

◆ Introduction

Reading Medialogies, Reading Reality: Just Deserts

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El sueño de la razón produce monstruos.
—Francisco de Goya

Henry Frankenstein: Look! It's moving. It's
alive. It's alive . . . It's alive, it's
moving, it's alive, it's alive, it's alive,
it's alive, IT'S ALIVE!

Victor Moritz: Henry—In the name of God!
Henry Frankenstein: Oh, in the name of God!
Now I know what it feels like to be God!
—Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

“We deserve Trump,” said one of us. “Sounds too Catholic,” said the other. “That’s one of the points,” the conversation continued. Few things are as transcendent of nationality, or of any one person’s ethical or political agency, as Trump. Let’s analyze—i.e., let’s take apart—that “we,” that first word of both “We the people” and “we deserve Trump,” which can also be the “we” of “We are the Borg; you will be assimilated; resistance is futile.” Some of us (some from that “we”) voted for or against him, or did not vote in the United States. But some of us (another part of that “we”) could have been citizens of Canada or Spain, with no agency in the voting booth. It is nevertheless that “we” which gives universality to the issue. “Catholic” means precisely that: “universal,” does it not? On the other hand, Catholic *qua* universal brings an unavoidable parochialism into the concept of universal, a “framing

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technique,” as the central interlocutors of the following discussion might put it. As for “deserve”—the conversation veered—it presupposes the gods of old times. The tit-for-tat business of all the gods that have ever been, from Jehova to Huitzilopochtli to the Market. “Deserving” is the key operational word in any god’s *modus operandi*. It is hard to let go of the sharp *dictum* of Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, which is both deeply Hegelian and anti-Hegelian: “As long as the gods don’t change, nothing will have changed—and the gods, obviously, have not changed” (97). “Deserving” is tantamount to “balancing the books”: the bottom line of life conceived as expiation, as assets/liabilities. The Book of the Apocalypse, the book of the *Dies Irae* is the one in which all these entries are kept: *Liber scriptus proferetur / in quo totum continetur / unde mundus iudicetur* (Lo, the book exactly worded / wherein all hath been recorded / thence shall judgment be awarded). Even the Lord’s Prayer, when rendered in Latin or in traditional Spanish, converts “our trespasses” into *debita nostra/nuestras deudas* (*our debts*), and “those who trespass against us” into *debitoribus nostris/nuestros deudores* (*our debtors*). For the Aztecs, or for the exploiters of the mines of Potosí, or for the makers of automobiles and roads, even for Crosby, Stills & Nash, human sacrifices are “the cost of _____” (fill in the blank with “keeping the World going,” “civilization,” “progress,” or “freedom,” this last one being particularly galling, since there is nothing free whatsoever in such a balancing of the books, in either economic or ethical terms).

“Perhaps,” said the other, “but the monster is of our own making. We built Trump.” And this presupposes the capacity for building on an unimagined scale. The gods—we would be the gods here—may not have changed, but they are irrelevant. Even the bloody Clio of History, or the equally bloody gods of Progress, cannot control the monster once it has grown out of control: once its growth is not growth anymore, not even expansion, but *inflation*. And we, gods or humans, can only inflate one thing: *our* thing, the Symbolic Order, language, media, desire . . . and debts, money: all things of *value* (*valet* in Latin translates to “stands for” or “means”).

There is, of course, no “ultimate Reality,” other than, perhaps, the reality we fabricate for ourselves with the tools at our disposal, as Bruno Latour’s anthropological deconstruction of science and the modernity it undergirds demonstrates. The proof of this (if proof is needed) is that the most Real thing there is (we can debate whether to call it Money or Capital or God or Soul) is the ultimate fabrication, the ultimate aggregate of faith, credit, and lies—signs. Let’s call it “It” with a prominent capital initial, as Agustín García Calvo used to do with all things that, not really being anything, are sacred. It, then, is the all-too-real mansion of Reality that the rest of the illusory props on the stage (or screen) occult, as they were created to do. This definitely not-quite-Platonic dialogue, this symposium, or perhaps *agape* around David Castillo and

William Egginton's *Medialogies: Reading Reality in the Age of Inflationary Media* will not assume to be doing anything for the first time, or for the last. Symposium or *agape* are good analogs of what we do, but only if we don't forget that, when we are eating a dinner in good company, we are doing something at the same time not repeatable (*irrepetible*) and not different from any other dinner in good company.

Half a century ago, Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar wrote *Lire le capital* (Reading Capital) and Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart wrote *Para leer al Pato Donald* (How to Read Donald Duck). The first of these "how-to books" was intended for the already educated, already European Marxist; the second, for a large reading body of mostly middle-class Chileans and Latin Americans. A user's manual of Marx's big opus was not more necessary than a user's manual of Walt Disney comics. One appeared in 1968 (and then there was May 1968); the other appeared in 1972 (and then there was Pinochet).

