation, not in terms of anger or futility but in terms of a nonviolent ethic that touches the common ground of all things.

### **The Horizons of Gesture**

Before we delve deeper into the historical dimensions of May 1970, I hope we can come to an understanding of why the term gesture is the apt one for describing Winne's self-immolation. I use the term to describe an action that aims at a horizon beyond the spatial and temporal bounds of the action itself. Many times

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<sup>37</sup> Here, we might see how Thich Nhat Hanh's practice of looking deeply breaks from the spatial-temporal coordinates that undergird Western epistemology in both its hegemonic and counter-hegemonic forms.

when we gesture, we gesture *toward* something, that is, we point toward a horizon that is beyond the reach of the immediate action. To illustrate this, let us imagine a hypothetical situation where you are lost and seeking the way north to your home. In response, I might triangulate our position in relation to the North Star. Folding my knowledge of the stars from the inside-out, I would then gesture northward. In this hypothetical, one would be foolish to take my action of pointing northward as a magic trick that would make your home crystallize out of the starlight. Instead, you would take my gesture as a symbol that tells you to carry on toward that northern horizon.

In a similar sense, Winne's gesture points toward a horizon beyond the bounds of its own action. Like the gesture of pointing northward, it becomes a symbol for those witnesses who are willing to look deeply. We are, of course, no longer dealing with a finger pointing toward stars. We are dealing with the collapse of the physical body. We are no longer dealing with a symbol that points home, but with a symbol that points toward a horizon of peace grounded in humanity's dawning awareness of inter-being. As we will see in Section II, this gesture gathers weight because it is inextricably bound up in the gravity of death. Winne commits himself—his *whole* self—to the final gesture and, without the possibility of a next day or a next action, he points a deathly luminous finger toward Vietnam and toward a horizon that lies beyond the violent way accepted by nation states, institutions, and indoctrinated subjects as the *only* road to peace. The deathly gravity of the gesture gives his preceding act of protest—walking into the emptied Free Speech area with a sign that reads “In God's Name, End the War”—a symbolic

power and resonance that pulls it beyond the mere act of protest. In fact, the deathly gravity of the gesture gives every preceding action in Winne's biography a symbolic power and resonance that pulls his life beyond mere biography. Through the deathly gesture, Winne becomes a black hole in historical time, the ghost of an action that retains its power to pull witnesses separated by time and space toward a horizon beyond the divisive and destructive order that structured and stratified life then and now.

## Part II.

### Touching the Historical Dimension Deeply

In a Dharma talk delivered to the monks of Plum Village, Thich Nhat Hanh describes the two different, but not unrelated, dimensions of reality. We have already encountered these two dimensions in our meditation on flame, cloud, and paper, but let us return to them again as discussed in this second talk:

In Plum Village, we speak of the two dimensions of reality: The historical dimension and the ultimate dimension... The historical dimension can be seen in the frame of time and space. There is a beginning period. There is a middle period. And there is a final, terminal period (ending period). And when we speak in terms of the three periods, we are in the historical dimension, but in the teaching of Plum Village, when you are able to touch deeply the historical dimension, you touch the ultimate dimension. That is why if you know how to live deeply in the present moment, the here and the now, you may have a chance to touch the non-local, the non-temporal dimension. (*Zencast* “The Ultimate Dimension”)

Building on this discussion, we can consider how the student of history and culture can touch the historical dimension deeply as she or he looks back on the artifacts of the past. To attempt this, we will need to take an imaginative leap back in historical time to May 1970. We will need to treat that moment as our present, not as a closed series of events set in stone or beaded into a rosary. If we can do this, we will see how certain gestures touched the non-local and non-temporal dimension that Thich Nhat Hanh describes here. To make this leap through time, we must remember that the U.S. was waging an unpopular proxy war in Southeast Asia, made all the more unpopular after the invasion of Cambodia at the end of April. If we found ourselves transported to May 1970, this would be all too apparent. We would see the images: the aerial views of bombs pulverizing the Vietnamese countryside, the images of

GIs burning huts, the footage of badly burnt villagers running from the firestorm of napalm, the photos of rows upon rows of mutilated bodies scattered in the fields and anonymous soldiers packed away in coffins draped in stars and stripes.

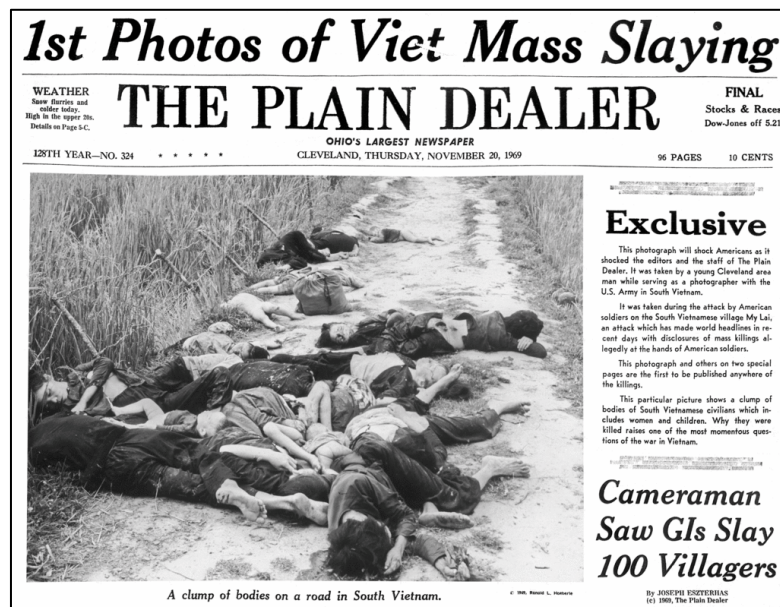


Figure 3.1: Front Page of *The Plain Dealer* Newspaper published on 20 November 1969



Figure 3.2: Photograph showing Caskets of U.S. servicemen 28 May 1965.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Image obtained from <http://vietnamwar-ru.livejournal.com/148910.html?thread=736942>

Those images would be beamed into our homes by a media that hadn't yet dulled our senses to reality. They would be seared into our minds. And then, on May 4, just a few short weeks ago, if we're imagining ourselves back in time, we would have seen the Ohio National Guard turn its guns on students at Kent State. A week from today, we would see the guns turn on black students at Jackson State. Six lives erased. Six more to add to the thousands upon thousands already dead. What would we do if we were transported across time to that moment in history?

Even if we cannot answer that question, we might be able to think about what we would *want* given the situation that confronted all of us: Many of us would want the war to end. We'd want others, whose vision was hardened to warfare, to recognize the cycle of violence that made these images inevitable. Many of us would want peace, not as a hollow sign, but as a real alternative to an order premised on militarism, racism, sexism, and class exploitation. This is what the student activists of May 1970 wanted. We can almost touch those desires now, across the years. There is anger and frustration, of course, but there is a utopian edge to that desire that sees beyond the established order, beyond its paradigm of violence, and that acts or refuses to act because of that desire. Let us take another step, slightly further back, to find the roots of the student activism of May 1970.

Since the mid-1960s student activists saw the UC system as a site and object of critique. Many student activists of this period were radicalized by the Civil Rights Movement, particularly from their involvement with groups like The Student



Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and other organizations that participated in and beyond the Freedom Summer of '64. These students brought their critical tools back to the university where they began to critique their institution for its role in preserving a contradictory status quo inside and outside its walls. For students affiliated with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) or Berkeley's Free Speech Movement, the university functioned as an un-democratic institution even though it was touted as a bastion of democratic ideals. In their eyes, the university's highly rationalized programs molded students into instruments for corporate or military ends rather than giving them the critical tools to transform society.

This critique was exacerbated by another contradiction: Students recognized that they, and the public beyond the ivory tower, had no voice in the operation of the public university. Though touted as a bastion of free thought, the UC had become a closed-system of Western knowledge, mainly accessible to middle and upper class white students trained to passively consume knowledge rather than actively using it to contribute to the common good of local communities and the world. Influenced heavily by Cold War ideologies, the elitist leaders of the UC system—the Regents—demonstrated that they were more concerned with profit and prestige than with the people inside or outside their walls. Along with their liberal managerial staff, they had the final say, not only on how the UC system would operate, but on what was speakable and unspeakable on its grounds. In this context, there was no room for dissent. Students who used subversive speech or participated in subversive activity—that is, speech or activity that threatened the elitist status quo—were

punished by disciplinary action and were monitored by government agencies such as COINTELPRO.

The Free Speech students, however, could not be deterred. Their movement empowered students, not just to have a nebulous political voice, but to take back the university and put it in the service of all people, especially those who were barred entry and who lived in worlds where systemic violence was most palpable. Their ethic, then, was the common good. Their tactic was civil disobedience. Both the ethic and tactic would be crucial for the anti-war protestors of May 1970, but this wasn't the only place where they drew their inspiration.

By the mid to late 1960s, the New Left and U.S. Third World Left voiced an urgent call for social transformation that attempted to push into more radical terrain than the Civil Rights and Free Speech Movements. Going beyond mainstream liberal political criticism and Old Leftist critiques, the critiques offered by the Women's Liberation Movement, Gay Liberation Movement, Black Power Movement, Chicano/a Movement, confronted the contradictions of modern industrial society. These movements focused their attention and actions against race, class, sexuality, and gender formations that shaped institutions and culture in exclusionary and destructive ways. The spectrum of their theories and practices brought to light the material and epistemological violence undergirding the U.S. nation state, its colonial and imperial projects, and institutions like the university that were complicit in the production rather than abolition of class, race, gender, and sexual hierarchies. These critiques found their way to UC campuses in direct ways with the emergence of student groups and coalitions linked to the movements (e.g.

Lumumba-Zapata Coalition) and indirectly with the emergence of a radical student consciousness that called for a utopian transformation that exceeded the bounds of liberal reform and integration.

The student anti-war activism of May 1970 was forged in this crucible and stoked further by the student movements in Paris, Prague, China, and the Third World. Though student activist critiques were as diverse as the movements that surrounded them, they found common ground in the opposition to the American war in Vietnam and the university's active role in the perpetuation of military violence. The student activist critique wasn't merely theoretical. Rather, it was grounded in facts that linked the university to the military industrial complex. These facts were brought to light when activists at several campuses, including UC San Diego, discovered and released the university's contracts with the military (Anderson 130). Though these military contracts were often couched in innocuous terms, like deep sea mapping or weather forecasting, it was clear that publically funded knowledge was being weaponized and deployed on the battlefield.

### **Sit-In**

Though student protests were not new in May 1970, the circumstances of that moment produced a greater degree of urgency: The clear links between the university and the military, the escalating military violence of late April, the continued military draft, and the Kent State killings, caused tensions in the university to boil over. The protests reached a peak in May 1970 when the largest student strike in U.S. history shutdown campuses across the nation. During this

strike, students occupied campus spaces associated with war research, extended rallies on to major highways, and reworked institutional spaces into sites of utopian pedagogy and collective forms of political participation (Katsiaficas 123, 127). Though one might be tempted to say that this strike came from the Left, it is more accurate to say that it was initiated by ideas and practices from the Left, but it soon spiraled into an event that transcended political party lines, pulling students and non-students from across the political spectrum into a space-time of refusal, a space-time where work and studies came to a standstill.

As a flashpoint of activity within this student strike, activists at UCSD staged protests, held teach-ins, walked out of classes, and staged sit-ins in departments that were conducting war research. It is this final tactic that I want us to turn to now. From April 29 to May 11, a coalition of students, faculty, and members from the San Diego community staged three sit-ins. They staged the first from April 29 - 30 at The Institute of Pure and Applied Physical Sciences (IPAPS). The second occurred on May 4, when students occupied the fifth floor of Urey Hall, home to the Aerospace and Mechanical Engineering offices and labs. A third sit-in was staged on May 12, again at IPAPS.<sup>39</sup> Depending on the source, reports show that the number of people ranged from fifty to two hundred students at each sit-in. The sites were strategically chosen, as they were suspected of being tied to war-research based on “advice-of-contract award” awarded by the CIA to the UCSD Visibility Lab (Anderson 130).

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<sup>39</sup> This occurred a day after Winne’s self-immolation and on the very day the university reopened after Governor Reagan and UC President Hitch’s three-day closure.

To get a glimpse inside these sit-ins, we can turn to the archive where we find traces of what transpired. The main source for grassroots coverage at UCSD during the 1960s and early 1970s was *The Indicator*, a student-run newspaper that expressed the political views of UCSD's New Left.<sup>40</sup> Unlike the more widely published *Triton Times*, this "free press" was divested from corporate advertisements and the staff refused to be influenced by the urgings of the administration or the outside pressures of the conservative military community of La Jolla. Though not free of ideological mediation, the newspaper offers glimpses of the various activities that took place that May, and it provides one of the few grassroots sources of coverage surrounding a partially documented history that continues to be erased through the redaction of primary sources in the name of privacy rights.

In early May, *The Indicator* staff published an issue largely devoted to covering the student strike as it transpired locally. One article, in particular, offers a view of the first and second sit-ins at UCSD that challenges the views expressed by the Chancellor, Academic Senate, and San Diego media, all of whom were quick to dismiss the sit-in as a sign of the student's immaturity or irrationality. In an article titled "Why a Sit-In?" anonymous activists document the events and motivations that led to the sit-ins at IPAPS and Urey Hall. They begin by describing student and faculty dissatisfaction with a meeting where faculty members provided "shaky justifications" for war research conducted at the Visibility Lab. After the meeting,

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<sup>40</sup> The title was eventually changed to *The New Indicator*.

the dissatisfied students collectively decided to hold their own meeting at IPAPS, which eventually turned into an overnight sit-in that disrupted “business as usual” for a workday. The authors then describe the sit-in at Urey Hall, explaining how it “was more successful than the first one” drawing in even more people and stopping down war research for a second day. The students offer a rationale that answers that question posed by the article’s title:

Sit-ins like these two are not going to stop the collaboration of the University with war research. It would be foolish to suppose that we can sit-in until all the ties between UCSD personnel and war research are severed. But mass sit-ins are probably the best and most effective means we as students have for successfully disrupting the war-supporting activities which go on in the university. This tactic has been proved successful because the people were fighting together and refused to be intimidated by the administration. We are no longer deceived by attempts on the part of faculty and administration to obscure the university’s complicity on the war. Many people have questioned the advisability of a sit-in. We feel that this very militant and direct action is among the better ways that students can fight the war in Southeast Asia by fighting war research at home. In order for an action to be an effective means of protest, it must meet certain criteria. Roughly speaking, there are three specifications that an action should meet. An action must be visible. Unless one’s feelings are communicated to all concerned, in a manner visible to all, a demand of the people is ignored. An action must involve mass participation. Participation of many is necessary in order to exert maximum pressure and indicate the feelings of the people in a unified struggle against the power structure. We also believe that an action must be concrete and directed. This means that it must affect or disrupt the war related research connected with the campus. Unless those who by their own activities support the war in Southeast Asia find those activities affected by an action, they will ignore, as they have in the past, mere vocal protest or any demonstration that does not directly interfere with their activities. (*Indicator*, 5 May 1970)

This perspective stands in sharp contrast to the views of the sit-in presented by liberal administrators like Chancellor McGill and the liberal and conservative media of San Diego, all of whom stood at a clear ideological distance from the New Leftist

activists (*Chancellor's Files* and *Student Newspapers*). While administrators and media focused on the illegality of such protests, the student activists who write “Why a Sit-In?” offer an analysis of the sit-in that shifts the focus from superficial debates about legality to the university’s complicity in warfare and the student’s power to challenge imperialist violence within their institutions. This position deserves admiration for looking deeper than the administration and local media are willing to look when it comes to local protests. Still, we need to look deeper to see what gets lost as the activists attempt to impose words and a singular New Leftist ideology on the sit-in. We can apply this scrutiny, not to dismiss these views, but to see how those participating in the sit-in embody a praxis that is more revolutionary than the writers’ words—for that matter, *any* of our words—might allow.

