

Neither Apocalyptic nor Integrated: Discordant Dialectics

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The following reflection is the result of the combined reading of the book by Castillo and Egginton (C&E) titled *Medialogies: Reading Reality in the Age of Inflationary Media* and the work of Spanish philosopher and essayist Agustín García Calvo. I have chosen to include García Calvo as the primary interlocutor in this reflection because he, for those unfamiliar with his work, is one of the Spanish essayists who has best been able to unveil the falsities that founded and continue to uphold the victory of the self-absorbed capitalist regime of individual well-being.¹ While this new order can be interpreted as an apocalyptic outcome of the post-human and post-political capitalist period, García Calvo shows that there is still time to combat the el “régimen que [la gente] padecemos” (*Análisis de la sociedad del bien-estar* [The Culture of Well-Being] 8) (regime that we are suffering through).² There is still time to attack its center, “the social.” Generally speaking, he takes us in the same direction as *Medialogies*, but by looking at the contemporary world from new angles, in my view, he opens up the analysis of capitalist reality to a wider discussion on the externalization of ideology.

I will pause on García Calvo’s concept of “the social,” which is always tied to the development of the state of individual well-being. From among his ideas, looking at “the social” is what best illustrates the strategy employed by neoliberal power to continue its colonization of the exterior world and the individual. For this reason, I trust that weaving C&E’s cultural analysis into García Calvo’s notion of “the social” and vice versa will allow us, as García Calvo writes, “abandonar toda distracción con otras formas de tiranía y centrar los ataques en el Dinero, que se ha declarado al fin como la verdadera forma del Poder; y romper la disociación entre la vida personal y pública haciendo de la Persona un tema de política del pueblo” (12) (to abandon all distraction by other forms of tyranny and focus our attack on Money, which

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revealed itself at last as the true form of Power; we can then do away with the dissociation of personal and public life and make the Person a political issue of the people).³

Additionally, by understanding “the social” from García Calvo’s explanation as the new form of the capitalist contract, we are able to return to dialectics as a tool with which to think through reality and talk about its contradictions. Dialectical thought, as García Calvo explains, reminds us that there is no nostalgic integration without apocalyptic disenchantment, and vice-versa. In agreement with Heraclitus, García Calvo reaffirms that reality is dialectical without the possibility of negotiation or synthesis. Dialectics is also the path to democracy, a pathway that, as García Calvo and the poet Antonio Machado well know, is always waiting to be walked, and with caution. The outcome of this dialectical introduction is a thought in motion whose results serve only to keep us in motion. And when I say “us,” again referencing García Calvo, I am referring to *el pueblo* (the people) and not to the masses, which are two different entities. Individuals are unable to be distinguished when they are part of the “mass” because the “mass” is the sum of what can be counted, and only individuals transformed into commodities can be counted in this way.

García Calvo takes us back to the analysis of wealth and poverty and places it in the context of the capitalist social contract. By “ataca a las cosas mismas, a los bienes de consumo de la sociedad del Bien-estar” (31) (attacking the things themselves, the consumer goods of the society of well-being), he comes to the dialectical affirmation, both Marxist and colonial, that “la riqueza no es otra cosa que una elaboración de la miseria (la venta de la vida) de los trabajadores . . . y de los países pobres” (32) (wealth is nothing more than the manufactured misery of workers . . . and of the poor countries). By dialectically connecting these two antagonistic realities, each one is altered “en su realidad misma por virtud de la relación del Desarrollo con la miseria de sus alrededores” (32) (in its own reality by virtue of the relation between the Development and its surrounding misery). The resulting truth is that, “a medida que la administración de la miseria se desarrolla, la riqueza misma, que era su objetivo se transforma, se vuelve miserable, se plea y se vacía [de riqueza]; y es ahí donde se ejerce la venganza de los miserables sobre los bienes mismos” (33) (at the same time as the administration of misery becomes more developed, wealth itself is also transformed and turns miserable, becomes shallow, and is emptied [of wealth]; and it is there that the vengeance of the poor peoples over the goods themselves is executed).

