

Macondo Time: On Alejandro Vallega's *Latin American Philosophy. From Identity to Radical Exteriority*

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Alejandro Vallega's *Latin American Philosophy. From Identity to Radical Exteriority* is an important contribution to the study of Latin American philosophy in the last half a century, more or less. While Vallega begins with Simon Bolivar's famous "Jamaica Letter" from 1815, which he pairs with Leopoldo Zea's writings on Latin American thought from the 1940s onwards, his focus is on the last twenty years of Latin American philosophical production. In fact, it can be said that Vallega is distinctly interested in the relationship between the philosophy of liberation, as it developed in the early seventies out of the debates among Zea, Bondy, and Dussel, and the more recent developments of what had been called decolonial thought in Quijano, Dussel, Mignolo, Lugones, Maldonado-Torres, and Castro-Gómez. The merit of Vallega's book is that he sets out to map these developments and to bring us to date in the latest debates within a certain strain of Latin American philosophical thinking. The other merit of Vallega's book is that he argues for what he calls a decolonial Latin American aesthetics that would begin from the radical exteriority of the Latin American experience that is framed by what he calls ana-chronic temporalities and their inspired sensibilities. Alejandro Vallega's book, however, is not a history of Latin American philosophy in the last few decades, but an interpretation of a group of key figures. As an interpretation, it is also partisan; it takes sides and explicitly so. It offers readers a distinct optic through which to make sense of a very generative line of thinking within Latin American philosophy. This optic in my estimation is that of a Levinasian inflected post-ontological metaphysical analytics of alterity. This optics is announced in the title of the book: from *identity to radical exteriority*. My argument is that this is the book's strength, but also its Achilles's heel.

In the following, however, I am less interested in entering into a debate with Vallega on how a "proper" history of Latin American philosophy can, should, or ought to be written. In fact, I don't believe that there are or there ought to be proper histories of philosophy. Vallega's book is an invaluable contribution to the growing bibliography of works on Latin American philosophy for a North American, US readership. I am interested, instead, on thinking with Vallega on a couple of issues that may advance the broader agenda of engaging Latin American thought in a generative and critical way. I also want to work with, rather than against, Vallega's own explicitly announced task of thinking "world philosophies." I think this is another virtue of Vallega's book, namely that the question of Latin American philosophy is at the same time the question of "other" philosophies, of philosophy in a world context. The study of Latin American philosophy is a way of provincializing and thus also historicizing both US and European philosophy and in this way, putting on the agenda the task of thinking world philosophies in the plural.

I will divide my remarks in three sections. First, I will revisit the evolution of Enrique Dussel's work over the last four decades in order to begin to challenge what I called above a Levinasian post-ontological metaphysical analytics of alterity. I want to show that Dussel has moved past this way of thinking the challenge of the other, and that his seventies project of an analectical philosophy of liberation has been superseded by a radical materialist historicism. Second, I want to investigate Vallega's provocative analysis of what he calls the "coloniality of time," by juxtaposing it with what I called in some of my own writings: chronotologies. In the third and final section, I want to take up the task of how to do "decolonial" histories of philosophy so as to begin to think world philosophies.

I. From Hermeneutics through alterity to ethopoiesis: Dussel's Ethics of Liberation

Vallega is right to pivot his book on the thought of Enrique Dussel, for Dussel has been the most prolific, generative, creative and influential Latin American philosopher of the last half a century. If we take as a measure of impact and importance the quantify of dissertations and books written on any given figure, then we can say that Dussel among Latin American philosopher is the one that has had the most extended and substantive reception around the world. His philosophical production spans already more than five decades. Despite his own complaints about his work not being translated, Dussel is probably one of the most translated Latin American philosophers, although to be fair, some of his most important texts do remain untranslated. Let us offer a very quick and abbreviated overview of the development of his thought, which I would track in four stages, which rehearses chronologies I have offered in my own texts on Dussel.