About twenty-five years after this collusion of "how to read" books came the collusion of "against" books. In 1993, John Beverley, for instance, came up with *Against Literature*, while in 1996, Agustín García Calvo published *Contra el Hombre* (Against Man), inaugurating a series of many "contra" books, one of which specifically being *Contra la realidad* (Against Reality).

We, then, sharing this meal with its drinks interspersed in the conversation, have been doing for decades now what we must do again, and shall do again in another half-century if by then there is still a world in which to tell it: debating and teaching how to read. And, yes, making it clear that "against" is one of the ways to say "no": that thing which, as Freud liked to put it, the subconscious knew nothing about. It's time to read Reality (or reality: letters matter, as Derrida showed us with the only-in-writing distinction between *différence* and *différance*). And perhaps "no" has a way of being done as much as a way of being said. One of us, for instance, is notorious (both in the profession and in the real world—pun intended) for not having a cell phone. Nothing major, of course, but kind of refreshing. Enough maybe to propose a first toast in our *convivium* (gathering).

Just so, one image that kept coming to mind imagined the producers of *The Apprentice* sitting in front of the TV with an ample table of refreshments and sustenance on U.S. election night, uncannily reciting Henry Frankenstein's godlike celebration of the power of technology when his creation comes to life, as Trump's electoral victory becomes more and more inevitable. Given the accelerated pace of geopolitical, economic, and social disruption and confusion since the swearing in of Trump, it would be hard to find a more timely theorization and analysis of the increasingly labyrinthine and contradictory relations between media, knowledge, and the myriad groups simultaneously caught up in and exploiting this hyperinflation of media than Castillo and Egginton's (C&E) *opus*. One of the more elegant metaphors for framing

what C&E call the “second age of inflationary media” comes from Bruno Latour’s attack on modern scientific epistemology, specifically his concept of the “Double Click.”¹ Playing on the religious resonance of the term *icon* as it relates to the digital navigation of a computer screen, *double click* for Latour refers to the reality effect that occurs when we open a digital link, in the sense that we tend to forget about all of the algorithmic, technological, institutional, economic, legislative, political, and linguistic *modes* through which the relation between the icon and its digital destination are constructed, delivered, and mediated. *Double click* embodies the idea that direct access to truth, facts, and being is possible *without mediation*, whether we are in the scientific or religious domain (Harman 92). Ultimately, Latour demonstrates how the immanent mediators of knowledge vanish in the movement from icon—or sign—to referent, which extends Slavoj Žižek’s understanding of ideological *vanishing* mediators to all modes and registers of knowledge, especially science.² In this light, the main goal of C&E’s powerful analytical apparatus can be characterized as the making-visible of said mediators, teaching the reader, in effect, how to recognize, historicize, and disrupt the “framing techniques” and discursive modes that a relentlessly compromised array of media apparatuses, political actors, and ideological matrices deploy in their forceful and often violent attempts to create distinct, isolated, and even confrontational publics or communities, “fundamentalisms,” in their terminology.

The aim of this volume, in turn, is to test, question, and ultimately multiply C&E’s hypotheses, analytical tools, and poietic potential by bringing in a group of accomplished cultural scholars and critics to engage with *Medialogies* in their own terms. As such, the *desiderata* of our *Polemical Companion* do not center on a clarification and reframing of the central ideas of the text, but seek, rather, a rhizomatic ramification of its rhetorical tools into multiple lines of escape—deterritorializations and reterritorializations—in terms of theoretical paradigms, media expressions, and aesthetic phenomena.³ This is also the reason for giving C&E the *penultimate* word, providing an occasion for them to see their own framing techniques from a distance, deterritorializing them in order to create even more points of convergence and lines of flight in what we hope will result in a veritable toolbox for measuring, assessing, even throwing wrenches into the inflationary medialogies we inhabit and that inhabit us.

We begin with Luis Avilés’s formal analysis of *Medialogies* and subsequent discussion of Jacques Rancière’s compelling theses concerning spectatorial “dissent” and “emancipation.” Foregrounding the marginal position of Castillo’s and Egginton’s work with respect to the philological tradition of Hispanic Studies, not to mention the marginal status of Hispanic Studies in the Academy writ large, Avilés emphasizes the alien nature of the media-centered project and its agents at a time when borders are being erected and tested

around all kinds of imagined communities and identities.⁴ His analysis of the nomadic nature of *Medialogies*'s movement through divergent chronological, geographical, critical, and generic spaces and practices tacitly frames its authors and their enterprise as *picaresque* in the way they expose, penetrate, and ironically contest the more containment-oriented manifestations of mediatic inflations in early and late modernity: by "identifying the layers of representations and appearances without leaving the confines of [Plato's] cave . . . as they so eloquently state, we are unable to confront medialogy outside medialogy" (23). Here, in C&E's "minor baroque strategy," is where Avilés situates Rancière, arguing that "emancipation means understanding the incapable as capable. The 'scenes of dissensus' reveal that there's no hidden secret in the mediatic machine, no fatal mechanism, no obscure cave, and no lost community" (24). Moreover, Avilés underlines how *Medialogies*'s ethical posture transforms the *picaro* into a problematic and disruptive character in the way she takes up and performs the selfsame masks and codes used by the elites to justify and maintain their power and control.