Inside this social order of asymmetrical relations, García Calvo identifies “the social” as the place where the separation of the public and the private ends, and where the law of common people and the Rule of law are presented as an obstacle to “the social.” Through the capitalist and technological-media construction, its unfolding and spreading of “the social,” we see how the power

of the market and its spectacle take control, surpassing the initial stage of the dissimulation—that first stage of inflationary media that the authors indicate in *Medialogies*—with an insolent simulation. Considering next the work of the Aymara sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, one could argue that the colonialist process of power and knowledge, first initiated in a period of appropriation and exploitation by an elite who owned the modes of production, attains its victory precisely through “the social,” specifically, through its social networks and communities: social media, social image, social life, social networks, social markets, and social self.⁴

The social contract creates its own reality, and it is one that can blind us. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that C&E choose to examine the concept of “medialogy.” They deliberately focus on two stages of “inflationary media” (a strategy through which the social contract is articulated) with the hopes of opening up a space for something that they call “ethical optics” (6). Without question,

to understand the impact of today’s era of inflationary media and its attendant crisis of reality, we must first understand its predecessor. . . . These early modern thinkers were witnesses to the first age of inflationary media, and were among the first to spell out its implications for the expansion and consolidation of power. (6)

I am completely in agreement with the need to revisit the sixteenth century and learn to distinguish that which lies outside of the dominant power. But I also consider it necessary to look to our pre-modern and ancient predecessors: to Heraclitus, Apuleius, and the Sufis. Now may be the time to rid ourselves of binaries (the ancient and the modern, the modern and the postmodern, the apocalyptic and integrated) and start a dialogue about what is contemporary. Both Heraclitus and Cervantes are equally important and still contemporary because, in their work, we can continue to learn how to fight back and resist the power that dominates the precarious and vulnerable life.

That being said, although it is essential to consider ourselves part of, and loyal to, a critical tradition, this does not excuse us from the obligation to analyze that critical tradition intelligently and creatively. Commemoration, Walter Benjamin tells us, can be dangerous because it is easy to forget what is truly being commemorated.⁵ Contrary to this, the cultural work of remembrance gives a historical and political meaning to what is being remembered and appeals both to language and the ethical and political conscience. It is in recalling alongside the contemporaries that the essayistic and heretical practice (as Adorno would say) is formed. This practice irritates those who defend

the status quo because it has no problem holding its own tradition and vocabulary at a certain distance—Cervantes has taught us that it is always interesting to observe the reaction of our adversary because in it we learn where to place our own answers. The act of recalling the history of the domination of power alongside Heraclitus, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Gracián, Velázquez, and Goya can enable us to free ourselves from the weight of the artistic and social conventions. In fact, if we think about it, and as the authors of this book explain, if Spain was truly a workshop for experimentation of narrative forms from the end of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth century, it was one precisely because of those who dared to imagine beyond the Medieval-European canon's formulas (the false first person autobiography of Lazarillo, the “novel without a narrator” in the *Celestina*, and the world's first completely epistolary novels). As the authors of this book remind us, what is revolutionary about this moment is not what is told but the *way* in which it is told. According to Todorov, it is because of this that *El Capricho* expresses a “sentido de libertad respecto de las formas visibles de los seres” and a “derecho a la invención” (69) (sense of liberty regarding the visible forms of humans [and a] right to invent). Keeping all of this in mind, it becomes critical in the twenty-first century to ask ourselves if zombies, apocalyptic narratives of use, capitalist neoliberal realism, hyperrealism, and cruel humor are equally revolutionary lenses that can destabilize truths and create new pathways that lead toward “ethical optics.” But is it just a question of changing the optics? Does the understanding of an order based on asymmetric relations change our position and the way we interact within this social contract?

My belief is that by recalling the problem of domination through the lens of contemporary voices, we can engage in a rich dialogue that interrupts culturally deterministic and fundamentalist visions and positions. These visions and positions prevent us from seeing, for instance, that capitalism's foundation is full of alarming contradictions that do not lead to any result *a priori*, and much less so if we think that this result will be (and has to be) positive. To arrive at a positive result, we must learn to philosophize *beforehand* and, also, to paraphrase the title of a work by Spanish philosopher Francisco Fernández Buey, we must philosophize *from below*. At the same time, we must always keep in mind that altering language or perception is not enough to change a social reality. Culture alone has the limitation that, even if it can be used to reveal the ideology of the dominant narrative, it cannot decapitate the dominant power; for this, citizenship is necessary, and citizenship is made up of people not masses.