The first stage I would call hermeneutical, which extends from the late fifties through the early seventies. Dussel's philosophical production begins with the analysis of two ethical worldviews: the Semitic and the Greek. The operative idea in Dussel's first two books was the Ricouerian idea of mythopoiesis, namely the idea that different cultures are given their distinct coherence by their unique myths or allegories. It is against this background that Dussel set out to think the uniqueness and distinctness of Latin America. During this stage, Dussel is also engaged in the massive project of writing the history of the Latin American Catholic Church, from the perspective of the theology of liberation. During the second half of the sixties, as Dussel's takes up his teaching position in Argentina, he begins what he will call a "destruction" of the history of ethics in order to develop an ethics of liberation for Latin America. What were originally lectures, became a three volume work on ethics. The first two volumes are framed by Ricouer and Heidegger. But, as Vallega notes, it was in the 1971 or 1972 that Dussel gets introduced to Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, and the project of the destruction of ethics becomes the project of the development of an ethics of liberation that is now framed by Levinas's concept of the absolute otherness of the other. Thus begins the second stage of his thinking, the stage that I would call analectical.

The work that is most emblematic and synoptic of this stage is *Philosophy of Liberation*, written in Mexico, as Dussel begins his exile. The operative idea during this period is that of totality and exteriority. It is important to note that in volume three of trilogy *Towards an Ethics of Latin American Liberation*, Hegel and Marx appear as thinkers of the totality. In the *Philosophy of Liberation* Marx once again appears as a thinker of Being, of the totality, of the totality that closes itself off to the alterity of the other. In the writings from this period, in fact, dialectics is juxtaposed to analectics. Dialectics is the logic of the thinking that grounds itself out of itself and which assimilates everything to itself without leaving a remainder. Analectics is the thinking that thinks from the distinctness of the other without assimilating the alterity of the other to mere difference. Analectical logics opens itself to the radical otherness of the other in such a way that it can never ground itself. This thinking thus is without ground. It is this analectical logics that becomes the deconstructive method of Dussel's philosophy of liberation during the mid seventies.

During the seventies Dussel was not only engaged in the debates that would give birth to the philosophy of liberation; he was also engaged in debates within the at the time vibrant theology of liberation. One of those debates was on the role of Marx within the theology of liberation. Another debate was on how "el pueblo" and "the poor" ought to be understood both biblically and theologically. Dussel's intervention in this debates will culminate in his 1986 *Ética comunitaria*, which was translated into English in 1988 under the title of *Ethics and Community*, published by the important editorial Orbis, in the series "Theology and Liberation." Yet, this *Ethics* must be read in conjunction with the works on Marx that Dussel undertook during the late seventies and early eighties. The first work that Dussel wrote on Marx during this period is his 1984 book, *Filosofía de la Producción*, which is made up of a translation of Marx's notebooks on technology (which he did with his son, Enrique Dussel Peters), and an extended analysis of the text. This book will be followed by three volumes on the genealogy of Marx's *Das Kapital* through a close reading of the different drafts that Marx wrote before he settled on the published version of volume one of *Capital*.

At the center of Dussel's genealogy of Capital is the discovery of the centrality of the concept of *lebendige Arbeit*, living labor, for Marx's critique of capital. In these texts, Marx emerges not as a thinker of the totality and the dialectics of the self-positing and self-grounding of being, but as the thinker of the exteriority of capital: the exteriority of living labor. Instead of a dialectical and Hegelian Marx, what we now have is an analogical (analectical) and Schellingian Marx. This Marx allows Dussel to given concreteness to the Levinasian other, which is no longer simply a wholly other, but a concrete, material, embodied, historical other: the poor, the wretched of the world, of history, of global capitalism. We could say then that Dussel had entered a third stage, one that I would call his Marxist, or historical materialist stage. This stage extends, I hypothesize, from about the early eighties to 1989.

A fourth and final stage, for the moment, begins in 1989, when through the mediation of Raul Fornet-Betancourt, Dussel begins a decade long dialogue and debate