Nevertheless, Avilés also shares the central and suddenly urgent concerns voiced by the authors, along with all of the participants in this volume, about the power of critical thinking, discourse—digital media—analysis, and education to disrupt the current power structures, which seem to benefit most from the second age of inflationary media:

Despite the fact that [Trump] did not control his political performance (the control of his own self in situations that required strategic self-presentation), he was able to convince voters that somehow that "essential self" that suddenly appeared was still part of an image, a performance, a representation. It may be possible that this is an effect of inflationary media, but in a negative way: our incapacity to see a "real" and unintended display of self when it becomes visible. (27)

In other words, Trump's constant use of outlandish accusations and "alternative facts" worked to camouflage his authentic lack of experience, preparation, and vision for the very office he was seeking, not to mention his arguably criminal behavior on a number of fronts. In the end, "the efforts to reveal what is hidden and the humanistic work on media literacy may not be enough, politically speaking" (27).

David William Foster's take on photography comes to a similar conclusion in the sense that the apparent promise of photography to deliver a more immediate view or experience of reality is undone by all of the modes—technological, social, political, legal, and aesthetic—that mediate the production,

accumulation, circulation, and interpretation of photographs. The central concern of this insightful essay is the visual archive, or lack thereof, of two of the bloodiest and most politically repressive dictatorships of twentieth-century Latin America: Chile (1973–1990) and Argentina (1976–1983). In Foster’s words, “photography is one cultural platform of particular eloquence in stimulating and preserving memory of a past that cannot be allowed to repeat itself” (32). Foster situates his analysis of the many attempts to visually document, memorialize, and/or condemn the use of torture and assassinations by the two regimes within the evolution in status and function of photography in the twentieth century. Moving from photography’s initial use as an archival record of scientific and technological progress to the Cartier-Bresson framing of an “unmediated slice of human life” (31), to the full-on artistic mode, in which photographers self-consciously insert irony in their selection of content and modes of production, it soon becomes apparent why any attempt to archive a technologically accurate and “authentic slice” of the violence of the *golpes de estado* (coups d’état) would by necessity become diverted or diluted by the inflationary nature and circulation of photographic modes and artifacts. In Foster’s words, “one might admire the many ingenious ways in which different photographers have established intriguing interpretive agendas with regard to the so-called *años de plomo* (years of lead), but one cannot escape the impression that the interest in so much production derives less from the way in which each project is a fragment of a whole as yet to be fully known as it is a question of a Derridian supplement to a supplement to a supplement to a supplement” (32).

In the end, Foster’s essay shows how photography functions as a limit on the tendency of the secondary age of inflationary media to invest copies with *aura* in the way that C&E ascribe to the Book. His closing lament that photographic records of the violently repressive and terroristic tactics and techniques of the dictatorial regimes are unable to capture the “money shot” reminds one of Latour’s description of how modernity’s *double click* mentality perpetuates the belief in the scientific age’s ability to provide a direct and unmediated access to reality. What becomes obvious here is that if we ever were modern, we certainly are not anymore.⁵

If Foster uses the most visual of modern media to exemplify inflation, John Mowitt proposes a sharp critique of *Medialogies* based on its inherent incapability to escape the prison house of medialogy. *Medialogies* would constitute a medialogical theory, not a theory of medialogy. The original sin of C&E’s efforts resides in its occulocentrism, its “photologic.” Mowitt notices how sound, and especially music, are minimally present in *Medialogies*’s discussions, and that even in the discussion of Cervantes’s *Retablo de las maravillas*, in which they do discuss the magnificent Cervantine touch of having onstage a musician playing “air *rabel*,” the authors don’t quite see the *panic* aspects of music, the