In thinking about the opening of new paths, García Calvo reminds us of the importance of reflecting on language. He emphasizes that there are words that “have not been properly attacked” and because of this, we must start by adding words into the official lexicon that have been stigmatized, forgotten, or dis-

placed: “class,” “race,” “gender,” “exploitation,” “colonization,” “violation of civil rights and of nature,” “insurgence,” “inequality,” “injustice,” “hegemony,” and “subordination.” These words are tied to issues that are often left out of the capitalist mass culture and are rooted in untold and unjust stories of appropriation and exploitation. As Pérez Andújar writes in his all-but-arbitrary *Diccionario enciclopédico de la vieja escuela* (Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Old School), recovering these words not only tells us the word’s current meaning, it also, and most important, provides us with “todo lo que ha[n] querido decir desde que se vaciaron y desde antes” (11) (all that it has wanted to say since being emptied, and even before). Contemporary questions arise in the convergence of these conflicting linguistic realities. For example, studying subjects under the categories of precarious workers and salaried-consumers brings us to a view of social inequality that renders the Marxist concept of class struggle out-of-date. When we return to classic notions such as “class struggle,” “exploitation,” “capitalist distribution,” “appropriation,” and to words that have been hijacked by those in power, we are able to propose tentative answers to the question: what is being gambled and what is in crisis?

When we remember *beforehand* and *from below*, something echoes in the words indicating that the answers we are searching for are not only cultural but also economic and political. To paraphrase Fernández Buey, the crisis through which we are living is relative to the forms of production, consumption and living that industrial capitalism has carefully crafted over the course of various centuries. The economic crisis is provisional and transitory and there is the belief that we will come out of it through systemic reform. Nevertheless, the expansive character of this type of civilization gives the reforms a neoliberal orientation. This means that they don’t alleviate, but actually accentuate, the ecological crisis. The capitalist and post-industrialist civilization has no sense of limits, and the ecological crisis will worsen. Furthermore, when combined with the cultural process of homogeneous consent, another consequence of the expansive nature of capitalist civilization, it will provoke a cultural discomfort in the world that is even larger than the current one (Fernández Buey 38).

In regards to how we have arrived at a point where a civilization is in crisis, *Medialogies* describes in detail “how the crisis of reality provoked by inflationary media in the early modern period set the stage for an epic struggle between domination and freedom in our own age of inflationary media” (6). The book’s authors are correct when they point to the birth of the “mass-media” and also when they signal to what they consider to be the two stages of “inflationary media” and the crisis of reality. With that said, in regards to how we have come to this place, it seems to me that the position becomes richer when we include in the paradigm of mass media “the social” component, and when we stop to think about this concept of “the social” and its relationship to the mass media. The result of the evolution of capitalism is a utopian society

rooted in the personal enjoyment and well-being of the self-interested and narcissistic individual. This individual has no qualms about the fact that his or her actions often occur at a cost to others. Out of the disenchantment of industrial capitalism and its promises of a futuristic utopia, a new moment of nostalgic enchantment, set in a possible earthly paradise, emerges. The individual no longer needs divine intervention. For this self-absorbed SELF, what is true and what is not ceases to be relevant. What becomes important, then, is who administers the truth for whom and how is it distributed through the civil order. The desire for a temporary well-being (*el estar*) imposes itself on the desire for a meaningful coexistence (*el ser con los otros*). The appearance of truth (*la verosimilitud*) replaces the actual truth (*la verdad*)—this is made clear in the section titled “Stranger Than Fiction” and is also emphasized in a statement supporting this work: “Modernity’s basic mode of framing, then, is the stage. The form of this medium quickly infiltrated every aspect of western experience” (190). The medium—the capitalist’s stage—becomes the message, and the social media, along with advertising, become the key to understand the globalization of “the social” order.

In ancient times, the political and private spheres (the space for politics and the space for private matters or *oikonomia*) were kept separate. However, in the capitalist agenda of “the social,” because everything is privatized in order to generate a surplus value, the distinction between these two spheres is eliminated. What C&E call the first “inflationary” stage marks the beginning of the capitalist process and confuses the public and the private spheres, progressively favoring “the social” contract. This contract supposes a frontal attack on the law that distinguishes between what a person can do in private (without any form of limitation) and in public (subject to common law). As García Calvo explains, “the social” does not represent an indifference to what is private and public, but rather an invasion of capitalist law in the private, which up until now, has been immune to it, as well as “liberation” of all that has been subject to this law.