with Karl-Otto Apel, which will culminate with the publication of his *Ethics of Liberation* in 1998. I want to foreground only two key moments in the debate with Apel that I hope show how Dussel has already left behind Levinasian post-ontological metaphysics. One moment has to do with the priority of the community of life to the community of communication (*Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*). Apel, whose work aimed to advance Peirce's agenda of linguistifying Kant, took as point of the departure for his version of discourse ethics the primacy of the community of communication. Dussel, departing from the suffering corporeality of the ethical subject, argued for the primacy of the community of life as a material precondition for the community of communication. There is no community of communication if that community has not first secured its material survival and sustenance. The second moment has to do with the Apelian-Habermasian bifurcation of the *begrundung* and *anwendung*, or justification or grounding and application of ethics. Apel talked about levels A and B of ethics, where A refers to the justification of ethical norms, and level B referred to the application of those norms. For Apel the key function of ethical theory is precisely the adjudication and elucidation of the moral norms that enable humans to co-exist in community. Moral theory in this version of discourse ethics is about the priority of intersubjectivity validity to substantive ethical values. For Dussel, however, moral validity is empty if it does not refer to the material moment of ethics. Ethics must address the life of ethical subjects who must secure their dignity and integrity in concrete conditions of privation and injurability. Apel retorted that questions of survival and distribution are part of what he calls an ethics of responsibility, which is subordinate to the formal ethics of intersubjectivity validity, or the formal ethics of discourse. In fact, Apel claimed that Dussel's ethics of liberation is but a version of an ethics of responsibility that aims to address the issues attendant to the application of moral norms.

From this decade long dialogue with Apel, Dussel will acquire a new set of philosophical tools that will allow him to reformulate his ethics of liberation, but now on a new philosophical basis. A quick overview of the structure of the 1998 *Ethics of Liberation* allows us to see how Dussel's ethics of liberation has moved beyond Levinasian phenomenology. This massive and impressive ethics is divided, I would argue, into three sections, though Dussel himself divided into two major parts. The first part is what he calls a world history of ethical systems –what he calls in Spanish *eticidades*. The second is what he calls “Foundations of Ethics”; and the third is what he calls “Critical Ethics” or “Ethical Critique.” The “foundations of ethics” part is itself divided into three parts: first, we have the material moment of ethics, or what he calls, the moment of practical truth of ethics. Ethics is grounded in the corporeality of living ethical beings and it must address their life. Then, we have the moment of intersubjective validity, or what Dussel calls “formal morality.” Finally, we have the moment of ethical feasibility, i.e. that a valid moral norm is one that can actually be enacted. Ethics are meaningful for finite beings and thus they must be enforceable. For Dussel these three moments are equi-primordial. To focus on one, or to give primacy to one over the other, is to fall into reductivism. The third part, or the second part of ethics, what Dussel calls Critical Ethics, mirror, but critically or negatively, foundational ethics: thus, we have ethical critique, anti-hegemonic validity, and the praxis of liberation—what he calls, the

principle of liberation. Every system for the production and reproduction of life cannot but produce victims, specific victims. These victims challenge the ruling system and do so by articulating a counter-hegemonic validity. Their victimization challenges the accepted rules and norms of validity of the ruling system. Ethics that is worthy of that name must articulate ethical critique from the perspective of what he calls the “negativity of the victims” of that system. The community of life, which is prior to the community of communication, turns into the community of victims that articulate the negation of the negation of the ruling system. Here, it becomes clear why Dussel must begin with a “world history of ethical systems.” The history of ethical system is the history of the critique of ethical systems that produced their own victims and consequently the articulation of their own respective anti-hegemonic validity. For Dussel, there is no ethics without the history of ethics, and thus, without the history of the ethical critique of the victims of history. For the moment, let me affirm without offering warrants or arguments that Dussel’s ethics of liberation is not unlike Benjamin and Adorno’s “negative moral philosophy” (to use Gerhard Schweppenhäuser’s terminology) or ethics of disaster.

We can see how the Levinasian other, which had become the “poor” and the “pueblo” in the *Community and Ethics* of 1986, has now become the victim and the community of victims of the ruling system. I want to underscore that this victim is no longer thought in terms of Levinasian alterity, the *otredad del otro*, the otherness of the other. The victim is always a specific victim, the victim of a given mode of production and its correlative system of the circulation of commodities. It is also to be noted that Dussel thinks of the history of ethical systems in terms of the emergence of inter-regional systems (that for a long time remained de-linked and non-subordinate to each other, or to one) that beginning in 1492 with the discovery and/or invention of the America were integrated into a world-system (launching the hegemony of Europe). To summarize: Dussel’s post 1998 *Ethics of Liberation* as well as his *Politics of Liberation* have three elements that are antithetical or allergic to radical alterity: both foundational and critical ethics require intersubjective validity, that is, a justification of moral norms and ethical values that require if not the consensus at least the validation of all those affected by the application of those norms. Radical alterity cannot enter into this process of adjudication and justification. The other element has to do with what I would call the *long durée* of the ethics of liberation that aims to both recover and valorize the lessons learned from past victims of now anachronistic or defunct ethical systems. Third, the victim and the community of victims points to the corporeal vulnerability and injurability of ethical subjects, but in a way that is explicitly historically indexed. *Our ethical flesh is riveted to history*. We all suffer our flesh but in different forms in accordance with the affordance of different material circumstance. Dussel’s ethics of liberation is thus the same time an archeology of ethopoesis. To paraphrase Adorno, there is a direct lineage between the slingshot and the atom bomb, but not one between barbarism and the response to the suffering of our victims. This is why ethics must always be prefaced by a global history of ethical systems –the memory of the vanquished and victims in and of history.