political and analytical role that sound (rather than sight) plays in any analysis of reality. Mowitt brings the likes of Adorno to the fore of the discussion, and just as Adorno “panicked” the un-dialectical theory of music of his time, Mowitt is “panicking” *Medialogies*. To study the Baroque is to study the apotheosis of the visual, and concepts such as “stage” or “screen” are apt tools for understanding it, as well as today’s medialogy; but it is true of *Medialogies*, as it was true of Maravall’s works, that music is not central to the discussion. And yet, there are curious facts, such as Spain not being nearly as prominent in baroque music as it was in all the other baroque arts. Mowitt, following Adorno and others, considers that the modern subject is in part a product of the cultural and political work of music. (A critique of Mowitt: one of us would have loved to see in his critique the mention of how it was Adorno who called the police in 1968 because he couldn’t bear the loud pop music that the students occupying the Institute were listening to.) Point taken: music and sound change things drastically, as Benito Repollo’s violent reaction to the music “not heard but seen” of the Rabelín shows. The reading of reality is a panic issue. Panic, as Mowitt explains it from its Greek origins, refers to “sudden sounds that alarm a troop, suggesting the imminent arrival of the enemy” (41). There is a deep short-circuit produced when music and the written word collide. Frank Zappa—a sharp ear, if ever there was—used to give a lot of written information about his records in his album sleeves. But part of that writing was a warning to “not read this and listen to the music at the same time.” And Zappa, obviously, did not want the easy way out of having his music be the background of anything else. We will, however, encourage the reader of this volume, or of *Medialogies*, to embrace the short-circuit, the panic catastrophe, by performing a “reading act”: read a chapter and, not as background but as co-presence, listen to Tomás Luis de Victoria’s pure beauty—yes, beauty is our ally—then read another chapter, or perhaps the same one, while listening to Kendrick Lamar’s militant hip-hop. Yes, militancy is also our ally. If we want to read reality, we must hear it.

Palmar Álvarez-Blanco brings herself, together with another guest, to the table. That *invitado especial* (special guest) is Agustín García Calvo, a recently departed Spanish thinker who is virtually unknown in American academia, but whose insights on the exact issues that we are discussing are many, profound, and perplexing. One of the consequences of bringing García Calvo to the discussion is that in bringing him we are rewinding the tape not just to the first inflation of media, but to Heraclitus and the pre-Socratic Greeks, to whom we should return if we are to “defend being” in any way, shape or form. What Álvarez-Blanco extracts from the vast production of the great Spanish anarchist-Hellenist is the notion of how today progress has progressed to a point of no return, but the companion of such progress has an older name than “media”: capitalism. Almost as a revelation of the elephant in the room, Álvarez-

Blanco recovers an old association, using García Calvo's notion of "the social." Just as "reality" can take opposite positions with respect to the world (with the Lacanian "Real" being absolutely different from, say, "reality TV"), García Calvo's "social" is the very opposite of "the people." "The people," of course, is the negation of the Person, the very antithesis of "the masses," which are always masses of individuals. The social is precisely the indifferenciation of the public and the private: the place where, ultimately, *Logos*, or "common reason," becomes the enemy, the obstacle (to Progress, i.e., to Money). Álvarez-Blanco poses a radical counterbalance to a pseudo-historicist reading of reality (or of *Medialogies*) by pointing out that Heraclitus and Cervantes are, and can only be, *our* contemporaries. What they *say* is what matters (more than what they *said*). Let us remember, not commemorate, that she quotes from Walter Benjamin. Remembering Adorno, like Mowitt did, Álvarez-Blanco brings to this discussion "heretical praxis," perhaps an excellent companion to *panic*. Quoting a trope used often by García Calvo and other philosophers, and absolutely contradicting Plato—or Hegel—that heretical praxis comes "from below." There is something, thus, to be said about what Marx called "base" and C&E refer to as "the crypt" below the visible theater. What is "truth" eludes us as much as it has eluded us since Heraclitus. But Álvarez-Blanco, using the idea of "the social," links today's "administration of truth," which replaces "the real thing," to García Calvo's favorite definition of capitalism/money/state as the "administration of death." The zombie is, indeed, "the face of the social." (A critique of Álvarez-Blanco: maybe "trope" is a better trope than "face" if we consider the face as a "mirror of the soul" being a Renaissance abstraction of "man" parallel to man's commodification—since the zombie's face is by definition "soul-less," a mirror of nothing except itself.) A possible escape from the zombie, that "synthesis of the social," is not fiction, says Álvarez-Blanco (because fiction does not oppose the real), but art. A pity that we put together this volume without an essay articulating the resistance powers of poetry—non-fictional writing—as seen from the pastoral (one of us has actually written an in-your-face pastoral novel) to the hip-hop modes. But that power of poetry trembles—or vibrates—in this essay like Pan's syrinx (music) only through dissonance, only through Heraclitean discordance, to re-use the metaphor of the bow and the lyre.

Barbara Simerka conceptualizes the movement between the modern fetishization of authenticity and postmodern inflationary media's flattening of the fiction-reality dialectic as a "continuum," which is not unlike Baltasar Gracián's movement between *ficciones* (fictions) and *mentiras* (lies). Simerka explores the notion of "reality bleed" through C&E's theatrical framework for understanding early modern inflationary media, specifically, how theatrical performances and the identities they mediate move in and out of fiction, subsequently exerting a destabilizing effect on the institutions ostensibly reinforced by the baroque culture of spectacle in the Maravallian sense. Contesting C&E's conservative

reading of Lope de Vega's *Acting is Believing*, Simerka foregrounds the ways in which the play frames religious authorities and institutions with the theatrical language of roles and stages. (A critique of Simerka: this self-conscious use of religious imagery on a secular stage would, on the one hand, be consonant with post-Tridentine interdictions on the use of images in such contexts; point taken: it does show, on the other hand, how the baroque philosophy of *desengaño* [disillusionment or undeception] is a blade that cuts both ways.)