The law of common people and the rule of law represent a great obstacle that the elites need to resolve in order for the unrestricted capitalist formula of preserving private self-interested well-being to be put in place. From the perspective of capitalist ideology, the public is the enemy of the private and vice-versa. According to essayist Marina Garcés, what results is “el individuo propietario de la negación de su dependencia. Propiedad y libertad, bajo esta concepción del individuo, se refuerzan mutuamente. Y el contrato social como obligación política asumida por voluntad propia, es la garantía de esa libertad” (32) (the individual owner and the negation of his/her dependency. Ownership and liberty, under the conception of the individual, are mutually reinforced. And the social contract as a political obligation adhered to by free will, is the guarantee of this liberty). What remains is “una comunidad de propietarios, voluntariamente asociados” (32) (a community of voluntarily

associated owners). There is no society, only self-interested individuals.

Following García Calvo, the doctrinal framework and narcissism of “the social” order is produced through a political regime that insists on the privatization ethos and the protection of consumer rights and freedom. This regime always favors the elites in power and leads to a mass of people with no sense of political or social engagement in the decision-making process. The simultaneous decline of public spaces for public discourse reduces the citizen, once a meaningful participant, to a spectator. It is worth going back to the following quotation from García Calvo’s book:

La democracia desarrollada, el régimen que padecemos, justamente ha tomado como apoyo último, eso, el individuo [. . .] el Régimen, el actual, el único del que debemos ocuparnos de frente y de perfil, está fundado sobre el Individuo y en la creencia de la libertad personal, libertad de compra y de venta, libertad de expresión, y todo tipo de libertades, pero siempre libertades de uno, de Fulano y de Mengana, entonces, creo que no cabrá duda de que no puede haber un tema más importante, desde el punto de vista político, que intentar atacar esto. (65)

(The developed democracy, the regime that we walk, has taken precisely the individual as its ultimate truth . . . the Regime, the current one, the only one with which we should concern ourselves in front and from the side, is founded on the Individual and on the belief of personal freedom, freedom to buy and sell, freedom of expression, and all kinds of freedoms, but always freedoms of the individual, of Fulano and of Mengana, so, I believe there to be no doubt that there is no issue more important, from a political point of view, than this one.)

The violation of human, political, civil, and planetary rights of those people and places who are less favored, and therefore excluded, from the unequal capitalist distribution has been silenced by the social contract and hidden from its narrative. Paradoxically, this violation is justified in the name of the rights of the self-interested individual and the concern for his or her well-being. At the same time, the defense of the neoliberal culture over other socialistic alternatives creates a political order with “vocación de contener una naturaleza humana, más o menos bestial, en la que el YO se enfrenta tanto a los otros como al mundo, en la que solo hay cuerpos separados que hace falta mantener juntos mediante algún artificio” (García Calvo 83) (a calling to control a human nature, more or less animal-like, in which the SELF comes face to face with others just as much as it does with the world, and in which there are

only separate bodies that need an artifice to stay together). What García Calvo writes seems more urgent still if we stop for a moment to consider its relationship to a time like ours that has been marked by large migratory movements (a direct consequence of unequal capitalist and colonial distribution). When subjects historically labeled as different by the imposed capitalist and colonial principles coexist in the same social space, their inflicted differences become clear and the current climate of physical and symbolic violence intensifies. It is interesting to think about all of this in the context of the chapter of the expulsion of the moors in *Don Quijote*. As Rivera Cusicanqui would say, from this violent perspective, the influence and colonial nature of capitalist power and knowledge come into being. Not surprisingly, for this reason cultural mechanisms that serve to conceal the history of these principles are produced with urgency.

The symbol of the zombie that is studied in *Medialogies* is born precisely during this violent moment where the self-interested individual and his or her “social contract” are affirmed. This affirmation is a grand fallacy because it implies that the capitalist law covers both the public and the private spheres. Since everything falls under what is “social,” everything is owned by market forces. The creation and defense of this “social” contract favor the freedom of companies, businesses, fracking, treaties such as The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP), and the neocolonial process of gentrification, which are all ways in which private property legally invades the public. By extending beyond its territory and reaching its legal limit, the capitalist law literally takes the private property of others. When the political disappears due to its economical privatization, there are administrative, regulatory, and organizational consequences. These are all consequences that affect the “social SELF,” because what once belonged to the private realm no longer does. “The social,” then, seems to be crucial in understanding the ambition that is behind the capitalist State’s contract and its cultural production.