The student activists who write “Why a Sit In?” unconsciously bend their view of the sit-in to the hegemony of rationalized, goal-oriented, action. We see this when they frame the sit-in in terms of “militant action” and also in the criteria used to measure the “effectiveness” of this action (i.e. visibility, clarity of message, and mass participation). The writers focus on the sit-in as a means toward a “concrete” and “visible” end, emphasizing the tactical power to shutdown war research at the university. Implicit in this view is the idea that those who participate share a common will that aims toward a singular end. That assumption, though necessary for tactical purposes, risks instrumentalizing the sit-in and cutting off a deeper dimension that lies beyond all concrete ends. To consider this dimension, we might imagine the event in the heat of the moment and freeze it there in a state of suspended animation.

Looking over this frozen moment, the sit-in can be seen in a revolutionary light. It appears as a gesture taken by a people that puts into practice an alternative to the hegemonic path of violent action adopted by warring states and institutions, including the public university, that were complicit in the violence. In this moment, various individuals—students, faculty, and members of the public—are pulled into each other's orbit. Most likely, they do not have a common end in sight. Some, like the authors of "Why a Sit In?" might see the sit-in as a means of shutting down the war research; others may doubt the effectiveness of the protest, but they participate nonetheless; others might simply be attracted to the banners, the singing, the slogans. Yet, by bringing themselves to rest as a group, by not acting according to routine, the protestors touch upon a dimension kept hidden by the divisive thought and destructive action adopted by warring states and their institutions. In the moment, they break from their roles as student, teacher, and worker, as well as from their political affiliations as radical, moderate, or conservative. They become a community of peace whose nonviolent gesture momentarily suspends an institution's active role in violence. Yet, it is the core of their nonviolent praxis—not the momentary suspension of war research—that is truly revolutionary.

At the core of the sit-in is a selfless and boundless love. This love carries individuals beyond doctrines and ideologies, beyond the walls of a single occupied department, beyond the philosophical and physical borders that secure the fictions of the ego and nation state. It is this love that carries the community of peace into a continuum with those across space and across time who chose a path of peace rather than a path of divisive ideology and destructive action. In the gesture of the sit-in,



the community of peace aligns its praxis most poignantly with the community of peace in Vietnam, whose gestures Thich Nhat Hanh reflects on in his essay “Love in Action.” He writes, “During our struggle, many scenes of love arose spontaneously—a monk sitting calmly before an advancing tank; women and children raising their bare hands against barbed wire; students confronting military police who looked like monsters wearing masks and holding bayonets; young women running through tear gas with their babies in their arms; hunger strikes held silently and patiently; monks and nuns burning themselves to death to try to be heard above the raging noise of war” (*Love in Action* 44). Though the context is drastically different in San Diego and Vietnam, and the State reaction more dire for those who choose nonviolence in the warzones of Vietnam, the community of peace is nonetheless united by their gestures, all of which testify to a love that refuses to fit into a divisive and destructive world order. At the risk of sounding idealistic, we might say that it is this love—not the accumulation of armaments, not targeted airstrikes, not even peace talks and legal armistices—that is the only ground upon which the cycle of violence is to be broken and supplanted by a truly revolutionary way. For love is the only spark that burns through that manmade veil that keeps people separate and at odds.

Alas, we cannot freeze time except in the realm of our imagination. Time rolls on. The sit-in of May 1970 cannot escape its forward movement. Just give it enough time. Give it enough time and the protestors will come back down to earth. They will return to the occupied department far away from the battlefield, fall back into themselves and the social roles that separate them from others close at hand and

farther afield in Vietnam. Give it enough time, and the sit-in will end. Most will go their separate ways. Of course, some, like the writers of “Why a Sit-In?” will remain shaken by their participation in such protests. They will struggle against the separateness imposed upon them and others by the dominant regimes that cordon off individuals in time and space. They will come back into themselves after the sit-in with radicalized words and a radicalized will, but even the radical word and will falls into the trap of putting ends (and the next action that might push us closer to those ends) above that which innervates the gesture (love) as well as that which is unveiled in the gesture: the dimension of interbeing, a hidden continuum veiled behind the everyday, hidden behind all the usual business.

### **Empty Space**

We—the “we” concerned with a peaceful alternative to State violence—should not underestimate the revolutionary possibilities unveiled by the nonviolent gestures of May. After all, why should we underestimate those gestures when ideologues concerned with maintaining the course of violent action saw in those very gestures the sign of revolution? We see this awareness ripple through the surface of a letter written by UC President Charles Hitch to the Regents of California on May 8, 1970. Hitch writes,

Let me say... to the Regents, as I did along with a group of my fellow university presidents yesterday to the President of the United States: This is not (underline) an ordinary dissent or protest sparked by a minority. Rather it represents a deeply and broadly held concern and resentment by the majority of young people and indeed faculty throughout the nation's universities and colleges -- joined by a broad spectrum of the nation's citizenry at large. (*Chancellor's Files*)

Like Hitch, university administrators around the country were frightened, not only by the fact that the institution had been brought to a standstill by the people, but by the deeper challenges these gestures posed to the established order. In response, several university administrations around the country declared an official State of Emergency, which gave the police and National Guard legal authority to halt the protests with force (Katsiaficas).

The power bloc in California took a different approach. Led by Governor Ronald Reagan, authorities in California deployed seemingly benign strategies of dealing with the protests. As decided in a private phone call with UC President Hitch and CSU Chancellor Glen Dumke, Reagan decided to implement a state of suspended operation in the UC system rather than declaring a State of Emergency (*Chancellor's Files*). He would not have another People's Park. Rather, the whole university system would be shut down from May 7 through May 12 for a "period of reflection" aimed at "lessening the tension and emotion" (*Chancellor's Files*, Letter from President Hitch to Regents of The University of California 8 May 1970). By closing the university on these grounds, liberal administrators sought to seize the time, and create the empty space, necessary for silencing the most revolutionary calls of the protestors of May.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Beyond the three-day suspension of the university, the summer would provide ample time for national, state, and local authorities to begin systematic analyses of the situation and new means of defusing the unrest. See "Powell Memo," *The Report of The President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, and *Chancellor's Files* in Mandeville Collections

Even though the government's approach in California appears benign on the surface, it was undergirded by violence. If we look deeply, we see that the defenders of the status quo met the May protests with covert warfare. This war was waged, not only against self-proclaimed radicals, but against all those who refused to march in step with the system, all those who refused to conform to the narrow subjectivity constructed within the bounds of isolated individualism and unquestioning adherence to a violent nationalism. The term "subversive" became the catch all phrase used to describe and discredit all these new enemies of the state. Reagan and his liberal bedfellows would soon take overt action against these subversives in the university. They created a police apparatus on campuses that kept statistics on "disturbances," recorded the names of individuals who were disciplined for protesting, and deployed the force of law in Penal Code 626.4 and 626.6 to punish those who "disrupted the orderly operation of the campus" (*Chancellor's Files*, Box 3).

When we look deeper, we see that a more subtle and insidious violence lies behind these strategies of restoring law and order. The gentle hand of the liberal State places a hidden stranglehold on a revolutionary consciousness. This plays out on two fronts: First, it occurs as the liberal and conservative media steps in to manage the representation of the protests. Seeing the gestures of May through narrow ideological lenses, the media casts these gestures as isolated and unmemorable events enacted by a few troublemakers or troubled individuals. Secondly, the gentle hand of the liberal State doles out weak rationalized reforms that respond to the surface demands of the protests but not to a revolutionary cry

that reaches beyond the borders of the self and the nation. This move retrospectively instrumentalizes the gesture as a means toward an end, an action that can be forgotten once reform is enacted.

Over time, the gentle approach of the State proves to be effective for reconsolidating a hegemonic power structure premised on violence, discrimination, and greed. Rather than using the bullet and the bayonet on its middle classes, neoconservatives and neoliberals alike would cede some institutional ground to the social movements. They would offer reforms and integration into the dominant system rather than revolutionary change. Within that framework, the violence of liberal capitalism was free to extend by other means, namely by shoring up race and class hierarchies and putting public institutions in the service of private financial interests, including companies invested heavily in the production of human misery and planetary destruction. Within this soon-to-be dominant framework, the only horizons worth reaching for would be monetary horizons, the only subjectivity worth inhabiting would be the rational competitive individual, the only value worth reaching for would be market values.

This, of course, is the framework of our times, our *here* and *now*. Within this context, we might search the musty archives for the names of the activists who gestured toward a different horizon, only to come across redactions. Their names, struck through with thick black bars, testify to more than the erasure of a proper name; they testify to that cunning enemy's futile attempts to close off the most revolutionary horizons. I say futile because that revolution is here in every moment, waiting to break through the man-made walls that keep us separate and at war. For

now, let's work against the ceaseless flow of history by focusing, not on a proper name lost to history, but to one common person who peeked through the walls.

### **Against History**

"It is not only a matter of what history does to the body but what subjects do with what history has done with the body."

– Allen Feldman, paraphrasing Jean Paul Sartre

On Saturday May 10, 1970 George Winne Jr. stepped into the emptied Free Speech area on the UCSD campus. *What had history done with his body?* History had given him the individual rights and liberties afforded to a white, middle-class male subject—that is, an inequitable yet still marginal access to the resources of the commons. History had given him the time and space to study ancient history and to excel in ROTC. History's dominant regimes of thought and practice had also constructed him as a loner, a troubled individual in the eyes of many who bear witness to his gesture. History had also constructed the elitist space that surrounded him and the racialized spaces beyond visible sight, seventeen miles away in Barrio Logan and 8,000 miles away in Southeast Asia.<sup>42</sup>

*What does George Winne Jr. do with what history had done with his body?*

He offers us a gesture. Experiencing history in his body and mind, Winne uses his body to gesture beyond the established order—beyond the history—that has produced him as a living subject and others as corpses in Vietnam. He sets himself aflame in a public space where administrators had fought since the mid-1960s to

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<sup>42</sup> Another history, a marginal one that goes largely unwritten, had allowed him to see that the path of divisive and violent action are not the only way.

ban the outside public from entering and taking part in demonstrations, a space where Reagan and his liberal bedfellows had now emptied of its collective body of protest. Stepping into that emptied public space, Winne momentarily abolishes the emptiness by exposing that which has been banished from that space: not simply the burnt and blackened body, but a body that reaches beyond itself to touch the pain of the other and to show us, the witnesses, that the violence and suffering that appears far afield is imbedded—not only within a racist, patriarchal, heteronormative, class-elitist, and militaristic system—but inside each and every one of us.

History, though, is relentless. It cannot let the gesture enter collective memory in this, its purest form. It must superimpose upon it a narrative with a definitive beginning, middle, and end: *George Winne Jr. was born on April 2, 1947. He studied history at UCSD. He excelled in ROTC. He questioned the war. He took his life on May 11, 1970 in an act of protest against the war.* Winne enters history precisely as the antithesis to that which he touched in his final gesture: He is reconstructed in an afterlife of historical discourse and memory as an individualized biographical subject. Framed in this way, the narrative is easily classified as the story of a protestor or suicide when, on a deeper level, it exceeds both.

Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us not to settle for this shortsighted way of seeing the gesture. In a letter written in the wake of several Vietnamese monk immolations—including the famously photographed self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc—he writes against the grain of what history would have us remember of

their lives and deaths. The letter, addressed to Martin Luther King Jr., reads as follows:

The self-burning of Vietnamese Buddhist monks in 1963 is somehow difficult for the Western Christian conscience to understand. The Press spoke then of suicide, but in the essence, it is not. It is not even a protest. What the monks said in the letters they left before burning themselves aimed... at moving the hearts of the oppressors and at calling the attention of the world to the suffering endured then by the Vietnamese...The Vietnamese monk, by burning himself, say with all his strength and determination that he can endure the greatest of sufferings to protect his people. But why does he have to burn himself to death? What he really aims at is the expression of his will and determination, not death. In the Buddhist belief, life is not confined to a period of 60 or 80 or 100 years: life is eternal. Life is not confined to this body: life is universal. To express will by burning oneself, therefore, is not to commit an act of destruction but to perform an act of construction, i.e., to suffer and to die for the sake of one's people. This is not suicide. Suicide is an act of self-destruction...

I believe with all my heart that the monks who burned themselves did not aim at the death of the oppressors but only at a change in their policy. Their enemies are not man. They are intolerance, fanaticism, dictatorship, cupidity, hatred and discrimination which lie within the heart of man. I also believe with all my being that the struggle for equality and freedom you lead in Birmingham, Alabama... is not aimed at the whites but only at intolerance, hatred and discrimination. These are real enemies of man — not man himself. In our unfortunate father land we are trying to yield desperately: do not kill man, even in man's name. Please kill the real enemies of man which are present everywhere, in our very hearts and minds.

In this letter, Thich Nhat Hanh gives us a lens for seeing the gesture of self-immolation beyond the labels and categories offered to us by history. Through this lens, he sees the gesture of self-immolation in terms of construction rather than destruction: One dies for the sake of people who remain under the invisible war-banners of the enemy. One dies so that others can see the banners and beyond them. This lens also allows Thich Nhat Hanh to see life beyond the bounds of those



ontological categories that sequester life to an ego-bound biographical story: Choosing self-immolation as a means of encountering violence, one aims beyond oneself. One reaches out, knowing that one's biographical end is not the end of life, nor is it the end of a long movement for peace that continues in and beyond the death of the body.

With the remainder of this section, let us go against the flow of history by looking at George Winne's gesture through this lens. Let us see it as a constructive rather than destructive gesture that calls our attention to the "real enemy" and that pulls us toward a dimension hidden in plain sight. Let us look deeply, so that we can see it in terms of continuation rather than the neat beginnings and endings of history.