More to the point, in order to get at the intransigent problem identified by Luis Avilés concerning whether Trump is aware he is acting or not—the Shakespearian knave/fool distinction—Simerka considers contemporary television series such as *House of Cards* (HOC) and *Orange Is the New Black* (OITNB). In the first case, Frank Underwood (played by Kevin Spacey) portrays a Washington politician who “both enacts and lays bare every tactic of impression management as he scales the ladder of power” (67). In comparison to Trump, whose performances are consistently and disturbingly confounding, Underwood placates the spectator's desire for a calculating and thus somewhat predictable and controllable mind behind the effortless performances of the man of power. By comparison, Trump's opacity is arguably monstrous. More interesting is the example Simerka pulls from *OITNB*. The character Marisol sells fake LSD to schoolmates for whom being seen taking the drug is perhaps more important than the supposed physical effects. This theatrical blindness reaches absurd heights when a buyer feigns being high to the extent that he leaps from the top of a building and kills himself, for which non-drug-induced death Marisol goes to prison, thus implicating the criminal justice system in prosecuting a fictional crime and non-fictional death. Perhaps most telling in this episode is how Marisol casually takes no responsibility for the beliefs and actions of her buyers, which sheds a disturbing light on the way in which hateful and divisive political discourse (or talking-head commentary)—most of it fictional—is distanced from concrete incidences of hate speech and hate crimes in contemporary society. This break in the continuum begs for serious analysis and potential responses, and so it is no coincidence that this is where C&E's question, “what would Cervantes do?” (WWCD), is invoked through Simerka's observation that the news—based on alternative or duly researched facts—becomes fair game for comedy shows such as *The Daily Show* and *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. More suggestive, these ironical and often caustic commentaries on politicians and news personalities are now appearing in the news itself, as is the case of a February 22, 2017 *New York Times* article, which focuses on the distinct ways in which Stephan Colbert and Jimmy Fallon have handled the unpredictability and incessant fictions and lies produced by Trump and his administration. Perhaps this is, finally, the place where the humanities can step in to produce real effects and change in the neoliberal order; or is it a sign of the incorporation of humor and

irony into the *major strategy*?⁶

If Simerka bridges the poles of a “reality bleed” with the notion of a continuum, David Souto Alcalde highlights an abysmal difference between pre- and post-modern medialogies. Echoing Latour’s idea that we have never been modern, Souto, nevertheless, reads the Baroque in a radically different way from C&E—and from Maravall—in which the “minor strategy” becomes central to the cultural production, with the “major strategy” being almost residual. The Baroque is proto-republican, Souto states. Yes, there are still the Powers that be, which, for instance, ban the reading of anonymous writing; but there it is, an anonymous subject as the subject of (almost) modernity: the picaresque subject, for instance. Far from escaping the immanent, the first medialogy is a veritable machine of immanence: it lays the embryo of *citizenship*. And, yes, that embryo never fully hatched; we never quite got from proto-republic to republic, and now republic is dead (as with Simerka’s idea, we never assimilated medialogy 2.0, but we are now in 2.1).

Immanence is thought of by Souto in a sense developed by Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze: a de-personalization of experience, a discovery and critical analysis of reality (i.e., an ethical investment). The masks (*personae*) of the Baroque are pre-conditions for sovereignty, a sovereignty that cannot but be anonymous and private. Each layer of masking is, paradoxically, a layer removed in the process of self-discovery. Zombie sovereignty—the opposite of anonymous sovereignty—is tragic, ironic even: zombie sovereign subjects retain enough memory of what has been taken away from them, but know that they can never recover it (the terabytes of computer memory, one could add, are too many for any merciful Lethe river to handle).

Souto’s article brings to the Baroque the old discussion that Horkheimer and Adorno brought to the fore about the Enlightenment as fundamentally dialectical, the progenitor of both progressive modernity and regressive Fascism: Hitler as much the legitimate son of Kant as Adorno. The dialectics of the Baroque are equally brought to the forefront in both *Medialogies* and the different articles in this volume. What seems not to have a dialectical counterpart—a Good Side of the Force—is today’s medialogy. No sight of something good to hope for: only doom. Can this be simply our own blindness? Souto aptly adds a coda to his essay. Fiction, that powerful tool, is back, with a vengeance—Álvarez-Blanco wasn’t so sure of this: she preferred “Art”; one could almost add “beauty.” From that unexpected “left field of the discussion”—the coda—WWCD retains its full value. We could introduce a critique here, in the sense that the “C” of the formula is the C of a fiction writer (Cervantes), but that in Souto’s own essay, Góngora, the poet, is as important as the fiction writers for making his point. Could we be glimpsing that dialectical counterpoint to the obvious Dark Side? If we add music—as Mowitt suggests—to the toolbox or arsenal at our disposal, we have fiction on our side; and poetry—it’s called “rap” nowadays.