As is emphasized in the book being discussed, the television, computer, and smartphone are all screens used to configure “the social” and to facilitate the individual’s participation in it. These screens are doorways used both to enter and adhere to a community that defends this social space that is neither public nor private. Therefore, and as the authors of this book point out, it is not a coincidence that we find in its cultural manifestation similar conflicts of Lope-esque theater (Lope being the inventor of mass media). Lope de Vega, Góngora, Quevedo, Gracián, and Cervantes witnessed the birth of the cultural paradox that is the “social SELF” (the cultivation of point of view and incipient relativism, or the trope of dissimulation that are so often seen in novels, proto-novels, and theater). For its part, the twenty-first century’s victory becomes clear through its use of scientific-technological advances to overcome the dissimulation period and the increase in production of “communication

screens.” C&E describe this moment in the following way:

The inflationary media of the first and second age each inverted the medi-ology of the prior age. Thus did the first inflationary age, by turning things into copies, transform an immanent domain of bodies and divine substance into a world of appearances masking an ineffable reality. Thus did the second reality invert that schema once more, importing those ineffable substances into the subjective realm, and turning what had been copies of those substances into ungrounded pieces of the real. Elites in each age were and have been agile at manipulating their respective medialogies, from imperial control of public media to promote the quiescent exchange of real privileges for symbolic honor in the seventeenth century, to the subversion of democratic governance by multinational corporations that benefit from the bolstering of technocratic bureaucracies in the face of rising fundamentalisms in the late twentieth century. (165)

The establishment, on a global scale, of the stage where the order of “the social” is developed, results in the normalization of the order of simulation as an expression that conceals its abuse of power and progress. When the economy invades the public sphere, it substitutes citizens’ rights for the rights of consumers. These consumers believe that by exercising their rights, they will find in the act of consumption a path toward “individualization.” This consumer, who may or may not see that reality is a simulation, may not realize that capitalism turns everything, even people, into equally valued merchandise. Following critic Julio Baena’s reading in “The Emperor’s Old—and Perennial—Clothes: Two Spanish Fine-tunings to Andersen’s Received Wisdom,” the truth results not in the unveiling, but in the further veiling of reality. As opposed to what happened in *El retablo de las maravillas*, in our century, truth is not in the nudity of the emperor, but in his clothes.

For this exact reason, in some sense, the zombie virus documented in C&E’s book appears to be the face of “the social.” It is the metaphor for a capitalist impulse that frees itself from the common law’s limit to put in its place one of self-interest. It is an image centered on the actual self that is not destined to revolutionize reality, but rather to justify or explain it without altering it. The zombie is an example of a mode of bourgeois mass-media populism that abuses excess to divert attention. It utilizes social neoliberal realism to establish a parasitic-type relationship where reality becomes a stage for phenomena that are neither truly analyzed nor studied in depth. We are left with anecdotes and interpretations; the whole truth is never revealed. These intolerable images lead to a lack of emancipation given that they never show “las cosas en sí mismas, sino

siempre y sobre todo como fenómenos mediados, distorsionados, impropios, entrecomillados” (Mauricio Ferraris 47) (the thing itself, but rather mediated, distorted, and unseemly phenomena). These kinds of mechanisms and images, in the eyes of the Spanish critic Mauricio Ferraris, constitute a type of “realism,” which is to say a “casi-realidad con fuertes elementos fabulísticos” (60) (almost-reality with strong fabulistic elements); it is not just “no es, por tanto, un simple product posmoderno. Tiene un corazón tan antiguo cuanto el deseo de ilusión propio del ser humano, y también cuanto al gusto por la mistificación y sus conveniencias” (61) (a simple postmodern product. It has a heart that is as old as human’s desire for illusion itself and also our enjoyment of mystification and its benefits). We are before “una variante del solipsismo, de la idea de que el mundo externo no existe, que es una mera representación, quizá a nuestra disposición” (61) (a kind of solipsism, the idea that the external world does not exist but is a mere representation that is, potentially, at our disposition). If García Calvo proposes that the concept of “the social” is the key that unlocks the world of the reality of money, Ferraris captures, with his idea of “realism,” the essence of a world where any authority that the real has is revoked in order to put in its place a simulated reality with strong “fabulistic” elements.