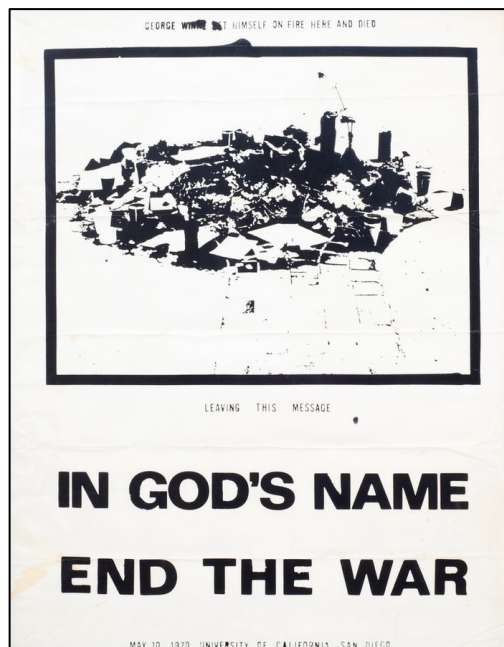
### **A Call**

The challenge to see Winne's gesture in this way presents itself when we consider his final words, written on a cardboard sign that he carried into the empty plaza. An image, featured in Paul Alexander Juutilainen's documentary *Herbert's Hippopotamus*, shows a police officer holding the burnt sign.



**Figure 3.3:** Archival footage featured in *Herbert's Hippopotamus*

This image is so grainy that we cannot make out the words. But those words are not burnt from time. Some, who felt the weight of this gesture, would not let them turn to dust. Below, we see the written words on a poster made by students who organized a vigil for Winne.



**Figure 3.4: Student-produced flyer featuring George Winne Jr.'s written message<sup>43</sup>**

What are we to make of this invocation of God in a secular materialist order where God died long ago? While critics of Winne have used these words to dismiss him as a religious loner, we might consider the possibility that a sense of spirituality provided Winne with a lens for seeing beyond the material order of warfare and

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<sup>43</sup> Image obtained from Web at <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2013/may/09/fanfare-maksymowicz-campus-legend-shadow-fallen-st/>

violence.<sup>44</sup> For a moment, let us reflect on these words with that possibility in mind. Let's begin with that first phrase "In God's Name."

Rather than dismissing Winne because of this religious invocation, I wonder if we can consider "God's name" as an imperfect sign of that dimension beyond the historical where the superimposed boundaries that keep people divided and at war dissolve. This doesn't seem like a stretch. After all, the various names of God once served as poetic expressions of that unrepresentable and uncontainable dimension that resides behind all human words, measurements, and theories. Take for example, the poetry of the Christian tradition before it was hijacked by empires past and present: In that tradition, Yahweh translates to "I Am That Am," a paradoxical phrase where the Godhead names itself by pointing, not to a particular contained form, but back to the uncontainable unfolding of existence itself. Similarly, the Jewish mystical tradition names God with the aleph (א) which is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The aleph symbolizes both God's name and the glottal stop between spoken words. Thus, instead of giving a particular shape to God, the aleph tells us that God is nothing and everything, the word and the absence of the word, the voice and the breath. In both of these examples, "God's name" identifies a limit

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<sup>44</sup> One might call this "sense of spirituality" irrational. We might ask, though, which is more in touch with reality: a sense that sees the non-visible interconnections between self and other, or a rational sense that superimposes rankings on all those superficial differences and fragile distinctions that divide what is, at its core, an indivisible world? Two points we might consider: 1. *How dependent we are upon all that is outside our self.* Consider all the workers and resources that went into producing the materials we touch, consume, or wear on an everyday basis. Consider all the ecological processes that go into creating and sustaining the "I": the cloud that produces the rain, the rain that waters the tree, the tree that produces the oxygen, the oxygen that gives us air to breathe, the body that returns to the soil. Think also of our day-to-day words, ideas, and practices and how contingent they are upon planned or unplanned encounters with others. 2. *How the rational materialist approach has led, quite logically, to rationalized forms of consumption and violence that corrode the planet and leave its people in a state of malaise.*

point within representation itself, the paradox of giving a name to that which cannot be named. I believe this is the exquisite paradox held within the first three words written on Winne's sign.

Now, let us consider the final phrase "End the War." Though this appears to be an imperative statement, I wonder if we can see it as a call, a call to an anonymous community of witnesses who are not yet present in the space or time of Winne's final gesture. In this light, the statement "End the war" is less concerned with laying down a command—or commandment—for President Nixon or the U.S. government than it is with calling witnesses into a dimension that Winne has touched, a dimension that transcends the man-made order of warfare and violence.

The philosopher Herbert Marcuse, who was then a professor at UCSD and leading theorist of the New Left, seemed to see the message in this way, at least in part. On May 14, 1970, Marcuse and a few hundred faculty, students, and others from the San Diego community entered the Plaza to memorialize Winne and to continue the anti-war demonstrations. There, Marcuse spoke directly of Winne. He described him as a "loner," who "without the possibility of joining the protest, was thrown back on himself." He continued, "Intensify your protest... Please intensify your protest—hear the message this young man left" (*News Clippings*, La Jolla Light, 14 May 1970). Looking closely at this statement, we see both an openness and shortsightedness that is part and parcel of the Western philosophical tradition, even in its most radical forms. Showing a depth of vision, Marcuse acknowledges Winne's message as an open call, yet he also forecloses the dimension touched upon by the gesture of self-immolation by constructing Winne as an individual who failed

to find the collective. For Marcuse, Winne's message reaches across time and space, but Winne himself falls back into himself. It is up to us, I believe, to salvage the call and to recognize the deepest sense of self that Winne fell toward.

### **Touching the Ultimate Dimension**

All of this discussion of Winne's words is moot without the gesture of self-immolation that Winne attaches to them. Without that gesture, they would be words of protest on cardboard—no more, no less. Yet they cannot be unbound from the gesture, just as the gesture cannot be unbound from the words. They are held in each other's gravity. Through the gesture, the words take on a deeper resonance. Through the words, the gesture points toward Vietnam and beyond it. Let us now, turn to the gesture in light of those words.

Through the gesture, Winne reaches beyond the historical dimension where the violence of human discrimination and separation leads quite logically to warfare, mass suffering, and premature death. He reaches toward the ultimate dimension. But he goes beyond reaching. Through the gesture of self-immolation, Winne touches the dimension where the self is inseparable from the other, where the pain of one is the pain of all. This is a bold claim that needs to be qualified. To do so, let us turn again to Thich Nhat Hanh. In the same talk cited above, he offers us a useful analogy to physics that will help us envision that dimension that Winne touches upon:

In Plum Village we learn how to be established firmly in the here and the now, in order to live the here and the now in depth. When we are able to touch the here and the now deeply, we have a chance to touch

eternity. When we touch the here deeply, we may have the chance to touch the non-here. Non-here doesn't mean the *there*. In the circle of science today, they use the word local. Local means here or there. And now we have non-local as a scientific term, transcending time. In Buddhist literature, we have the expression [...], means transcending time. Transcending time. If you study quantum physics, you find out in the quantum state everything behaves in a non-local and non-temporal way. Not only non-local, but non-temporal. It means you transcend time and space. We have found out scientifically that time and space are not two separate entities. Time and space are the two aspects of the same thing. Without time, there can be no space. And without space, there will be no time. That is why non-local also means non-temporal. And on the level of the quanta [sic], they behave non-locally and they behave non-temporally. They touch eternity. They touch absolute time and space. (Zencast "The Ultimate Dimension")

Through the gesture, Winne behaves non-locally and non-temporally. Through the gesture, he touches eternity. I am not using that loaded word "eternity" to suggest anything of the sort embraced by religious literalists or fanatics who mistake religions' poetic expressions of reality *as* reality. This is not a Heaven filled with angels trumpeting upon high. It is not a Nirvana where virgins blossom forth from lotus flowers. Simply put, Winne's gesture lifts the man-made veil imposed upon reality. And, through it, he touches a dimension hidden right under our noses, a dimension where linear time and stratified space give way to an absolute space-time that existed before humans invented history, a space-time where the boundaries separating *self* from *other* become thinner and thinner until they ultimately dissolve. Giving himself over to this dimension fully, Winne embodies the pain of the other who is dying in man's warzones only relatively far away from the Plaza. He steps into a crumbling body that, beneath it all, was always his body. He takes on a pain that, beneath it all, was always his pain... and ours.

It is crucial to note here, that Winne's gesture does not call us toward those shallow forms of liberal empathy critiqued by such theorists as Saidiya Hartman. It does not ask those who have a comfortable position in man's social hierarchies to shed tears or self-flagellate for those others who suffer the routinized and rationalized violence that are part and parcel of being a racialized, gendered, sexualized, or foreign other. Rather, his gesture calls us to intensify our protests, as Marcuse says—to intensify our protests in order to end the warfare built into all the man-made hierarchies that keep us separate by locking us into the historically constructed fictions and fictional meanings given to ego and nation. But it calls us in a very particular way that should be clarified: At the risk of sounding controversial, we can say that the gesture of self-immolation calls us to immolate ourselves, not physically but consciously—that is, in a way that allows us to pass beyond the borders of ego-self and nation and beyond the fictions of linear historical time and stratified space. Only when we look there—only when we look deeply—will we see that the violence targeted at “them” is a violence against all. Only when we look there—only when we look deeply—will we recognize the pain and suffering of the “other” as a common pain. Only when we look there—only when we look deeply—will our protests reach their most revolutionary intensity.

### Call & Response in a Black Hole

“Something happened on the day he died  
 Spirit rose a metre and stepped aside  
 Somebody else took his place, and bravely cried  
 (I’m a blackstar, I’m a blackstar)” – David Bowie

There is something paradoxical about Winne’s call: the one who calls is no longer there in time or space to see or hear any possible response. Yet communication does not stop or fail in the face of apparent absence. In fact, just the opposite: Without the body, the call is amplified, at least for those attuned to its frequency. This might sound counter-intuitive, so let us take time to consider it.

To do so, we might return to the site of the sit-in the day after the protest. Where have the protestors gone? As we have already seen, those who participated in the sit-in came back to earth, back to themselves. They could not escape the physics of forward-motion, the pull of linear time, and the fictional geometries imposed by physical form and stratified space. They moved on, locked in—at the bare minimum—by the boundaries of their flesh and bodily needs. At times, of course, many of them would reach out toward the same boundless love they touched at the sit-in, but they would always come back to themselves, back to the historical dimension. This is not a judgment of the participants. This is just what it means to be *in* the world but not *of* it.

Winne, on the other hand, escapes that physics. Through the gesture, he eternally points toward the boundless love that is at the heart of nonviolence. In this way his gesture of self-burning creates an opening in history, a black hole, that exerts a profound gravity on those who enter its orbit. Pulled in by this gravity, we



might feel our own walls crumbling, our own selves dissolving. Moving toward that hollow center, we might see how illusory the distinctions are between the “other” who calls and the “I” who is here to respond to the call. This is where the true “constructiveness” of self-immolation lies. Its call resonates in and through us. We find ourselves stepping in to fill the void. We find ourselves becoming another’s continuation: a voice that must shout “end the war” in lieu of the other’s silence, a body that must act in lieu of the other’s absence.

### **Part III.**

#### **Continuations**

When we see Winne's gesture in terms of continuation, we see a shape that explodes the neat beginnings and endings of linear historical time. His gesture brings his body into alignment with all those across time and space who forsook a path that turns the wheel of violence over and over again. He becomes a singular point within a constellation composed of those who saw the surrender of the self as nothing to fear for, seeing beyond the walls of self, they recognized the continuity of all things which the warriors of the nations and empires lose sight of when carving up and ordering *their* cosmos around the illusory distinctions "I" and "you" and "us" and "them." For a flickering moment, he becomes their manifestation, their continuation. When his particular manifestation ends, that long movement continues with him as a trace within it, an energy that hasn't come to an end. And we, who stand across the gulf of time and space, begin to see his self-immolation beyond the terms of failure that are applied to it. Rather than seeing it in terms of what is lost, we see, floating before our eyes, the revolutionary alternative this constellation carries across time and space: the potential for a nonviolent way.

#### **Out of Sight, Out of Mind**

Yet, as we have seen, most people don't remember Winne in this way. They don't see him as a blackstar within that constellation. They do not hear the call, nor do they see themselves in terms of being the continuation of those who gestured toward a dimension beyond a historical dimension where apparent division has

become reality and warfare the only way. Part of this shortsightedness has to do with the current context inhabited by those of us who live in the United States and the other epicenters of liberal capitalist empire, but the roots of our forgetfulness run deeper than the current moment. Within liberal capitalist cultures, the realm of inter-being is hidden behind the visible surface of the commodity form and our individual masks of identity. Of course, this atomization of life has been further accentuated by the neoliberal turn of the last four decades and the hyper-militarization of culture since 9/11.

The philosophy and practices of neoliberalism, combined with the contradictory historical lineage of both liberalism and capitalism, have forged a dominant system that gambles with people's lives, deaths, and futures rather than investing in the common good. The ideologies and practices circulating within this system mold a mask of subjectivity with a more shortsighted field of vision than the previous masks held out to the ego in the past. A fiction adorned by a fiction! Gazing through that mask, the subject sees his or her peers as competition and strangers as threats or objects of suspicion. The mask is also hyper conscious of its own fragility. It knows—or better, it has learned to know—that we live in a violent world where terror is just outside our walls and borders. The barbarians are at our gates, as the warmongers say, and the only way of stopping them is by standing our ground, raising our guns, and deploying our drones. Violent action, it seems, is the only road to peace. Walter Benjamin's ghost rolls uncomfortably in his grave and begs us to see this as a sign that the enemy is once again victorious.

It is hard for people raised in this system to look back at a gesture like self-immolation in a deep way, but that does not mean it is impossible. The mask of subjectivity can be peeled away. When it is, people can re-member what was never allowed entry into the memory banks. They can recognize the shape of revolutionary constellations that were never given proper form in the history books. Before we consider the ways in which this is possible, let us consider the challenges that narrow the window of possibility in that institution where Winne self-immolated and where I now find myself writing these words four and a half decades later.

We can consider the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) a reflection and moving part within the dominant system that surrounds it. In the patriarchal, white supremacist, heteronormative, militaristic, and economically exploitative system—which hides behind political labels like democracy or liberalism—all interest in the public or common good has given way to private interests. In the university, the cost of education has shifted from public funding to students and their families (especially in the form of debt), corporate donors, and global streams of revenue including international student recruitment. This shift results in a dramatic change to the institutional character of the university: Humanities and social science programs are seen as obsolete because they do not generate monetary value.<sup>45</sup> STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)

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<sup>45</sup> Still, the knowledge produced by these disciplines is continually kept from the public by gatekeeper companies that make a profit on access to academic journals.

fields, on the other hand, have become the darling of the corporations. Their research has become a for-profit enterprise, cut off from the public by corporate gatekeepers, and put in the service of private ends rather than the public good.