William Childers offers a case study on how our current medialogy first re-circulates the productions of the first medialogy, re-packaging them with an aura, and then exploits that aura. In TV series, such as *The Newsroom*, a re-aurized Don Quixote, extracted more from *Man of La Mancha* than from Cervantes's text, but more importantly and lastly the book *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, performing its epiphany as thing, sustains the myth of the modern TV newsman as resistor and restorer of truth and the good fight in times of mediatic calamity. The good fight for truth, that is, as evidenced by another myth: Edward R. Murrow, the valiant knight who single-handedly brought down the (also single-handed) evil of Joseph McCarthy. What Childers brings to the fore is how these attempts to resuscitate a nebulous, tenuous, Broadwayesque Chivalric Age lack precisely the one element that Cervantes uses as his main weapon: irony, or distance. Murrow himself is comparable not to Don Quixote, but to Cervantes. His was not the feeble lance with which to pierce the armor of the dragon (or giant), but the full power of the medium of television itself. The simulacrum of apotheosis of the individual as hero imposes itself as the perfect antidote to the real empowerment of people. But before we shake our heads in Eurocentric patronizing disbelief ("these Americans, you know . . ."), Childers reminds us that Cervantes's novel has been unread or misread by almost everyone in our medialogy, not just by the producers of HBO series, but also by individuals and institutions, from the German Romantics to the Instituto Cervantes. American exceptionalism is not exceptional. A "defanged" or "toothless" Don Quixote (to use Childers's terms) or a Don Quixote losing "traction with the real" (also Childers's words) in other words, a harmless, fetishized Don Quixote (Quixotism minus praxis) has regularly and inevitably emerged as a constant companion of the Baroque's major strategy according to which a (masculine) presence remains beyond representation to tell us "and that's the way it is." The pervasiveness of this major strategy to lurk behind (or below, or beside) the obvious "minor strategy" that Cervantes's masterpiece embodies so well bears witness to the resilience of our self-inflicted bondage. To desire a Don Quixote as a Cronkite, or a Cronkite as a Don Quixote, Childers shows with painful clarity ("painful" is the word Childers uses), is to desire a Trump. Childers hints at ways that have been used, though, and could be used, to show that the opposite resilience is also true: the resilience of the "minor strategy" in the very bosom of the beast. At the heart of this minor strategy, Childers, like some of us, puts humor, or at least mockery. One wonders, though, if humor, when applied systematically, when it becomes a genre, adds itself to the forces of the major strategy (after all, an entire European school of *cervantismo* has been misreading *Don Quixote* for decades reducing it to being "a funny book").

Rachel Schmidt's essay begins with an image that frames—or haunts—the entirety of her in-depth exploration of the intertwined matrices of mas-

culine valor and economic value in light of Cervantes's novelistic treatment of the Law in early modern Spain. The image is of a prisoner of war who self-consciously traces, but never escapes, myriad institutional and symbolic enclosures, be they financial, familial, juridical, or aesthetic. The *reo* casts a disruptive and corrective shadow on the dominant received portrait of Cervantes as a virile and lettered soldier who attacks what is portrayed by early and late modern critics as the empty spectacle of honor and the excessive political violence of the Spanish Baroque. What Schmidt makes apparent, in other words, is that Cervantes has often been recruited into a transhistorical effort to frame Spain ever more tightly within the so-called *Black Legend*, rather than being recognized as a first order *European* theorist and critic of modernity and its colonialist foundations. This fetishization of the novelist-hero, as Childers has pointed out, doubly emasculates Cervantes's fiction and his compelling male *and female* characters by framing them within simultaneously modern and nostalgic notions of personal liberty. In order to return the power of Cervantes's irony to his works, Schmidt shows how the critic must likewise perform Cervantine *arabesques* on the critical canon in order to expose and dismantle the framing techniques within which the Spaniard's contestatory aesthetic experiments have been enclosed.