“Realism” is constructed through “la yuxtaposición . . . [de imágenes contrapuestas cuya sucesión yuxtapuesta logra su neutralización]; la dramatización [transformación de lo real en semi-ficción] y la ‘onirización’ (60) (the juxtaposition . . . [of overlaid images, whose further juxtaposition achieves neutralization]; the dramatization [the transformation of the real into semi-fiction] and the ‘onirization’), or conversion of the experience into the prolongation of an institutionalized dream. The purpose, as Ferraris affirms, is to make “el deseo, en propiedad, se confirm[e] como un elemento de control social” (54) (desire, in itself, conform as an element of social control). We are in the midst of an *inemendable* (unmendable) reality, that is to say, one that is not dependent on conceptual structures because “no hay hechos, solo interpretaciones” (46) (there are no facts, only interpretations). Although this reality is a “resultado de un cambio cultural que en buena parte coincide con la modernidad, esto es con el prevalecer de los esquemas conceptuales sobre el mundo externo” (47) (the result of a cultural change that in good part coincides with modernity and the prevailing of conceptual structures over the external world), we must never forget that above all it obeys a colonial capitalist agenda.

In this capitalist reality, truth, according to García Calvo, is the falseness that the world holds itself up on. This truth is observable in the fact that, instead of

reconocer lo real e imaginar otro mundo que realizar en lugar del primero, [capitalismo] pone lo real como fábula y asume que esta es la única liberación posible: de modo que no hay nada que realizar, y después de todo

no hay tampoco nada que imaginar; se trata, al contrario, de creer que la realidad es como un sueño que no puede hacer daño y que satisface. (61)

(recognizing what is real and then imagining another world that can be realized in its place, [capitalism] makes what is real a fable and accepts that fable is the only freedom possible: in that way, there is nothing to achieve, and in the end there is nothing to imagine, either; what it involves, on the contrary, is believing that reality is like a dream that satisfies and can do no harm.)

Truth is a fable of reality and results in “El populismo mediático, un Sistema en el cual (con tal que se tenga poder para ello) se puede pretender hacer cualquier cosa. En los telediaros y en los *talk show* se ha asistido al reino del ‘No hay hechos, solo interpretaciones’” (42) (media populism, a system with which [provided there be power to do so] one can expect to instill belief in anything. The news programs and talk shows have become part of the reign of ‘there are no facts, only interpretations’). In the end, “la razón del más fuerte es siempre la mejor” (42) (the reason of the one in power is always the best).

Regarding the stories of the apocalyptic sign, one could say that their emphasis favors hegemonic power because it increases the state of paralysis that produces learned defenselessness. This state is intrinsically linked to the capitalistic processes that continue to strategically spread precariousness at different levels: ecological, political, educational, social, ethical, ontological, and aesthetic. As C&E point out, the fact that the apocalypse arrives in the hands of the zombie creates a sort of analogy with the spectator’s reality that, in some sense, supports the continuation of the capitalist social contract. As long as human vulnerability continues to be perceived as a problem to be solved individually, the investment of surplus value in a market infrastructure destined to improve well-being at all costs will continue to be justified.

To frame the apocalypse and the state of crisis not as a collateral effect of the capitalist narrative but as part of its *modus operandi*, allows us to understand that there is no capitalist narrative without crisis and apocalypse (e.g., paradise does not exist without the serpent). Furthermore, it is also possible to find in this imagined ending the perfect justification for this self-interested story of evil that conveniently diverts our gaze from political solutions to individual moral responsibilities. From this oppressive perspective, the problem is no longer a story of domination over people but one of human nature as we become both victims and executioners of our own desires and responsible for our own demise. Indeed, the zombie is the synthesis of “the social,” and in the spectator’s fascination, it evokes the collective hysteria that Cervantes portrays in *El retablo de las maravillas* and serves as a censorial mechanism

for any counter political position.

At the same time, we cannot forget that the study offered by the zombie and its fascinating and destabilizing effects point us to a debate that has been going on since the Avant-garde and the Frankfurt School. It centers around the political capacity of the intolerable image when placed at the heart of the entertainment industry in the society of the spectacle. In response to this debate, in the depoliticized and dehistoricized capitalist cultural production, an outbreak of utopian and dystopian fictions appear which seem to be divided along two aesthetics: the excess, on one side, and the social neoliberal realism on the other. Both tendencies seem to point toward the dissatisfaction of the system, including its persuasive tactics, and the production of images that show the invisible horrors of our time. However, Jacques Rancière, in line with Ferraris, arrives at the conclusion that despite the original critical intention, in both cases the images, far from achieving their objective of short-circuiting the field of perception and destabilizing truths, end up reinforcing the hegemony of the dominant narrative. By introducing a threatening dose of discomfort, they either reaffirm the defense of the individual's well-being or, on the contrary, make the weight of the state of learned defenselessness even heavier. In this sense, graphic artist Banksy and Rancière explore the banalization of the intolerable image whose potential is altered because, as Rancière proclaims, the mistake stems from the mechanisms used for its communication.