The neoliberalization of the university fits hand and glove with the booming business of warfare. Within the context of the so-called free market, the question is not right or wrong, but how to open new streams of revenue that allow the corporate university to grow and expand purely on financial terms.<sup>46</sup> If investment in prisons equates to financial growth, then university managers invest.<sup>47</sup> If military contracts are lucrative, then university managers will bid for them. The latter is especially true at the University of California, San Diego. UCSD has a long historical relationship with the military industrial complex. Part of this is due to its geographic location in San Diego, a strategic port for the U.S. Navy and training ground for The Marine Corp. The university's founding fathers, including Roger Revelle, had military ties which allowed them to negotiate with the military for government owned land in the extremely affluent city of La Jolla, which might as well have been an alien world for San Diego's working class white communities and communities of color. That relationship with the military continued to structure the operation of the university long after ground for the university was broken in 1960. As we already saw, the

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<sup>46</sup> The social costs of the neoliberalization are immeasurable. It builds exclusionary walls around institutions like UCSD. These walls keep out all those communities and ideologies that are not seen as profitable. In California's working class communities of color, for example, schools have been transformed into militarized carceral zones that look very similar to the prisons or warzones where many young people will be pipelined to in their so-called future. Likewise, radical women and queer communities whose ideas and practices oppose the established order are seen as valueless in the system. When they do manage to make it into the university, their success and mobility is blocked by formal and informal institutional punishments.

<sup>47</sup> Only recently has the UC system divested from for-profit prisons, but it still remains heavily invested in the public prison system and the war machine.

university conducted research to support the war in Vietnam. And today, UC San Diego continues to be bound up in the military industrial complex. For example, some of its world-renowned STEM departments participate in violence by researching and developing weapons, predator drones, and technologies used on the militarized and lethal border just seventeen miles south of the university.

### **Aesthetics of Remembrance**

Within this context, Winne and the anti-war movement is marked off as unmemorable. We know this because there is no trace of them in the institutional histories and glossy brochures for the university. We know this because when we walk into Revelle Plaza there was, until very recently, nothing to remind us of the people who protested, let alone the nonviolent path they gestured toward. We should be clear though. Their absence is not a matter of conspiracy. The memory war is much more subtle than that. Simply put, those who write the histories and plan the built environments do not see anything worth remembering in what ideology constructs and history remembers as a suicide and a forgettable protest from a bygone era. If anything, it's just bad PR, not a marketable history that would attract students or revenue streams into the university.

Culture could be a site where we encounter these buried histories and remember what can't be recorded by the official histories. But the neoliberal university culture has overwhelmingly come to reflect that of the corporate world. We might call to mind the many hollow buzzwords used to market the university such as excellence, leadership, integrity, and diversity. We might also think of the

many consumerist festivals that draw in crowds who, in a different context, might have been attracted by the rhythms of counter-cultural music or anti-war rallies on campus. For now, though, we will focus our attention on the built space of the university itself, and how sites that might allow people to *re-member what has been forgotten* have been closed off or co-opted. As an example, let's consider the privatization of art at the University of California, San Diego.

At UCSD, all art is curated by a private committee known as the Stuart Art Committee. According to the website and brochures, the Stuart Collection, "seeks to enrich the cultural, intellectual, and scholarly life of the UCSD campus and of the San Diego community by building and maintaining a unique collection of site-specific works by leading artists of our time." This innocuous mission statement hides a contradiction: Despite its best intentions, the Stuart Committee's role as the singular source of art gives it a power *over* that community. It is an artistic gatekeeper, defining not only what art the community sees when it enters campus, but the boundaries of the public's aesthetic experience. This isn't to suggest that there is malicious intent on the part of the Stuart Committee. The arbiter at the gates is the committee's sense of taste, a fondness for high art produced by world-renowned artists. As we will see, this rich taste closes off the liberatory possibilities of the aesthetic dimension.

If we walk around UCSD, with a mindful eye on its history and the dominant ideologies and practices that govern the university and society, we might feel we are drifting through a landscape dreamt up by a mind out of joint with the

realities behind the slogans and corporate banners of neoliberalism. The pieces in the Stuart Collection erupt through space as abstract, ahistorical, free-floating signifiers of nothing, like so many artistic stalactites and stalagmites emerging to fill the cavernous empty spaces of the university. This isn't to say that the pieces themselves are devoid of meaning. The Stuart Collection's website, its smart device apps, and the beautifully designed art book *Landmarks* explain the complex and nuanced meanings suggested by each work. Yet, we must remember that these meanings are mostly obscure to a public who has fewer and fewer opportunities to think about, let alone study, arts and humanities. In our current context, these fields are even less accessible because of the push to defund and dismantle programs that offer universities little in terms of *monetary* value and new revenue streams.

The Stuart Committee seems ignorant to this reality. It continues to spend millions of dollars to fill space with artwork that matches its tastes. We could rightfully point out here that those tastes are exclusionary,<sup>48</sup> but for now, a simple irony will suffice: the Committee's tastes were cultivated in a period when arts and humanities were publicly funded, more accessible, and taken seriously as vehicles for social progress. To fill a campus with "high art" in a context so dramatically different than that earlier moment is a sign of cognitive dissonance, not only on the Committee's part, but on the part of an institution that sells the public canvas to men and women with fine tastes and big wallets.

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<sup>48</sup> In that they relegate art from working class communities and communities of color to the category of "low art," which is socially constructed as the inferior art.



One is never sure how to interact with the pieces in The Stuart Collection. One is left mesmerized before them, as if he or she has just entered Oz or Wonderland. The most one can do is pick up his or her cell phone and take a picture of a surreal object in front of a building that used to, until recent budget cuts, house a freshman library. This mesmerism is not accidental. The Stuart Committee has fully embraced a fashionable aesthetic that revels in the infinity of meanings offered to the spectator by the artistic spectacle. Though the postmodern approach to aesthetics seems liberatory on its face, it hollows out the very thing within art that has the power to liberate: a core that pulls the spectator into its gravity, a core that allows the spectator to touch history deeply and see beyond its veils. Without this core, art risks becoming merely another billboard alongside corporate billboards, another hollow sign among signs.

What might work against that flattening of meaning—and what is missing from the Stuart art pieces—are signifiers that would send sparks through the historical and cultural DNA of spectators, signifiers that would break spectators from their bounded position in time, space, and from an ego that is now at war with itself and all others beyond itself.

A liberatory art would do this. It would allow us to touch the historical dimension deeply and re-member our connection to that which lies beyond it. A liberatory art would shatter the constructed boundaries of time and space. It would open a window onto a constellation of fallen and forgotten ones whose light still bears down upon our present moment. Caught in the sublime light of the aesthetic dimension, we would burn away the masks of subjectivity produced by those

systems, liberal capitalist or otherwise, that draw fictional boundaries around this planet and around the life that grows from it as the apple grows from apple tree. Moving beyond these fictional boundaries, we would touch the ultimate dimension, feel ourselves as a continuation of the other rather than a singular cellular organism caught in the merciless flow of history.

And, unlike a postmodern aesthetic that points everywhere and nowhere, an art of this sort would gesture toward a horizon beyond the well-trodden path of violence adopted by nation states and internalized by subjects. It would allow us to remember the boundless horizon that others reached toward, and it would show us that we can continue to reach for that horizon when the hands that pointed the way have all turned to dust.

For the sake of shedding light on this liberatory aesthetic, let us consider an art piece from a different but not unrelated context, that focuses specifically on self-immolation. The piece, titled *The Venerable Thich Quang Duc Memorial*, is housed in Ho Chi Minh City, and it memorializes the famously documented self-immolation of Thich Quang Duc in 1963. Installed in 2010 as a replacement to a more traditional Buddhist shrine to Quang Duc, the memorial consists of two sculptures. The centerpiece is a large bronze statue of Thich Quang Duc amid flames. On a wall behind the statue, is a background sculpture depicting the scenes that surrounded his self-immolation.



**Figure 3.5: The Venerable Thich Quang Duc Monument in Ho Chi Minh City<sup>49</sup>**

Unlike the Stuart art pieces, this memorial doesn't decontextualize and bleed history out of the art. Rather, it gestures toward a dimension that exists beyond the fictitious separations imposed upon life within the historical dimension. The design captures this brilliantly. The central statue of Thich Quang Duc represents the monk as an enlightened Bodhisattva surrounded by an aura and halo of flames. By itself, this statue would deify Thich Quang Duc, but the statue does not exist in isolation. Though it stands apart from the historical scenes behind it, it is paradoxically inseparable from that background.

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<sup>49</sup> Image obtained from web at <https://ncliedl.wordpress.com/2010/10/06/thich-quang-duc/>



Figure 3.6: Detail of The Venerable Thich Quang Duc Monument (Center)<sup>50</sup>



Figure 3.7: Detail of The Venerable Thich Quang Duc Monument (Left)<sup>51</sup>

What pulls us back to the historical scene is the Bodhisattva's double. Directly behind the large statue of Thich Quang Duc is a smaller representation of the monk as he appeared in his final moments. He sits at the center of a scene where

<sup>50</sup> Image obtained from web at <http://www.shoreexcursions.asia/thich-quang-duc-monument/>

<sup>51</sup> Image obtained from web at <http://getyerblogout.blogspot.com/2012/02/thich-quang-duc-memorial.html>

nonviolent protest is met by military violence. What this scene allows us to remember is what Thich Quang Duc, George Winne Jr., and others touched through self-immolation: a dimension where the divisions wrought upon us by history are revealed as illusory. What suggests this in the sculpture is the fact that each distinct form, from the baton-wielding officer to the gas-masked soldier to the fallen peace activist and community of monks, is cast from a single piece of bronze. Behind it all, they are all *of* the same substance. Foreground cannot exist without background, and each seemingly distinct figure is secretly a continuation of the other.

We, the spectators, see the fragility and ephemerality of the forms in the foreground, but this same view doesn't seem to be available to some of the figures caught up in the action represented in the sculpture's foreground. The baton-wielding officer and gas-masked soldier seem to be stuck completely in their historical roles on the stage of history. They wear the warrior's mask and play the ancient game of separation and warfare. Others, like the fallen peace activist and toppled monk seem to be forcefully caught in the game as well. On the stage of history, they wear the mask of peace, acting courageously against the manmade force of violence that sweeps their way.

But the memorial's central point—its core—is the doubled figure of Thich Quang Duc. In this memorial, as in life, Thich Quang Duc inhabits a role within the drama of history and a position outside of it. Frozen amid the violence and peaceful protest, he burns away his singular mask. This is not a sign of madness or desperation. It is a sign that the monk saw what we, who stand across the gulf of historical time, see clearly in the aesthetic object: a common ground that exists in

and behind all seemingly separate and distinct forms, a ground where the manmade game of violence is revealed as counter-intuitive, for the suffering it inflicts on *one* has reverberations for *all*.

### **Pause**

*The Venerable Thich Quang Duc Memorial* beckons us to that central point, toward that core that, paradoxically, is also the totality of the artwork and of life itself. It calls the spectator to pause at the physical center, between the aura-enshrouded Bodhisattva and the more earthly representation of the burning monk. In this regard, perhaps the most profound doubling is not found in the two representative figures of Thich Quang Duc, but rather in the doubling effect that dissolves the boundaries between the spectator and the spectacle of the artwork. Occupying this middle ground, the spectator momentarily fills the vacant position that Thich Quang Duc occupied between the immanence of the historical dimension and the eminence of the ultimate dimension. Here, the boundaries man has superimposed upon time, space, and all material forms melt into thin air.

Like the monk, the spectator pauses amid the action of history. This pause, in both cases, is not apolitical, nor is it merely a momentary or total renunciation of the so-called realities of life. Rather, the pause is the seedling of a revolutionary practice. It stalls the hegemony of violent action and shows us another path illuminated by the deeper realities of the ultimate dimension. Pausing mindfully, the *eye* is able to look deeply at history and at history in the making to see what lies beyond the mask, outside the game of separation and violence. Pausing mindfully,



the small *I* (ego) remembers the hidden fabric of our inter-being that is eclipsed by physical form and the atomizing names, classifications, and boundaries superimposed upon it.

Still though, one might wonder how the pause itself is revolutionary. Rather than looking to theory for an answer, I'd like to invoke the words of a folk singer who, though he was never given fancy titles like Bodhisattva or Revolutionary (and who probably wouldn't give a damn if he had been!), saw and sang beyond the veil of history. Shortly after World War II, Woody Guthrie remarked of war: "I would like to see every soldier on every single side, just take off their helmet, unbuckle your kit, lay down your rifle, and set down at the side of some shady lane, and say, nope, I ain't a gonna kill nobody. Plenty of rich folks want to fight. Give them the guns." For many, Guthrie's words may seem idealistic, especially when one recognizes the complex histories, ideologies, power struggles, and geopolitical conditions that are behind a war. Some critics might note the dangers of flattening out differences and offering universalizing solutions to complex issues. Perhaps, though, it is the critical mind's inability to recognize the deep realities and possibilities behind such simple statements that prevents the people from taking a revolutionary path that is always hidden in plain sight.

## Some Who Remember

“The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting.”  
- Milan Kundera

Despite the pressures to forget, some have struggled to remember the student activists of May 1970, George Winne Jr., and the path of peace they gestured toward. To find traces of their memories, we can return to UCSD and the shady lanes that exist off the beaten path and outside the university’s official histories.

In 1971, Professor Michael Todd and his ecological sculpture class attempted to bring the memory of Winne’s self-immolation back to public space. That year, they began work on *The George Winne Memorial Grove*.<sup>52</sup> Their goal was to create a space of quiet contemplation that avoided making any kind of political statement. To do so, the class chose to place the memorial in a eucalyptus grove tucked away from the public eye and across campus from the actual site of Winne’s self-immolation. We can gather from the archives that this choice stemmed, at least in part, from pressures from members of the campus and San Diego community who felt it was inappropriate to have a public and visible memorial to Winne, either because of the controversial nature of his self-immolation or out of respect to his surviving family.

The memorial grove also offered meaningful symbolism for Todd, his class, and other students who would visit the site in the years to come. At the center of the grove was a fallen tree that kept root and managed to thrive despite its collapse.

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<sup>52</sup> I spoke with Todd a few years ago. He recalled Winne in an email: “George Winne was one of my most promising and talented students in metal sculpture. His work was ambitious and serious as a metal sculptor. I was inspired by some of his work, as he may have been by mine.”





Figure 3.8: The George Winne Memorial Grove at UCSD<sup>53</sup>

Todd recognized the significance of the fallen tree in an interview when he said, “An analogy can be driven to a fellow student who survives spiritually.” With this symbolism in mind, the class set to work clearing the grove and installing a metal sculpture and plaque for Winne beside the fallen tree. In 1976, the sculptor Virginia Maksymowicz, then a graduate student in Visual Arts, was drawn to the memorial grove. Under the cover of night, she furtively placed one of her sculptures, titled *30 Blocks*, in the grove. The sculpture shows the fossil-like outline of a body impressed upon the clay blocks. Over the years, legends circulated about that sculpture: *That’s the burnt impression of Winne’s body. Those are the actual singed blocks from the Plaza.* Neither of these legends are true, of course. Still, they suggest the sculpture’s power to unearth a buried history.