She begins with the observation that the physical enclosure of the Algerian prisons informs Don Quixote's suffocating experience at the palace of the duke and duchess, an episode that exposes and problematizes the ideological, legal, and sexual impositions and interdictions on personal honor and identity—including authorship—to which both men and women were subject in Counter Reformation Spain. As one of us has argued, it is at the palace where Cervantes reveals the tendency of an inflationary theatrical culture to act as a “pimp” of sorts for the illegitimate desires and actions of the monarchical-seigniorial elements of Spanish society. From here, Schmidt's analyses of the early modern equivalences between economic wealth and personal valor, or ethnic purity and honor, as well as the changing roles of narrative fiction in disseminating and questioning the former, underline Cervantes's display and disruption of said equivalences: “It is because Cervantes ironizes the play between Law, liberty, desire and transgression that theories of the modern novel rooted in idealist and neo-Kantian thought use *Don Quixote* as their foundational text” (115). Of course, neither can the author free himself from the selfsame aesthetic or ideological structures that help constitute his voice, which is why Schmidt's rescue and expansion of Schlegel's concept of the arabesque provides such a powerful and useful figuration of C&E's notion of the baroque *minor* strategy. It also allows her to build a robust conceptual bridge between early and late modern fantasies of individual honor and freedom in order to reveal how they imprison individuals within repressive and isolating ideological fundamentalisms.

Alberto Moreiras's simultaneously beautiful and mournful reading of *Medialogies* brings Derrida's *parergonal* analysis of Kant's unfinished notion of aesthetic judgment to bear on his own pointed inquiry into the analytical program of C&E. Just as Derrida's *parergon* of Kant arises from a fundamental lack in Kant's aesthetic philosophy, to wit, the abyss between a disinterested aesthetic judgment of beauty that arises from the absolute subjectivity of the observer and the objective bias of logical judgment, or reason, Moreiras's reframing of *Medialogies* is erected on what the critic identifies as a lack in C&E's *parergonal* critique of the second age of inflationary media:

The fundamental question for *Medialogies*, in my opinion, a question that *Medialogies* is by no means blind to, but may remain ultimately uncertain about, is whether such loss of reality—a loss of reality paradoxically understood as a total assumption of reality within the frame of the second medialogy—can be compensated or countervailed by the minor-baroque strategy of *parergonal* reading, by the strategy of interrogating the frame, or of reading those who have interrogated the frame. (127)

In essence, what Moreiras asks is whether a program of reading, in this case a more *literate* reading of Reality, can create the conditions through which truth and humanity can be salvaged from the status of “standing reserve” in a technologically-framed biopolitics.

Moreiras begins his discussion by noting that such a *parergonal* critique is precisely what C&E identify as the potent legacy of Baroque authors and artists such as Cervantes and Velázquez, a legacy through which they construct their own critique of the mediatic age we currently inhabit. For Moreiras, however, “the minor baroque is a strategy for reading, not a proposal for a new creation” (124), which points to the principal issue identified by other contributors in the volume, notably Avilés, Simerka, and Álvarez-Blanco. However, he adds an important factor to this context by noting how university professors, situated within a neoliberal matrix that equates their work with self-exploitation, “must now think of themselves as appropriately relegated to the woodwork” (126), which is, of course, exactly where the *parergon* resides. In light of Childers's deconstruction of the figure of the individual heroic journalist, the questions Moreiras asks go to the heart of the self-identification of the professor as a potential social and political actor: “There is only the hope, no matter how enthusiastically expressed, still only just a hope that our active reading, Colbert, or walking dead movies will produce critical effects” (126).

Actually, Moreiras puts it succinctly in the center of *Medialogies*'s court when he begins his thoughts asking about the strength of the WWCD formula

and finishes with the thought that “perhaps the frame must be broken” (131). It could be argued that Cervantes, indeed, shattered the frame—to use a nice expression by María Rey López that Castillo has borrowed once or twice—in *Don Quixote*, but also in the *Novelas ejemplares*.⁷ The Boccaccian *cornice* is more than just a convention, and Cervantes’s way of shattering it in *The Colloquium of the Dogs* is more fundamental. From the depths of the Hospital of Valladolid, and of the delirious mind of Campuzano—yes, the dream of reason produces monsters, or witches, or bottomless pits of hell—Campuzano comes out: “Salía del hospital de la Resurrección” (281) (He came out of the Hospital of the Resurrection) are the exact words the narrator uses. And then he gives his friend Peralta a manuscript to read, in which dogs speak and witches rule the world. The *Colloquium* is a novella framed by another novella, and yet it comes out to frame the entire collection (partially: Cervantes would never replace a totalitarian frame with another totalitarian frame). And the last words of the collection are Peralta’s “vámonos al Espolón a recrear los ojos del cuerpo, pues ya he recreado los del entendimiento” (359) (let’s go out, to the Espolón mall, to pleasure the eyes of the body once I have pleased those of the mind). Moreiras is inviting us, in a way, to follow Cervantes’s shattering of the frame: to go out to El Espolón (say: the Agora, the Washington Mall, or simply the open-air *tertulia* with no cell phones, computers, or even books). But is it possible to step out into any Espolón? Isn’t the Espolón itself a framing machine, a stage to see and be seen? (Burgos’s own Espolón is nicknamed “el tontódromo” [the idiotdrome].)