II. The Production of Time. Decolonial Chronotopologies.

One of the central aims of Vallega's book is to articulate what he calls ana-chronic temporalities so as to open the possibility for new emancipatory sensibilities. Ana-chronic temporalities are also meant to challenge the "coloniality of time" –a term that Vallega coins as a way to complement Quijano's foundational idea of the "coloniality of power and Maldonado-Torres's idea of the "coloniality of being." I share the impetus for Vallega's temporal analytics that elucidate how it is that the "West" and "Europe" are able to impose their epistemic power over the rest of the world through the manipulation of time, a manipulation that assimilates reason to the historical narrative of the Europe. Edward Said has already in his classic *Orientalism* indicated how orientalism operates by displacing cultures to a remote, infantile, regressive, primitive, and immature past. To orientalize means to de-temporalize. If we use the language of Johannes Fabian, Western hegemony is maintained through a ceaseless process of the denial of the coevalness of cultures. Or, we could use the language of Homi Bhabha: the philosophical discourse of modernity, the modernity of Europe, is one that is always interjecting a temporal lag between the hegemon and its subaltern. The subaltern is always suffering from an incurable belatedness, to use the Fanonian term. It is in this sense that I can take on the term, "coloniality of time," namely in the sense that time insofar as it becomes temporalized through certain narratives becomes the vehicle for relegating others to an immemorial past, a past that is de-linked from the present of the present, the future of the present, the future of the new.

In fact, there are a variety of ways in which *time is temporalized* (Koselleck) in such a way that it can perform those forms of de-temporalization and a-chronization. We have the philosophical discourse of modernity that tells specific narratives about the convergence of historical time and the rationalization of the life-world. We have the sociological discourse of rationalization, disenchantment and the separation of value spheres. We have the anthropological discourses that talk about primitive and tribal societies that are not only relegated to savage spaces but also distant pasts. We also have the psychosocial discourses that talk about logics of maturation and non-dependency. We have the pedagogical discourses of the departure from self-incurred tutelage or immaturity. I think the different ways in which the temporalization of time takes place through different temporal devices –as indicated by the previous list of types of discourses- that result in different forms of de-temporalization and a-chronization gets lost or muted by the overly rhetorical "coloniality of time." It is for this reason that I would instead urge Vallega to drop the term and adopt instead the term that I introduced some decades ago in my essay "Chronotopology: Critique of Spatiotemporal regimes." I want to argue that the project of a decolonial critique of Western hegemony requires that we undertake a critique of the spatiotemporal regimes that are secreted by the different philosophical and theoretical discourses of the modernity of Europe.

Let me briefly sketch what a chronotopological critique would look like by making reference to Karl Marx. In volume two of *Capital*, chapters 12 through 15, Marx sets out to disaggregate different temporal moments of the production, circulation and

accumulation of capital. Marx discusses the working period, production time, circulation time and ways in which these different times affect the rate of the accumulation of surplus value that turns into capital. These different times crystallize into surplus value. In effect what we have here in these chapters is an analytics of the production of time, one that mirrors the analytics of the production of space that we found in volume one of *Capital*. Another Marxist complemented Marx's analytics of the production of time with a detailed analysis of the changing regimes of marking time, of keeping track of time, of domesticating time. This was E.P. Thompson, whose still indispensable essay "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism" (see *Customs in Common*) demonstrated how capitalism could not have taken off without the secularization of time, and its subsequent mathematization and disciplining through the rise of the clock. Capitalism required the abolishment of divine or sacred time and its replacement by merchant time, the time of production and consumption.