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<sup>53</sup> Photograph obtained from The UCSD Guardian 9 May 1985



**Figure 3.9:** Sculpture entitled *30 Blocks* by Virginia Maksymowicz. Photo: Mollie Twohig

Forty-two years after its creation, the Memorial Grove rests in a state of disrepair, a ruin amid a neoliberal university. It can be found in the shadows of the campus's commercial center and The Stuart Collection's most recent installation, *Fallen Star*, a quaint-looking house that hangs from one of the nearby buildings at a precarious angle, as if it had been lifted and dropped there by a whirlwind from Oz. Students in a hurry to get to class occasionally cut through the grove. They rush over the fallen tree, dragging leaves, wrappers, and other debris over the clay blocks. Some come to the grove for a now illicit smoke break. Occasionally, they whisper tall-tales of the man who burnt himself as they scatter ash over the two

sculptures. Perhaps in this period and in this context, this ash and smoke is all we have left of incense and blessings.

Though it remains largely off the radar, the site continues to offer teachers and students a window into the buried histories of student activism and perhaps even a window into a dimension that lies beyond those histories. I experienced this first hand over the last few years of teaching at UCSD where I worked as a teaching assistant for a course focusing on social justice in the context of U.S. history and culture. Whenever we arrived on the topic of the anti-war movement of the 1960s and 1970s, I would bring my students to the memorial site and to Revelle Plaza where most of the protests occurred.

We had our most memorable and meaningful conversations in these two sites. At the first, we focused on the fallen tree that had, over the last four decades, sprouted several sturdy outgrowths. Following Todd's lead, we would draw new analogies between the slow, defiant, and unpredictable physics of those outgrowths and the way that social movements extended beyond the historical date of their collapse or co-optation. I do admit though, in my first years of using the grove as a teaching site, I was reluctant to bring up Todd's overtly spiritual analogy. It seemed taboo in the context of academia, but now I realize that in order to do justice to Winne's gesture, one must point toward that dimension where the revolutionary dead continue beyond their physical death. Labeling this dimension as "spiritual" seems moot.

On our visits to the memorial grove, my students and I spent some time reflecting on Maksymowicz *30 Blocks*. One student, William Bulman, wrote the

following in a paper that compared the discursive renderings of Winne's self-immolation to a form of remembrance elicited by the sculpture:

Winne's purpose is only mentioned in the title of the article, "To Protest War," yet the article elects not to talk about this elsewhere. This confuses the gaze of the readers because their eyes are induced to look in a place that Winne did not intend. As a memorial to Winne's action the Triton Times does no justice. The medium of sculpture is a much better [representation] of Winne. The memorial has no words it is simply images that represent the self-immolation of Winne. This is what Winne was, a man of few words mostly action. The article also fails to represent Winne's divergence from static ideologies. The sculpture on the other hand was not a required part of Winne's story, as a news article was, but now stands as the most important connection to this past, partially because there is no commissioned memorial to date. The sculpture embodies the wholeness of Winne by itself being mysterious. (Bulman)

Bulman's reading of the sculpture as a definite representation of Winne's action may not be entirely accurate, but it is also not a reading we should discount. The composition of the sculpture, and its placement in this particular memorial grove, seems to render that meaning and that memory. It's as if the Maksymowicz was hoping for a reading of this sort rather than an infinity of possible interpretations. A statement that Maksymowicz's gives about her artwork also touches upon that last point Bulman makes when he writes "the sculpture embodies the wholeness of Winne by itself being mysterious." She writes,

I've come to realize the power of what might be called 'visual synecdoche'. By using only a segment of the human figure, an artist can seduce her audience into becoming active participants instead of remaining passive viewers. With the part standing for the whole – in narrative as well as visual terms – the possibilities for interpretation are extended. Whose body is this? Is it male or female? Could it be me? Could it be someone I know? ("Fragments and Repetition")

This concept of visual synecdoche is a wonderful description of what Winne gestures toward in his self-immolation. If we look deeply at history, as we have done throughout this chapter, we will see it. We will see what Winne and others who saw the world through a compassionate lens saw: that the individual body (that fragile little part) is merely a stand-in for the whole cosmos from which it emerges and to which it is inexorably bound. In that respect, the “wholeness” of Winne that William Bulman mentions might be paradoxically seen as the emptiness to which Winne and all others, living and dead, are bound, just as full or crashed waves are bound to the ungraspable whole of the ocean. One can only put one’s finger on the emptiness of the ocean by grasping the tiny fraction of the wave that rolls across our skin or through our hands. Likewise, one can only put one’s finger on the emptiness of inter-being by touching the self or by reaching toward the other—the same gesture, in the end.

What is also striking about Maksymowicz’s statement are the final questions she poses. They could be the very questions Winne’s gesture calls us to ask, not only in regard to his self-immolation, but in regard to the images of barely recognizable corpses in warzones, to the tiny fetal shapes of refugees washed ashore in Europe, to the huddled inmate who looks like a burnt husk after decades in solitary confinement. Such questions could only be asked by a compassionate spectator, one who sees her own precariousness in the death masks of the other, one who sees her liberation in the liberation of the other. And it is this compassion, I believe, that calls the audience from passivity to action.

### **Constellations Hidden From View**

When my students and I made the long trek from the George Winne Memorial grove over to Revelle Plaza, we were stuck by an absence. There was no marker of what took place there. History, it seemed, had passed George Winne Jr. and the student protestors by. It had left us without a trace. Yet, as I was doing research on Winne and May 1970, I found that this wasn't the case. Digging through the archives at UCSD, I came across several pictures of the Plaza taken over the years on the anniversary of Winne's death. Like all photography, they held afterimages of old light.



**Figure 3.10: Photograph of memorial service for Winne appearing in Triton Times 12 May 1970**





**Figure 3.11: Photograph of 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Vigil for George Winne appearing in UCSD Guardian 4 May 1990. Photo credit: Brian Morris**



**Figure 3.12: Photograph of 42<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary Vigil on 11 May 2012. Credit: Rosi Escamilla**

Of course, history necessarily excludes. It hides things from view that don't fit into the neat formulae of beginnings, middles, and ends. But eventually the truth outs, like stars peeking through a deep cloud cover. And when this happens, when the clouds of history are rolled back, we see that—much like the light from long dead stars—the struggles of the revolutionary dead continue well beyond their physical or historical endpoint. Looking deeply at the photos, we find that light peeking through.

The old light of these photos forms a constellation that breaks our vision from the historical dimension where events occur and end within a given time and where community is seen as those who are present in a set time and space. With these photos, we gain entry into a non-temporal space occupied by those who remembered. Of course, many of those who came to the vigil moved fire to wick without knowing clearly why. But knowledge is not requisite for the type of remembering we have been considering. This re-remembering simply requires an intuitive feeling, a slight tremor within that sets the hand in motion. What we intuit is the deepest reality Winne and others gestured toward: the reality of inter-being that lies behind the man-made world of violent separation and warfare. Those who came to the vigils worked against the very structure of that world. They sat together, talked together, and lit candles for the dead ones whose lives and struggles still illuminated the paths of the living. Even when one came alone to the site of the vigil, perhaps in the wee hours of the night, they were still in community. They were still one within that constellation.



I hope now, in light of our exploration together, we can see those photos of the vigil as a testament to Winne's continuation and to the continuation of a non-violent and revolutionary tradition beyond the failure of the body or the movement. When I saw those photos for the first time a few years back, I think that is what I felt, though at the time I wasn't able to write it down in that way. I struggled, as we all do, with words. But I did act on that intuition, and I remain proud of that action.

### **Constellations Emerge**

"It never happens that a new constellation suddenly rises out of the east. There is an order, a predictability, a permanence about the stars. In a way, they are almost comforting."

- Carl Sagan

"It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present casts its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."

- Walter Benjamin

That faint tremor I felt when I first saw the photos of the vigil led me to continue the efforts started by others to bring the memory of Winne and the May 1970 anti-war protests back into the space of Reville Plaza. Over the last forty years, the effort followed a familiar pattern: A handful of students who remembered would propose a memorial in the Plaza. People would react with hostility to the idea of memorializing a suicide, a madman whose act threatened to overshadow real acts of protest past and present, an individual who deserved privacy in his death. Caught in the maelstrom of these views, the students' efforts would peter out. The students moved on to other things. After they graduated, the process would repeat itself.

Several years ago, I found myself picking up traces of their work, and I wondered if I could break the cycle. In 2013, I, along with supportive faculty and undergraduates who had also been inspired by this topic, began to craft a proposal for a permanent memorial in Revelle Plaza. We knew what we were coming up against with a neoliberal university whose artistic landscape was tightly managed by The Stuart Committee. We also knew what we were coming up against given the taboo nature of the gesture, especially when viewed through the liberal-pastoral lens that casts the taking of one's own life as a sin against the sacred or secular order. With this knowledge, we continued our efforts with a degree of cunning.

Our efforts began a year earlier, with a vigil on May 10, 2012 at the site of Winne's self-immolation. We laid candles in Revelle Plaza alongside photocopies of the *Triton Times* newspapers from May 1970. The forty-two year old papers contained stories of the immolation and the anti-war protests as well as photos of the occupation of Urey Hall and the first impromptu vigil for Winne. After a few short speeches, several stayed on to sit in that spot where others had sat across the years. We shared stories, laughs, and food by the candlelight. Most of the students passing by probably thought us strange, but some were drawn to the circle. They picked up the newspapers, stopped for a few seconds, and sped off to class. Some joined the circle for a few minutes. A few of us stayed until nightfall when the Plaza was cleared of its foot traffic. We decided to call it a night when a chill wind blew in from the Pacific. Before leaving, we placed a note next to the candles that asked

people to keep the flames lit during the night and to sign their names to a document if they would support a permanent memorial in the Plaza.

Before I exited the Plaza that night, I turned back one final time and saw the candles burning in the area where Winne immolated and where hundreds once gathered in *protest* (that word always seems so inadequate). From afar, the candles appeared as distant stars, a constellation in need of a name. I wondered if others would be drawn to the light of that constellation. I wasn't confident. When I returned after the weekend, the candles were burnt all the way down and over a hundred people had signed their names in support of the memorial project. Reading those names next to the spent candles was my initial impetus to devote myself fully to the project. Before proposing anything, however, I wanted to make sure that I connected my efforts back to those who were intimately connected to this history.

Several months after that vigil, I took a trip to San Luis Obispo to visit Keith Stowe. Stowe was the activist who saw Winne burning and who, without batting an eye, reached out to quell the flames engulfing his body. Stowe and his wife Marianne invited me into their house and shared their stories with me. They spoke passionately about their experiences as pacifists in the anti-war and Civil Rights movements. At times, their youthful zeal would shine through the stories, but it was tempered by a realism bestowed upon them by history. The horizons they envisioned did not match the destination we had reached in the present. Yes, a war had come to an end, but warfare persisted. Yes, a form of segregation had ended,

but segregation persisted. Yes, a moment of violence had come to an end, but violence persisted.

When I showed Stowe a picture of that younger self in hospital, he laughed. He hadn't seen that picture in a long time. His laughter soon faded, and his face appeared tired. He pulled back his sleeves to show me his scars. He then spoke candidly about the anger he felt toward Winne after the flames were extinguished from their bodies. He recounted the ride to the hospital next to the burnt man, the overpowering smell of their burnt flesh and hair. Stowe told me of their exchange, how Winne told him "You should have let me die" and how he then responded with venom, "Don't worry. You will."

Perhaps Stowe thought I might judge him for those words because he went on to qualify them. He spoke of his singed nerves, of the searing pain in his arms. He reminded me of his pacifism, how he just couldn't agree with Winne's method. He spoke too of his regret, for those unkind words, and for getting in the way of what George Winne felt he had to do. Stowe's words weren't really necessary. I didn't judge Stowe for any of it. Even as he recollected his final exchange with Winne, I could sense the compassion that was hidden behind the vitriolic, yet ultimately hollow, words.

This was the end of George Winne Jr. in Stowe's history. The burnt man remained a small blip in his personal history and the more encompassing history of the anti-war movement. Stowe made this clear: The movement was much larger than Winne. I listened, trying not to stall the flow of his memory, trying not to draw him back to "my" topic. Now, though, I feel the need to suspend our conversation to

acknowledge two points: The first is an acknowledgment of the unpredictable power of even those small blips—those black stars—on the map of our personal and collective history. In this instance, Winne's gesture is what brought Stowe and me together for a brief moment. It had folded history together. The second thing that needs to be recognized is a secret kinship that links Winne's gesture with the almost instinctive action that propelled Stowe toward the flames. Like Winne, Stowe reached out for the other. He acted selflessly to alleviate the suffering of the other, as if he himself were aflame. How many of us would have acted in that way if we were confronted by the burning man?

Around that same time, I also visited George Winne's cousin, Doug DePalma, and his wife, Kathy, in Morro Bay. Though hesitant at first, Doug quickly agreed to meet. I later found out that Kathy had reminded him that they didn't have any children, and that this would be a good way to pass on his family's histories. Doug agreed and invited me in to talk about his cousin and the war.

During my short visit, Doug showed me several artifacts. He picked up a book from his shelf on Norman Morrison, the Quaker who famously immolated in front of former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's office in the Pentagon. He handed me a CD-R disc containing Paul Alexander Juutilainen's *Herbert's Hippopotamus*, a documentary about philosopher Herbert Marcuse and the New Left, which featured a few scenes about his cousin's immolation. He showed me a sculpture of a Buddhist monk that an artist friend, David Settino Scott, had sculpted. The monk's features appeared elongated and alien, as if distorted by a carnival

mirror. As I look back now, I see DePalma was pointing me to a series of dots that connected back to his cousin Winne. Like me, he had become a kind of detective.

Doug gave me another perspective on George Winne Jr.—Chip, as he affectionately called him—that would never make it into newspapers or history books. Doug told me of summers he spent with the Winne family when George was a toddler. His eyes seemed to be staring through me as he described sunny days of old and the image of a young Chip plodding toward him through the surf. Both he and his cousin knew nothing of the war then, but they soon would. Doug drifted apart from the Winne family during the war years. He made a career for himself in the military, and his cousin had gone off to the university to study history. Their paths were threaded together on that Sunday morning in May 1970 when Doug heard the news of his cousin's self-immolation over the radio. When he heard the name, he was in disbelief. He couldn't comprehend it then. Now though, after years of detective work, he seemed to have a deeper sense of the gesture and its impact.