What is interesting in this debate, in regards to the loss of the destabilizing capacity of intolerable images, is that it reveals to us the crisis of the nature of aesthetics that Cervantes perceived and that we need to keep in mind when we evaluate metaphors such as the zombie. In the context of the culture of the masses, the zombie, pastiche of a monster, is a bastard that functions as a mirror in which spectators can drown themselves in their own fascination. In the midst and height of consumer culture, readers and spectators believe that the fiction is dedicated to them. In solitude, they imagine themselves as the owners of words and images, and it is that possibility that allows them to search in the words, not a common meaning, but their own particular, selfish, narcissistic meaning. Mass consumer culture seems to be a mirror of self-interest and, in this context, creativity loses its freedom and ceases to be a form of communication, becoming one of production. It is a mirror that entertains a gratifying and pleasurable experience. As Zygmunt Bauman has said, "when investing in a relationship, the first thing anticipated is security . . . Of course, a relationship is an investment just like anything else" (118), and on occasion this investment can be tied to power. Cervantes already warned us, through his "experiments with framing," of the danger of creation as production (C&E 178). This occurs, for example, with the appearance of Don Quixote's double and his adventures. Through this character, Cervantes reveals another possible alternative: he suggests that literature is an instrument with a purpose that

extends beyond itself. What is inscribed in his decision to not be subservient to those in power is a pact of responsibilities made by one who knows himself to be the inventor of a mechanism of public intervention, communication, and interrelation. Cervantes opens up a different path for “singular uso del patrimonio público que el lenguaje representa y mediante el cual nos constituimos en seres sociales” (*La cena de los notables* 13) (singular use of the public patrimony that is represented by language and through which we become social beings). In *Autoconstrucción*, Spanish writer Jorge Riechmann writes: “Jamás se había hablado tanto sobre las desigualdades sociales, jamás se había hecho tan poco para reducir las . . . Nunca se había hablado tanto los daños ecológicos, y nunca se ha hecho tan poco para delimitarlos” (20) (Never before had there been so much talk of social inequalities, never before had so little been done to reduce them . . . Never had there been so much talk of ecological harm, and never before had there been so little done to remedy it). Maybe it is time to leave fiction behind simply because, by not being opposite of the real, is no longer the best way to gain access to what is real. In the instant that we recognize fiction as inseparable from a context, we are recognizing the fact that fiction’s existence is a display of a process of production, an ideology, and the outline of an inescapable power. Because of this, it may be the time to start searching, not in fiction, but in Art so that we can remind ourselves that there has always been a time for resistance and rebellion. In the company of our predecessors and those still to come, we can rediscover the emancipatory power of dialectical contradiction to escape from the deplorable system that we currently inhabit. And for this reason, I think that, given the circumstances, it might be the time to think not in fictional ways but in artistic terms and also *beforehand* and *from below* in order to, as the Spanish philosopher Marina Garcés writes, “liberarse del yo [como] condición para conquistar la propia vida” (16) (free ourselves from the self as a means to conquering one’s life).

Medialogies ends by pondering the purpose of the Humanities in this process of crisis and shift in civilization. We cannot think that culture and the Humanities are going to provoke the political shift that we need, even when their presence is necessary. As explained in the chapter titled “Occupy and Resist,” there exists a citizen protest culture that speaks out against capitalist abuse and appropriation. But, even those who participate in protests sometimes ignore or forget that political disobedience has been the seed for large social changes; take, for example, the worker-trade union movement in the 1930s and 1940s and the social moments of the 1960s and 1970s, including environmentalism, pacifism, and feminism. In the twenty-first century, civil disobedience has returned with the financial crisis: 15M in Madrid; the Chilean student protests; the manifestations of the Arab Spring; the white, violet, and green tides in Spain; Occupy Wall Street and “We are the 99 percent” in the United States; #YoSoy132 in Mexico; the water war in Bolivia; the continuous manifestations