It was Henri Lefebvre, however, who articulated most lucidly Marx's analytics of the *production of space* in his book of that title. Very briefly, in his book Lefebvre argues that space is spatialized, that is, produced as space through a dialectical interplay among: spatial practices (how we live space), spatial representations (how we represent those lived spaces), and spatial imaginaries (how we imagine alternative spaces). There is never absolute or abstract space, but only *spatialized space*. I want to argue in parallel that we ought to think of the production of time in terms of an analogous trialectic: temporal practices (how we live time), temporal representations (how we measure and represent the passing of time), and temporal imaginaries (in what thens, nows, and to-come-times are the horizons of agency and possibility imagined). There is never absolute or abstract time, but only *temporalized time*.

Now, decolonial thought can only critique the temporal regimes imposed by the West if it is able to disaggregate how different cultures live time, how they represent and measure the passing of time in their lifeworlds, and in within what temporal horizons they imagine their transformation and becoming. If we are caught in the grip of the "coloniality of time," then, we cannot articulate either a liberating project, a future that is to come, or an immanent critique that demonstrates how European hegemony is maintained by the conceptual gerrymandering of time. The goal of a critical chronotopology at the service of decolonial thought is the affirmation of coevalness and the common production of time for a common future.

III. Decolonial Histories of Philosophy

The decolonial project is distinct from the postcolonial project in that the former assumes an avowed global perspective in ways that the latter does not (Chakrabarty notwithstanding). This is also one of the virtues of Vallega's book, namely that the study of Latin American decolonial thought, as it has been articulated in the last two decades, is at the service of provincializing both US and European philosophies in the name of opening philosophy to world philosophies. I want to contribute to this aim of decolonial

thinking by attempting a typology of the ways in which different attempts have been undertaken to provincialize Western philosophy.

The first type of such provincializing history would be the one that we find exemplified in the work of Said, specifically in *Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism*. Here the project was to offer an archeology of the discourses of othering that produced and invented imaged of the orient, one that would legitimate their subordination.

The second type would be the one exemplified by Gayatri Spivak's distinct deconstructive postcolonialism that aims to explode the masterful and mastering discourse of Western philosophy from within by demonstrating their internal incoherence. This type of deconstructive reading, not unlike that of the archeology of othering discourses, begins with the archive of Western philosophy of itself. These two types of histories let the master discourse speak in order to show its own incoherence. The other, the subaltern, however, remains silent. The master's discourse incoherence speaks loudly if the subaltern remains silent.

A third type of history could be that which we find exemplified in the work of Bhabha and what he calls the "third space," or the hybrid, which seeks to make visible the ways in which master discourses are always cannibalizing the thinking of its putative subaltern others. We can call these histories of dispossession and agnotology—the production of forgetfulness and "white ignorance". Enrique Dussel, in fact, has contributed to this type of histories, as has Eduardo Arciniegas, whose *historias desde el reverso*, show how Latin American thinking was key to European enlightenment (see *America in Europe: A History of the New World In Reverse*).

There is a fourth type of history that aims to write different narratives and stories of the West itself. These are the histories that we find in Stephen Toulmin's *Cosmopolis* or Michel Onfray's *counter-histories of Western Philosophy*, (that he has narrated in four volumes) which give privilege place to hedonism, skepticism, nihilism and egoism. These histories are counter-Kantian and counter-Hegelian narratives. They aim to show the discontinuities and internal tensions and dissent that make it impossible to speak of "an" "European" or "Western" discourse. I would place here Fernando Coronil's important work on what he called "Occidentalism."

There is a fifth type of history and that is the one in which the subaltern refuses to narrate its history in terms dictated by the master discourse, or even to engage it all. These histories are not counter-histories in the sense of Onfray or Coronil, but rather alternate histories, or non-histories, or histories of silences and blindnesses. I am thinking here of the kind of narratives that we find in some of the works of Achille Mbembe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (who already in 1986 called for a "decolonizing of the mind.>").

I am sure my typology of decolonial histories is incomplete. Yet, as incomplete as it may be, this typology allows me to make a point. Decolonial histories of philosophy

required we used a variety of forms of writing the histories of philosophy, both European, North American, Latin American, African, Chinese, Japanese, and so on and so forth. In fact, given the layered histories of Western imperialism and its many topographies, the archives of Western colonialism and imperialism are plural; thus they call for different and differential histories. If the decolonial project is to have efficacy, it must excavate different archives and different chronotopes of the invention of Europe and their (there is neither one Europe nor one West—but an empty signifier) different colonial others.