One of Doug's anecdotes regarding the impact on the family has stayed with me over the years. It's the story of Winne's mother, Emily Winne. Before her son's gesture, she fit the conservative mold expected of a navy wife. After her son's immolation, things changed dramatically. Emily became a proponent of peace. She wrote to President Nixon telling him of her son's death and urging him to end the violence. According to Doug, Emily and New Left philosopher Herbert Marcuse struck up an unlikely friendship, perhaps after she heard him speak in Revelle Plaza or after the philosopher sent her his consolations in writing. Though lost to history, this anecdote of a mother's passion for peace testifies to an excess in the long

movement for peace, an excess that words cannot capture, that flames cannot destroy, and that bullets cannot pierce. She was her son's continuation. She carried on in the direction he gestured toward. How many more anecdotes of this sort are lost to history?

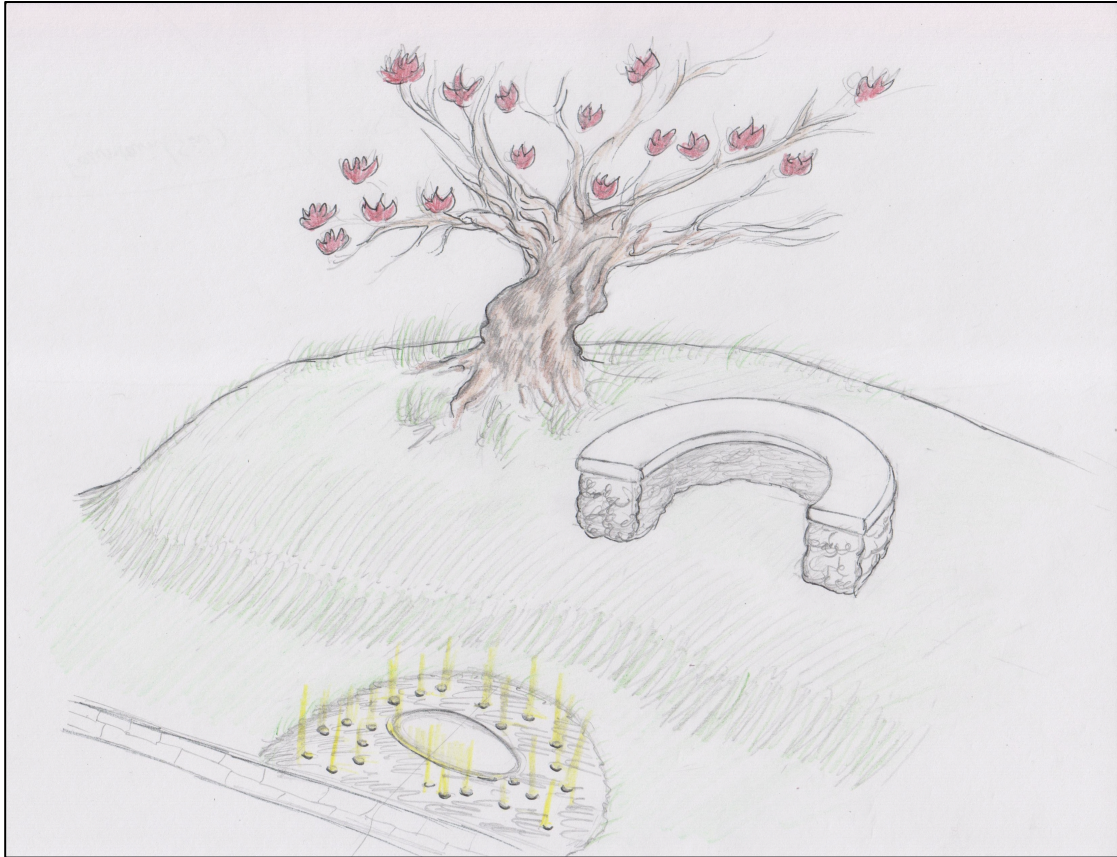
After the vigil and meetings with Stowe and DePalma, I wrote a proposal for a simple plaque to be housed in the Plaza. I had the help and input of supportive faculty and undergraduates from the Dimensions of Culture, namely Professor Jorge Mariscal, Hilda Gracie Uriarte, and Allyson Osorio. I also had the support of Keith and Marianne Stowe and Doug and Kathleen DePalma. Stowe, who initially expressed hesitation about a memorial to Winne, was swayed by the proposed inscription. Doug DePalma offered his support as well, which was important for our group because we didn't want to proceed without the family's blessing. When I received the proposal letter with his signature, I could see the shakiness of his hand. He wouldn't live to see the memorial completed.

Our written proposal posed an alternative narrative to the depictions of Winne as a troubled loner. It addressed the historical context of violence surrounding Winne's gesture that was surprisingly absent in discussions of his self-immolation. It spoke of Winne's and the student activist's passion for peace. Attached to this proposal was the list of signatures collected from the vigil. We submitted this to a Vice Chancellor who was supportive of student-centered art projects. He supported the project and invited our group to design a memory site

that would be slightly more ambitious than what we originally envisioned with the simple plaque.

Though I hadn't done anything like this before, I accepted. I went to work sketching designs. I turned to the photos of the vigils for inspiration. I wanted the memorial to do some justice to those small, short-lived, and radical acts of remembering that extended across the years. In the photos of the various vigils, I noticed a recurring shape: a circle. The students laid out their candles in a circle. They sat in a circle. I thought the geometry of these communal circles a fitting counter-image to the fictional geometries of an individual self divided from its social world and environment. So I played around with the shape until finally settling on a semicircular design. To draw another connection to the vigil, I sketched a series of lights that would shine up from the ground. My hope with the semicircle of light was that one day, perhaps long after I left the institution or passed on myself, others would come to complete the circle with their bodies and candles when the times called for its completion.

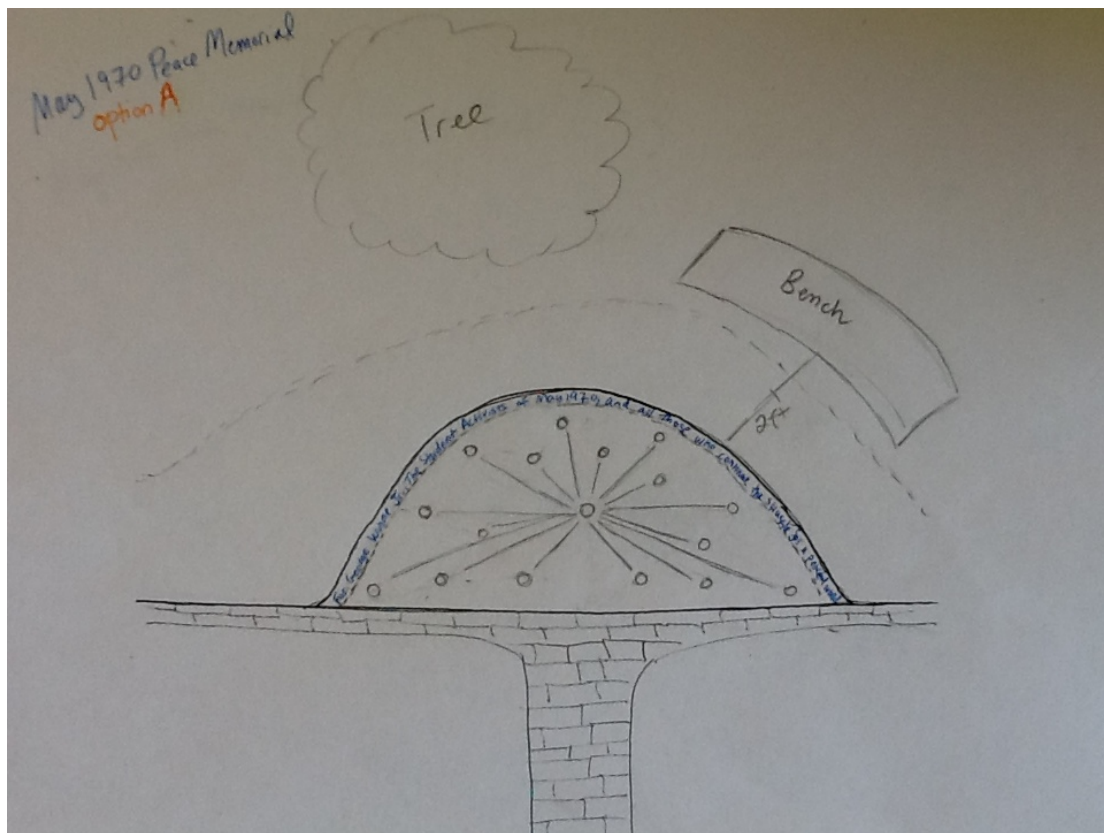




**Figure 3.13: Preliminary Sketch of May 1970 Peace Memorial drawn by author**

My sketches drew as much inspiration from starlight as they did from candlelight. That's because the night sky is a great teacher on the subject of time. It teaches us of a time that exceeds the narrow confines of historical time. Look up and you see the far distant past. You can almost touch it. What's really bewildering for our rational senses is that many of these stars, so vibrant in our present, collapsed long ago. Yet these dead stars still cast waves of light down upon us and through us. This is a fitting analogy for Winne, the student activists of May 1970, and all those whose gestures bear down upon us. We are drenched in their old light, even if we don't recognize it. We just need to look deeply to see it.

I recall one particular night out in the Joshua Tree desert when I had Winne and the yet-to-be created memorial on my mind. I stared so long at the constellations that my eyes started to draw tendrils of light between the stars. This made me think of the process of trying to connect Winne to a constellation that exceeded and preceded the self. I couldn't name that constellation then, but I felt it was there. At the time, all I could do was gesture at it by drawing lines between each point of light.



**Figure 3.14: Preliminary Sketch of May 1970 Peace Memorial (layout) drawn by author**

Now that we've taken this journey together, I feel we can give a name to that constellation. It is the constellation of nonviolence to which Winne and the anti-war protestors of May 1970 were a part. Though this tradition is broken at times, it is

never completely destroyed. It continues long after the death of individuals or historical endpoints. It continues in those who look deeply and see its shape (larger than the body, larger than the movement) breaking through the clouds of history. It is up to them to thread together what history breaks up, divides, and marks off with neat beginnings and endings. When one takes up this task, they may soon find that they have become, not just a witness looking at a constellation, but a luminous part of it.



**Figure 3.15: The May 1970 Peace Memorial at night. Photo credit: Lianne Twohig**

On May 2014, The May 1970 Peace Memorial was unveiled. Its inscription reads:

FOR GEORGE WINNE JR., THE STUDENT ACTIVISTS OF MAY 1970,  
AND ALL THOSE WHO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE FOR A PEACEFUL WORLD.

May it be a reminder—or, as Toni Morrison says—a re-memory: Though the enemy has ceased to be victorious, those who refused his weapon, have ceased to be vanquished. Seeing their blurry shapes behind the clouds of history, we remember what the bullet and word would have us forget: we are their continuation.

## Conclusion.

### Empty Space Filled<sup>54</sup>

“In an essay on politics, [Pinochet] wrote that man, like the planets, must submit himself to structure, since ‘nature shows us basic order and hierarchy are necessary’ for the perfect functioning of the cosmos.”

– Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela

“I am convinced that memory has a gravitational force. It is constantly attracting us. Those who have a memory are able to live in the fragile present moment. Those who have none don't live anywhere. Each night, slowly, impassively, the centre of the galaxy passes over Santiago.”

– Patricio Guzmán, *Nostalgia For The Light*

### Sound in the Void

Let us begin our final journey with a utopian moment that occurred during a time seemingly bereft of revolutionary possibilities. The event I want to point us back to is NASA's launch of the Voyager spacecrafts in 1977. With Voyager, scientists committed themselves to a project that was out of joint with the times, incongruous with a planet gripped by the threat of nuclear annihilation, bloody proxy wars, and violent coups. The mission was unlike any other in the history of exploration: these crafts had no set destination; their cargo was not meant to be exchanged or used. Instead, these two spacecrafts were built to sail on well beyond their creators' lifetimes, perhaps beyond the lifespan of humanity itself. Their cargo was two golden records that contained images, natural sounds, greetings and music from around the world. As fraught as the mission was, especially given the privileged backgrounds of those who curated the disc and the nationalist tendencies

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<sup>54</sup> For Uncle Trae whose soft cadences and tongues of fire I still hear beyond his death. And for Alejandra Alvarez Garcia who continues to carry her father's revolutionary fire into the long night.

of the space agency, it points to a reality that lies beneath the new world order being forged through counterrevolutionary violence. Before we consider what alternatives these spacecrafts gesture toward, we should say a few words about that counterrevolutionary context that they left behind as they exited earth.

The counterrevolution of the 1970s was a violent reaction to the social movements of the 1960s that, like the other flashpoints of revolution before them, put the common good over private gain, sought to break down social hierarchies, and saw reality in terms of interconnectedness and the possibility of peace rather than separateness and the inevitability of war. The counterrevolutionary assault was led by right-wing think tanks, neoliberal economists, and military warmongers who sought to divide the planet and set it to motion on their terms.

Naomi Klein's book *The Shock Doctrine* gives a detailed account of the various maneuvers this power bloc deployed to establish corporatist hegemony. It documents how these groups looked to catastrophe as a way of extending neoliberal values and expanding capitalist markets. They embraced what Klein calls the shock doctrine. Adhering to this doctrine, military juntas led by the likes of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile and other warmongers in Argentina, Uruguay, and in various hotspots around the Global South, unleashed violence to topple governments that were developing horizontal forms of governance and more equitable social formations. In addition to armed warfare, these juntas deployed terror, in the form of mass torture and disappearance, to eliminate dissent and to inspire fear among the people. This initial shock, as Klein explains, had a purpose: It aimed at eviscerating collective forms of governance and social life to clear the

way for those economists, investors, and policy makers who prefer to keep the blood off their own hands. It created an empty space—a vacuum—that was then filled by corporatist economic practices rooted in the theories of Milton Friedman and the Chicago School of neoliberal economics. The “shock and awe” of violence, in other words, was followed by the second shockwave of privatization, corporatization, and financialization that reoriented economic ends away from notions of the common good to a totalizing logic of capital enhancement that radically shifted social life from logics of collectivism to a logic of self-reliance and self-investment.

If we consider this shock doctrine in light of the revolutionary constellations we have mapped throughout this dissertation, we see just how counterrevolutionary it is. The doctrine violently reinscribes the myth of separateness as reality. It does so through blood, fire, and economic policy. The neoliberal practices unleashed after the initial shock of violence divides the commons and sells its resources off to the highest private bidder. They divide the people, shrink the public sphere, distribute wealth upward, break the back of the middle class, and send millions upon millions spiraling toward poverty and premature death. In addition to these material effects, these practices also construct an isolated and atomized neoliberal subjectivity that determines its self-worth in terms of market values and market-positions and that measures its failures in terms of accumulated debt and personal shortcomings. This is the material and ideological reality that has been built for us in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. This is the reality that frames the way

subjects look back on the past, that delimits the choices they make in the present, and that encloses the horizons of the future.