by the Mapuche community in Chile, etc. The crisis of representation, the “no nos representan” (they don’t represent us) shouted in Madrid in the Puerta del Sol referring to the dominant powers, points to a rupture in the social contract that makes up the foundation of the capitalist State. The Arab Spring, 15M, Occupy Wall Street and the “99 percent” in particular bring together those people excluded and affected by the capitalist contract—those who are brushed aside by history, in debt, and economically insecure. Their chants, performances, and posters outline an individual and collective first person (“yo-con-nos-otros” [I-with-us-others]); they allude to a dimension of the shared world and do not present themselves as the possibility of the sum of subjected individualistic and independent selves, but as a force of interdependent actions that need to be shared. Parading misery through the streets was a way to make a public display of the economic interests behind the social contract. The precariat who camped in the plazas brought attention to class struggle in a tale that the commercial mass media did not want to acknowledge. How does one explain the relational quality of human beings if it has been eliminated from the capitalist agenda through processes of self-interested individualization, instability, and privatization? Clearly, to rearticulate the Marxist category would require an understanding of exploitation and biophysical limitation as starting points to the development of a relational logic: “donde no llega mi mano, llega la del otro” (Garcés 30) (where my hand doesn’t reach, the hand of another does). Thus, the individual and collective first person (*yo-con-nos-otros*) is born out of a mourning experience that dismantles the idealized fiction of the self-sufficient and independent modern self-made human.

The government’s response to the voice of the people has of course been to criminalize these disobedient behaviors in the name of social order and security. In this same way, the sectors that share the existing asymmetric social structure and the distinguishing principles of power favor the governmental measure and, on occasion, exercise their own forms of collective censorship: silence, blindness, false accusation, and consent. Lastly, civic repression is guaranteed through violent acts by police and the creation of laws that, supposedly, serve the purpose of taking care of civic security and protection (but of all citizens?). It is in this framework that protests and civic disobedience reappear as the missing link in a history of resistance that the dominant power and its culture stigmatize and silence. Because of this, its revival is essential if what we want is to actively participate in taking the step from a capitalist and pseudo-democratic situation to one in which it is possible to make widespread political and economic conditions that allow for fairness, eco-sustainability, and interdependent lifestyles. Perhaps instead of looking for lenses to reveal the dominant fiction, we need symbolic combat weapons and common practices that, summarizing Baena’s book on Cervantes, produce emancipation through discordances. Dissonance and short-circuits are necessary to think

through the peculiar and violent forms that capitalism uses to deal with distortions, with the “defenses of humans” (C&E 217) and with the communities that try to defend themselves from its domination (just ask the Mapuche in Chile, the Rock Sioux, or other tribal nations, and their limited number of survivors). If we think of counterculture as a public referential point where knowledge of the world is formulated, then we are being called upon to speak clearly and provide the conditions of fair objectivity that allow us to understand the relationship between culture, society, and power. A dialectical culture *a la contra* (counterculture), as García Calvo used to say, will then be the catalyst for those distinguishing principles that operate and structure the same reality that is the object of transformation. Similarly, a counter cultural criticism will take into account the attitudes and positions that are inherent in its creation and production. Given that we critics are also humans and therefore part of the system that we are trying to analyze, it may be convenient to start with an exercise of self-criticism that would require us to explore the motivations behind our pleasures, prejudices, and ideologies.

Notes

1. For readers unfamiliar with his work, Agustín García Calvo (1926–2012) is an activist *a la contra* (countercultural) and one of the Spanish philosophers who has best studied and analyzed the setup of capitalism, and, this is what interests me specifically, the concept of “the social” and the construction of the socio-cultural capitalist SELF.
2. All translations should be attributed to the author of this essay.
3. For García Calvo, the populous is “nada más que algo negativo (que no tiene Personas, que no es la Mayoría Democrática, sino lo contrario: todos)” (22) (nothing more than something negative [without identity, not the democratic majority but all the contrary]). The people fight “por lo que todavía no existe” (for what does not exist) because “para luchar por lo que existe ya están Ellos, los Ejecutivos del Estado de Bienestar, y por ello están luchando cada día y procurando que todo ciudadano luche por lo mismo: por lo que existe, que es lo que a él le conviene” (22) (to fight for what already exists we have Them, the Executives of the State of Well-being; they fight for it every day and ensure that every citizen does also: for what exists is and is in his [and her] best interest).
4. It seems truly ironic that immediately after Donald Trump wins the general election in the USA he is proclaimed the king of the social media.
5. This idea is explored in Benjamin’s *Tesis sobre la historia y otros fragmentos* (Theses on the Philosophy of History) in *Illuminations*.

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