This is the new world order that the Voyager shuttles left behind when they exited earth. They were launched just four years after General Pinochet's violent coup against Salvador Allende's Popular Unity Government. They made their exit as juntas and policemen on the ground went about their butcher's work of torturing leftists, workers, and freethinkers in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and in other areas where the shock doctrine was being deployed. The spacecrafts flew outward to the far reaches of our solar system as helicopters flew over the Pacific Ocean or the Rio de la Plata dumping their barely human contents into the abyss. These spacecrafts went further and further into the dark as Allende's secret police went about digging mass graves in the desert where their victims' bodies would rarely see the light. They moved freely through cosmic clouds of dust, past behemoth planets, as thousands upon thousands of people were being packed into torture centers and concentration camps in Chile or into the gulag zones and open air prisons of the deindustrializing Global North.

These two relatively miniscule spacecrafts gesture beyond this new world order. Quite literally, they escape the gravity that pins us down to the earth. They leave earth behind and reach toward the cosmos, attempting to touch its outer limits with the song of planet earth. At the same time, they escape another gravity, a crushing gravity that fills the empty spaces opened up by the shock doctrine. They



escape a gravity that sets subjects in motion for the sake of private ends or that disappears those who refused to stay locked in place.

Yet, even as the spacecrafts escape, they turn a backwards-looking glance toward earth. They look back upon a reality that cannot be contained by man's gravity, a reality that cannot be broken apart by those who seek to exert their "power" over the commons and the cosmos. To see this, we have to consider the spacecrafts' flight path through space. Their path is radically different than the corporatist and imperial counterrevolutionaries who seek to subdue empty space through a violent physics that homogenizes all that resides within. The spacecrafts soar through empty space—not to plant a flag on alien soil, not to open new markets for capital—but to carry the collective rhythms that reside below our fragmentation. There is no end to their paths. Most likely no one will listen to the golden discs. But that seems far from the point. The point is in the path itself. These two ships will continue to streak through the cosmos bearing a collective song that cannot be touched, disappeared, or diminished to a mere commodity. That song is out of sight, out of man's grip. As long as humanity exists, these crafts will point back to a subterranean reality beneath the new world order, a reality where humanity's rhythms exist side by side, in a balance that does not efface difference. When humanity ceases to exist, when history has come to an end—which may be sooner than expected given the rate of climate change, the pillaging of planetary resources, the warfare and global displacement that neoliberal capitalism creates and embraces—these ships will testify to those who saw through the veil of

separateness. They will remember their rhythms. They will carry their song into the night.

But let us not jump too far ahead of ourselves. Humanity, after all, has not come to an end. And despite what some philosophers say, history has not ended. In the time that remains, common people, people bound to earth's gravity but *not* to the gravity of neoliberal capitalism, will be the ones who remember the revolutionary dead and who carry their song and flame through time and space.

### **Remembering After the End of History**

Before we turn to those who remember, we might first consider how the shock doctrine dismembered the revolutions of the 1960s. It tore the revolutionary body apart, both individually and collectively, through violence and torture. It also dismembered the revolutionary psyche through “economic shock treatments” that, as Naomi Klein explains, altered people’s psychology to “facilitate the adjustment” to neoliberal capitalism (8). We can push that last point further to say that the shock of violence followed by the shock of abrupt economic change wiped a revolutionary awareness of interconnectedness from collective memory and replaced it with a reality of separateness where subjects are made to stand alone, not only in a hostile universe, but in a competitive “free” market.

This might seem a grim picture, one that might elicit despair for those seeking alternatives to the counterrevolution documented by Klein. In a large part, that despair stems from an acceptance of the totalizing story told by history’s most

recent victors, the neoliberal capitalists. The final chapter of that story, as Klein explains, goes like this:

When the Soviet Union finally collapsed, the people of the “evil empire” were also eager to join the Friedmanite revolution, as were the Communists-turned-capitalists in China. That meant that nothing was left to stand in the way of a truly global free market, one in which liberated corporations were not only free in their own countries but free to travel across borders unhindered, unleashing prosperity around the world. There was now a twin consensus about how society should be run according to Friedman’s rules. It was, as Francis Fukuyama said, “the end of history”—“the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution.” (22)

Though Klein debunks this sanitized narrative by revealing the militaristic and economic violence that undergirds corporatist hegemony, her own counter-narrative falls into a kind of fatalism. The shocks treatments she describes are so wide-reaching, so effective in emptying space of dissent and collective forms of life, that we might conclude that we have indeed reached the end of history. Likewise, those shocks have been so effective in pushing revolution into the dustbin of history, that we might conclude that there are no viable alternatives to the violent corporatist hegemony that rules the present. We might reach these conclusions, in part, because the analytic frame of *The Shock Doctrine* is built on pure empirical knowledge. Klein’s analysis is, in other words, grounded in unearthed historical facts and observable material realities. Though these facts are crucial for understanding the counterrevolution beyond the sanitized narrative, a sole focus on the empirical dimension risks losing sight of the subtle continuations of revolution beyond the violence, beyond disappearance, beyond the end of history.

As a way of illuminating the continuities, we can turn to the realm of culture. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, certain aesthetic works cut through the visible facts to expose a deeper reality where revolution continues beyond the destruction of the revolutionary body or movement. One text that illuminates this is Patricio Guzman's documentary *Nostalgia for the Light* (2011). Guzman's documentary is set in the Atacama desert of Chile in the 2000s. It juxtaposes the narratives of two groups who seek the past in the desert. The first is a team of astronomers who study the arcane light from the far edges of the universe in order to learn about the origins of the cosmos. The second are the relatives of the disappeared who comb the desert in search of their kin's remains. By juxtaposing the astronomical search with the women's search, the documentary exposes the latter in a light that allows us to see their search beyond the terms of trauma and total despair. We are shown a deeper reality in which the kin of the disappeared, like the astronomers, receive an old light from bodies vanished long ago. They are illuminated as stewards of that light, bearers of a story without end, and the living continuation of a body that can never be found yet that paradoxically surrounds them on all sides.

### *Living Behind the Times*

The astronomical search featured in *Nostalgia for the Light* opens up a way of seeing the past beyond the dominant frames molded, in part, by the shock doctrine over the last fifty years. At first glance, though, we might think it strange to compare the search for celestial bodies with the women's search for the bodies of

their disappeared kin. It is true that both seekers are concerned with the past, but the profound differences between the objects they seek seem to make any kind of comparison impossible. One of the astronomers that Guzmán interviews, Gaspar Galaz, addresses the difficulties of this comparison:

To compare two completely different things, their process is similar to ours, with one big difference. We can sleep peacefully after each night spent observing the past. Our search doesn't disturb our sleep. Sometimes the heat bothers us, but we sleep. The next day, we plunge back, untroubled, into the past. But these women must find it hard to sleep after searching through human remains, looking for a past they are unable to find. They'll not sleep well until they do so. That is the major difference. It can't be compared... What is strange, is that society should understand these women better than it understands astronomers. But the opposite is true. Society has a greater understanding of astronomers in their search for the past than those women who search for human remains. There is a certain reticence and that worries me. People say: "It's in the past, enough's enough!" That's easy to say. Until they find their loved ones, they'll never find peace. I can't imagine what they must be going through. I don't know what I'd do if a sister, a brother, or one of my parents were lost somewhere in the desert, in this vast expanse. Personally, as an astronomer, I would imagine my father or mother in space, lost in the galaxy somewhere. I would look for them through the telescopes. I would be very anxious as it would be difficult to find them in the vastness. It's the same for these women as the Atacama desert is so immense. Who knows where they are.

Galaz is quick to note the differences between the astronomers and the women of Calama. Yet, at the same time, he empathizes with these women in far deeper ways than those who insist that they get over the past, that they move on. What forms this bridge is Galaz's own pursuit of the stars, his pursuit of their old light.

Astronomy, at least in this instance, gives the scientist a lens for understanding the women's search in a way that sees beyond common sense perception. Through this lens, he sees that the past is not merely a dead object—not

merely history—but a reality that touches the edges of our perception. An earlier exchange between Galaz and Guzmán sheds light on this reality:

Galaz: All our life experiences happened in the past. Even if it is a matter of millionths of a second. The camera I am looking at now is a few meters away and is therefore already several millionths of a second in the past in relation to the time of my watch. The signal takes time to arrive. The light reflected from the camera or from you, reaches me after a moment. A fleeting moment at the speed of light is very fast.

Guzmán: How long does it take for moonlight to reach us?

Galaz: Just over a second.

Guzmán: And sunlight?

Galaz: Eight minutes.

Guzmán: So we don't see things at the very instant we look at them?

Galaz: No that's the trap. The present doesn't exist. It's true. The only present that might exist is the one in my mind. It's the closest we come to the absolute present. And not even then! When I think, it takes a moment for the signals to travel between my senses. Between when I say "this is me" and I touch myself there is a lapse in time. The past is the astronomer's main tool. We manipulate the past. We are used to living behind the times.

The astronomer's lens allows us to see beyond a superficial reality where the past has no bearing on the present. It reveals a deeper reality where the past surrounds us on all sides, where we are bathed in old light, caressed by old waves. In this reality, we live "behind the times." In each instant, our senses receive vibrations of what *was* rather than what *is*. What is significant about this view is how it challenges the dominant way that most of us, whose psyches have been shaped by the shock treatments of the last four decades, experience time. For many, the present is the only dimension worth inhabiting, for the present is the realm of productivity and

value production. The past, on the other hand, is merely a dead story, a tale not worth telling.

Through the astronomer's lens, however, the clean separation between what we term *the past* and *the present* gives way to a temporally fluid dimension where the vibratory waves of phenomenon permeate our being, move through us, and affect what we become *after* the moment of their happening. This is true of the sound or light waves we receive from far off celestial bodies. It is true of the light we receive from one who gestures to us from a distance. Our eyes receive the light of what *was*, the waves of what has past. In a subtle and strategic way, this view of fluid time provides us with a lens for seeing the women's search in a deeper, more penetrating, light than what would have been possible if Guzmán had presented the women's search in isolation. By juxtaposing the two, Guzmán subverts the usual apolitical rationalism of science to broaden our frame for understanding time; he deploys science to illuminate the constant communion between past and present, between the living and the dead in a way that even the neoliberal dogmatists would have a hard time challenging.

### *The Whole Body*

After introducing us to the astronomers, Guzmán turns his camera on one of the women of Calama, Violeta Berríos. During her interview, Berríos sits among the rocks of the Atacama. Like the rocks, she is sunbaked, worn by time. Guzmán asks her, "Will you carry on your searching?" She responds:

For as long as I can...if we must carry on searching...I will do so. Even if I have many doubts...and I ask myself questions which I can't answer. They say they unearthed them, put them in bags and threw them into the sea. Did they really throw them into the sea? I can't find the answer to this question. What if they threw them out nearby, somewhere in the mountains? At this point in my life, I'm 70, I find it hard to believe what I'm told. They taught me not to believe. It's hard for me... sometimes I feel like an idiot because I never stop asking questions and nobody gives me answers I want. If someone were to tell me they threw them out on top of that mountain, I would find a way of getting right to the top. I'm not as strong as I was 20 years ago. I'm not as healthy. It would be difficult. But hope gives you strength. I no longer count the times Vicky and I have gone into the desert. We set out full of hope and return with our heads hanging. But we always pick ourselves up... give ourselves a shake and set off again the next day even more hopeful and more impatient to find them. Some people must wonder... why we want bones? I want them so much! And I'm not the only one. When they found one of Mario's jaw-bones, I told them I didn't want it. I told doctor Patricia Hernandez: "I want him whole. They took him away whole, I don't want just a piece of him." And I'm not saying it just for him, but for all the disappeared. All of them! If I found him today and I were to die tomorrow, I would die happy. But I don't want to die. I don't want to die before I find him. As I told you the other day, I wish the telescopes didn't just look into the sky, but could also see through the earth so that we could find them. Like this...[motions hand around]...then, a bit further on. We would sweep the desert with a telescope. Downwards. And give thanks to the stars for helping us find them. I'm just dreaming.

If we were to read the testimony through the dominant ideological lens—a lens focused on the present and on what is visible, nameable, and valuable—we would conclude that Berríos's search is pointless. Through that lens, we would see a woman wasting her time as she combs the desert. We could be sad for her, of course, but we wouldn't see the point of her search. After all, there is no real value produced by it. There are no answers to her questions. Even when she finds the bones, they are just a part of something she cannot find: the whole body. And, even if she were to find the whole body, she would still be left with skeletal remains of a



life that cannot be restored. So, what's the point, the neoliberal subject might ask. It's all just history, he might say, as he urges her to stop, to let the past lie, to live in the present, to move on to the future.

We see the search for the disappeared in a radically different light when we look at it through the lens opened by Galaz and Guzmán. Like the astronomer, Berríos and the other women of Calama put themselves in touch with the arcane light of bodies that were disappeared from space long ago. Each time they enter the desert—each time they bend to the earth under the hot light of our distant star—they pierce the veil that seeks to separate the past from the present and the living from the dead. Like the astronomer, this search into the dark regions of the past yields more questions than it does answers. In this, too, there is a defiance of the logic that disappeared their kin. They refuse to make their search about definitive ends. They refuse to be moved by the forward-moving physics of neoliberal capitalism. Instead, they commit themselves to a paradoxical search: they seek to remember the whole body that *cannot* be remembered yet that *must* be remembered.

By continuing this search, Berríos and the women of Calama *remember* the past that the shock doctrine has dismembered. In one sense, this remembrance occurs as they fill the empty space of the desert and the cinema with stories that the shock doctrine attempted to burn from memory. These stories bring to light what Pinochet and his secret police sought to bury. They restore what the shockwaves of neoliberal policy have attempted to leave behind in the dustbin of history. In another sense, the remembrance of what has been *dismembered* occurs on a more subtle level: Just like the astronomers, whose eyes touch the old light of distant stars, these

women thread themselves to those who stand across the gulf of time and space. They thread themselves to a revolutionary constellation filled with the arcane light of the disappeared. They refuse to let go of the light. How could they! For the light surrounds them on all sides, moves through them, and continues to affect who they become. That light continues beyond the shock of military and economic violence, not only as a faint glimmer in the eye of a woman who refuses to let go of the past, but as a thread of remembrance to the freedom her disappeared relative felt in his whole body. The power of *Nostalgia for the Light* is that it makes that invisible thread visible. To do so, Guzmán and his production team deploy the visual effects offered by cinema to overlay the scenes of the women with a field of stardust that surrounds them and flows through them—the particles of past forms, past bodies, that are never wholly lost.



Figure 4.1: Scene from Patricio Guzmán's *Nostalgia For The Light*

*Amid Constellations*

At another point in *Nostalgia for the Light*, Guzmán plumbs the depths of the past by bringing us inside Chacabuco, Pinochet’s largest concentration camp. The camp, which was housed in the “middle of the vast emptiness” of the Atacama, now lies in ruins. To fill these ruins with memory, Guzmán interviews Luís Henríquez, an internee who belonged to a group of amateur astronomers in the camp. As Henríquez explains, the group “learned to recognize the constellations” under the guidance of a doctor who knew about astronomy.

The documentary allows Henríquez to continue this work. It gives him the space to bring a revolutionary constellation back into view, to make it visible for the untrained eye. That constellation reappears when Guzman asks Henríquez, “What did you feel watching the stars whilst in prison?” Henríquez responds, “We all had a feeling of great freedom. Observing the sky and the stars, marveling at the constellations, we felt completely free.” Though he and the other internees were fully enclosed—though they faced death, torture, and the disappearance of loved ones—they remembered a freedom that couldn’t be crushed by the violence or contained by the camp, a freedom that far exceeds the narrow market freedoms ushered in by the neoliberal economists.

The astronomers featured in *Nostalgia for the Light* help us to see that this feeling described by Henríquez more than just wishful thinking. Their tools reveal how that feeling touches upon a deep reality. This reality comes into relief later in the film when the astronomers of the Atacama discuss those billion-year-old

elements that compose the cosmos. One of these astronomers, George Preston, describes the calcium found in the bones of humans and stars:

I always tell people when I do public lectures that I'm going to tell them the story of how the calcium in their bones is made and that is the story of the beginnings of us. Our beginnings...some of the calcium in my bones...was made shortly after the Big Bang. Some of those atoms are right there. We live among the trees. We also live among the stars. We live among the galaxies. We are part of the universe. The calcium in my bones was there from the beginning.

As a visual accompaniment to Preston's point, Guzmán follows with a stunning sequence of images that juxtapose the surface of the moon with the surface of a skull. The pockmarked surfaces seem almost indistinct from one another, and for good reason: In the deepest sense, they are inseparable. Moon and skull—all things, in fact—have come from the same billion-year-old source. They are composed of the very same star-stuff. When they crumble, that star-stuff will come undone, but it will not disappear. It will continue in new forms, new life.

Looking up at the night sky, Henríquez and the other internees of Chacabuco were touched by this reality, and they felt the deepest, most revolutionary, form of freedom. Piercing the veil, they remembered their interbeing with the cosmos. They saw they were the stars, not just metaphorically, but at the very core of their being. As part of the constellations, their interbeing could not be surrounded by the walls of the camp, could not be touched by death or by disappearance. That being would outlive the shock, the awe. It would continue, as the light from dead stars continues. We should not, however, take this reality as a consolation for the violence unleashed by Pinochet, the policemen, the torturers, and the economists who adhered to the shock doctrine. In fact, it should remind us how deep their crimes run. In this light,

the crimes of Pinochet and the corporatist economists take on cosmic proportions, for they exerted their violent will, not only over an isolated population, but over the very fabric of the cosmos. They prematurely broke apart what billions of years of migrations had brought together in a singular and social body. They attempted to force closed the eyes of the cosmos that was beginning to witness itself. In the light of interbeing, we should also remember that there is nothing natural about the violence they unleashed or the structures they imposed. There's was no cosmic law, only myth.

*Nothing Really Comes to an End*

*Nostalgia for the Light* offers us one final profound revelation when it introduces us to Valentina Rodriguez, a child of disappeared parents. Rodriguez's story is interspersed with black and white photos of her parents and footage of her grandparents sitting so still and silent that they appear to be frozen in time. Against the background of these four individuals—these four points of light on her map—Victoria Rodriguez offers us the following testimony:

I am the daughter of detained and disappeared parents. First they detained my grandparents. They were held for several hours. They threatened them relentlessly to make them reveal where my parents were, or else, I too would disappear. With this threat, my grandparents took them to where we lived. After detaining my parents, they returned me to my grandparents who brought me up. Astronomy has somehow helped me to give another dimension to the pain, to the absence, to the loss. Sometimes, when one is alone with the pain—these moments are necessary—the pain becomes oppressive. I tell myself it's all part of a cycle which didn't begin and won't end with me, nor with my parents, or with my children. I tell myself we are all part of a current, of an energy, a recyclable matter. Like the stars which must die so that other stars can be born, other planets, a new

life. In this context, what happened to my parents and their absence takes on another dimension. It takes on another meaning and frees me a little from this great suffering as I feel that nothing really comes to an end.

My grandparents are the happiness of my life. Thanks to them, I've been able to write my own story. Not merely from a painful perspective but also a joyful one, optimistic, driven by this strength and the desire to progress. My grandparents were wise realizing they had a double responsibility. They found a way to make my parents important reference points for me. They passed on my parents' values and their strength. What is more, my grandparents were able to overcome their pain so that I could have a happy and healthy childhood. Sometimes I feel like I'm a product with a manufacturing defect which is invisible. I find it funny when people tell me that it doesn't show that I'm the daughter of disappeared prisoners. I realize that my children don't have this defect. Nor does my husband and that makes me happy. I am surrounded by people who have no manufacturing defect. I am happy that my son is growing up like this.

In one sense, this testimony reveals the ongoing traumas of the shock doctrine. Its reverberations continue on in Rodriguez's body, just as they continue on in the forcefully divided social body of Chile. As she admits, "I feel like I'm a product with a manufacturing defect which is invisible." Here, Rodriguez is forced to assess her worth on the terms left to her by the free market revolution that filled the empty spaces ripped open by Pinochet's violence. The stigma of being the child of the disappeared adds no value to her life, at least not on the terms set by the market. Her "manufacturing defect" only draws her backward to the past, toward suffering and absence.

Yet, her testimony reveals that there are other dimensions of being beyond that of the market and of trauma. Astronomy brings her into a dimension that looms beyond the market reality and beyond the individualistic parameters it sets for subjects. From astronomy, Rodriguez sees that "nothing really comes to an end."

She is the living embodiment of this cosmic principle. She is her parents' continuation. The modes of being her parents embodied, the values they committed themselves to, live on in her. They were passed on and transmitted by her grandparents who sit stalwartly behind the scenes of her testimony, behind the scenes of her life. This is not to deny the unfathomable trauma that she experiences. Rather, it is to say that she inhabits multiple dimensions. At times, she inhabits her trauma. She feels an absence that cannot be filled. She suffers. At other moments, her frame widens and she sees *death* and *disappearance* as concepts that obscure the deeper reality of continuation. In those moments, she threads her story—she threads her very being—to a constellation to which her parents are bound, even in their absence. That constellation casts light upon her suffering and her people's suffering. It transmutes suffering to hope.

A larger story is contained within Victoria Rodriguez, just as the whole story of the cosmos is contained within each of her cells. Her story testifies to what is remembered of revolution after the shocks, after the end of history. She is the living memory of a body that was broken apart and hidden beneath the sands of the desert and the sands of time. She is the living memory of revolution, the witness of its old light, the living breath that rekindles its lost fire and its silenced voice.

### **Filling Empty Space with Light and Sound**

As a coda, I turn to a recent disappearance that occurred as I wrote this dissertation, the gravity of which shaped the path that I attempted to lead us through here. On September 26, 2014, forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural

Teachers' College were disappeared from the city of Iguala, Mexico. These *Normalistas*, most of whom came from poor indigenous families, were traveling through Iguala en route to Mexico City where they were to join the 46<sup>th</sup> anniversary of commemorations for the students massacred at Tlatelolco. The students never made it out of Iguala. Instead, they were stopped by police and, it is said, that a confrontation ensued. After the confrontation, the students were most likely rounded up like dogs and handed over to a local drug cartel. They were never seen or heard from again.

The eerie repetition of Tlatelolco is not coincidental. The 43 embodied what the counterrevolutionary regimes of the past five decades, in Mexico and elsewhere around the globe, have attempted to empty from space through military violence and the shock of neoliberal economic policies such as NAFTA. Like the students at Tlatelolco, the *Normalistas* refused to stay in their proper place within a social formation that kept people divided, impoverished, and at war. They broke from the dominant rhythm of this formation by seeking education—a liberatory education—which aimed toward a horizon of autonomous governance and more equitable and collective forms of being, especially for the poor. This is what marked them off as dangerous for those who filled the power vacuums created by neoliberal capitalism. This is what made them a target for those who lived according to the dominant law of violence and profit.

We do not have the space to do the 43 justice in these final pages. We would never have enough pages for them or for any of those discussed thus far. Still, we



must remember them in the space and time that remains to us. To do so here, we can take a final glimpse at the ways in which the revolutionary dead and disappeared continue on in the practices of the living.

In response to the disappearance of the 43 *Normalistas*, students at UC San Diego organized an event called *The Vigil for the 43: To Mourn, To Honor Their Dreams, To Continue Their Struggles*. The vigil was held at The May 1970 Peace Memorial, which we discussed in Chapter 3, but it was one of the few events that I have witnessed where the walls separating the campus from working class San Diego gave way. At the vigil, several speakers spoke of the past in a way that threaded it to the present. One of the speakers was Alejandra Alvarez Garcia, a dear friend, human rights worker, and daughter of an Argentinian revolutionary disappeared during the state terrorism of the late 1970s. Alejandra offered the following words:

A dear Mexican friend told me, “Raise your voice Alejandra for those of us that cannot do so.” I believe because of this we are here today and in other parts of the world to raise our voices, to proclaim ENOUGH in the names of all those because of censorship and fear cannot do so. The word DISAPPEARED is sadly familiar to those of us who live with the disappearance of a parent, relative, or friend. 37 years ago in my country, Argentina, the military dictatorship implemented a state terror campaign that resulted in the disappearance of thirty thousand people, one of which was my father JULIO ALVAREZ GARCIA. In another context and in another country, these terrible disappearances have occurred again. I speak of the 43 students who were kidnapped and disappeared in Ayotzinapa, Mexico and the of thousands disappeared since the inception of the infamous War Against Drugs in that country and elsewhere in Latin America. I would like to tell you that I think we always have to struggle and to show solidarity with the victims of oppressive state worldwide that keep disappearing people in different latitudes of the world. And that the only struggle which you lose is that which is abandoned. VIVOS LOS LLEVARON Y VIVOS LOS QUEREMOS! WE WANT THEM

ALIVE! WE WANT JUSTICE! WE WANT NO MORE  
DISAPPEARANCES IN MEXICO! WE DON'T WANT ANYMORE  
IMPUNITY FOR CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY. 43  
NORMALISTAS DESAPARECIDOS PRESENTE AHORA Y  
SIEMPRE! (Alvarez Garcia)

Alejandra spoke these words while surrounded by the photos of the disappeared students from Ayotzinapa. Their faces were illuminated by candlelight, forming a constellation around her. Mirroring that setting, Alejandra threaded her history—her people's history—to the forcefully closed history of the *Normalistas* in more profound ways than I can do here. Her words reveal a constellation that no violence can ever fully crush or disappear. In that moment, Alejandra and the rest of us stood amid this constellation. We were not merely university students or San Diegans isolated within our spatial and temporal bubble. We were threaded to others across time and across space. And, like so many other points of light spread across the country and across the world, we stood with the disappeared. We took hold of their light and attempted to continue it. We gasped for the breath they had been denied, and we formed it into words.

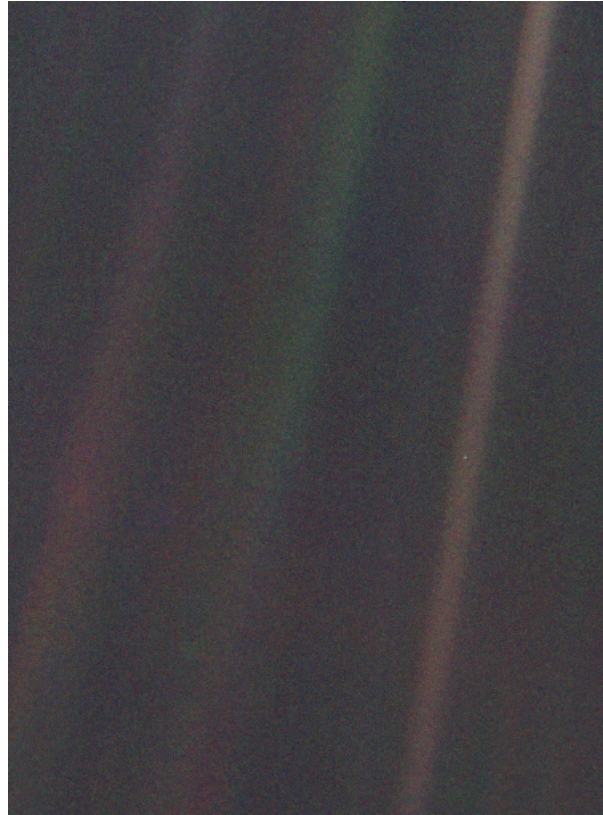


Figure 4.2: Vigil For The 43. Photo credit: Nadia Lopez

Alejandra's words echo in my memory. They bring me back to that scene. In that realm of memory, we can float upward as she speaks. We can rise above the memorial, above the ground upon which she and the others stand firmly, defiantly.

As we hover a little higher, the faces of the 43 blur. Their names become unreadable. The faces of those gathered blur as well, losing their distinctiveness. As we rise higher still, the candles on the ground and in people's hands appear like an unnamed constellation. From this distance, we can still hear Alejandra's words projecting outward from the speaker. As we rise higher, and enter the feathery clouds above UC San Diego, the words become a faint whisper, a vibration following us through space. Down below, we see the lights of San Diego and Tijuana and the lethal manmade border separating the two cities. That line disappears as we soar higher. Once we break through the stratosphere we experience a calm, but we are compelled to move higher. Soaring upward, we break through earth's atmosphere: the spattering of lights, millions of lights, telling us that half of the world is awake while the other half is asleep. We are reminded of the relativity of time. As we soar outward to the moon, we see the continents, the green of forests, the brown of deserts, all framed by the blue canvas of oceans. From here, we see few signs of humanity, but we know they are there. We know, too, that they are dependent upon the green and the blue, dependent on each other despite the veils cast over so many eyes.

Now, our speed increases. We fly past the planets, with little time to comprehend the paradox of their immensity and their smallness. Just as we are about to leave our solar system, we pause. We decide to turn one final glance back to earth, back to our common home, just as one of the Voyager shuttles did when it reached this distance. Our eyes see what its mechanical eye captured so many years ago: a "pale blue dot" amid the vast emptiness of space.



**Figure 4.3: Photograph entitled “Pale Blue Dot” taken by *Voyager 1* Space Probe on 14 February 1990**

Seeing this tiny dot, we remember the words of Carl Sagan when he saw that same view projected across the vast distance from the Voyager shuttle he helped to create:

Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every ‘superstar,’ every ‘supreme leader,’ every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam. The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Think of the

rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand. (Sagan)

We have come so far together. We might be tempted to continue our journey, to turn our eyes away from the pale blue dot, to move ever further out into the cosmos, perhaps in search of the Voyager shuttles—or perhaps, to take the ultimate journey of letting our selves dissolve back into the source. Yet, we cannot go on, for we are held to this dot by the gravity of memory. For now, we are drawn back home. We remember those who we have left behind. From this distance, we would need superpowers to see the light from the vigil or to hear Alejandra's words, but still, we know the waves of light and sound are trailing after us, threading us together across time, across space.

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