Moreiras’s melancholic critique is rooted in Heidegger’s notion of the “standing reserve,” by which the philosopher means the reduction of human essence to a series of biopolitical equivalences—“pool of genes or labor force, as human resource or consuming power” (130)—through a universalizing technological framing that creates order through what Zygmunt Baumann has called the “necessity of waste” in yet another *parergonal* relation.⁸ The danger, as Moreiras sees it, is that “man everywhere and always encounters only himself . . . [leading to] a vicious spiral that wants to challenge forth yet more dreams, more desires, more resources that become so much more fodder for the disciplinary machine” (131). It seems fair to ask, however, whether we might return to Kant and what appears to be a quasi-fundamentalist impulse in his notion of aesthetic judgment:

knowing whether I may say that something is beautiful has nothing *intrinsicly* to do with the interest I may or may not demonstrate in its existence. And the pleasure (*Lust*), that kind of pleasing known as pleasure, which I experience before that which I judge to be beautiful requires an indifference or, more strictly, an absolute lack of interest in the thing’s existence. (11)

This statement carries a certain affinity with the ideological fundamentalisms theorized and critiqued by C&E, in the sense that there is no necessary relation between the judgment of an object's beauty and its existence as a real object. On the other hand, such an absolutely subjective stance refuses the impulse to project its judgment back onto the object, thus opening up the possibility of what Mowitt or Álvarez-Blanco might call a "panic-producing" aesthetic response to the biopolitical impasse elicited by Moreiras's *parergon* to *Medialogies*.

This volume, then, has been conceived and put together within the established parameters of a series of volumes called *Hispanic Issues*. But both *Medialogies*—the target book by C&E—and the essays that comment on it in this volume, deal with issues that many could consider as far exceeding the academic territorialization that even today they would impose on "Hispanism." The issue of inflationary media—say, the discussion of "the Internets," to quote a famous former US president—is not a Hispanic issue. Or is it? In a way, Donald Trump's overt attack and focus on Hispanics and Muslims has made the resulting "alternate reality" of walls and deportations a Hispanic (and Muslim) issue. How can Nazism not be a Jewish issue? How can colonialism not be an issue of the colonized subjects?

Many of the media that constitute the first age of inflationary media were invented or exponentially developed in Spain: modern prose fiction from *Celestina* to *Lazarillo* to *Don Quixote*; massively produced modern theater (Lope de Vega alone penned many hundreds of plays (Lope de Vega alone probably penned more than 1,500 plays of which about 500 survived); and even modern poetry, with Góngora. That in itself makes the issue Hispanic. But bracketing the issue at the other end, we find now that Hispanics are singled out (with perhaps only Muslims as companions in otherness) as the danger to (American) greatness. Could it be that we are, indeed, dangerous? Could it be that we, Hispanics or Hispanic-lovers (Hispanists)—perhaps out of sheer habit with the incessant Baroques that have been—can actually read reality in a troublesome, inassimilable way? This is, of course, a volume edited by two individuals, both Hispanists (one Hispanic, one not). It revolves around *Medialogies*, a book also written by two Hispanists (one Hispanic, one not). And it contains the contributions of American Hispanists (some Hispanic, some not).

As an illustration on how this issue is particularly pertinent to the cultures that are being perceived as most dangerous to the status quo, we can cite and relate two cases:

1) Lewis Black, in a classic stand-up routine about the Bible, stated: "you, Christians, can't be experts on the Bible; it is OUR book. It is full of b. s., and aren't we Jews the ultimate experts on b. s.?"

2) In one of our *Don Quixote* classes, a very interested student was taking notes and making good comments until we arrived at Cide Hamete Benengeli

and the “found manuscript.” All of a sudden, she is confused, lost. In my office, I explain to her basic literary concepts such as “fictitious author” versus “real author” versus “narrator,” but she cuts my lecture short with an emphatic hand sign, and tells me: “So you are telling me that *Don Quixote* is a lie?” She lost interest. She quit the class. She was a Muslim student of Moroccan descent.

Here we have, then, two engines, two machines with the potential to “see through”: Hispanics, like the self-deprecating Jew, can claim to be better suited for the task, because, after all, we invented the thing: we invented Baroque and mass media. Muslims, like the student—perhaps because they are notoriously iconoclastic, passionate adversaries of representing human beings in images—are somewhat vaccinated against the virus of virtual realities and lack “fictional competence,” and, therefore, “fiction” is no different from “lie” for them. From different experiences (because we invented the monster or because we never experienced its full strength), it may very well be that Trump has had just the right instinct for identifying the most dangerous enemies. But, of course, fiction—and, with it, the reading of fiction—and reality—with the reading of reality—have this tremendous thing in common: they tend toward the half-truth, or, from another angle, they tend to veil half of the truth. Lewis Black is not a good candidate to be the patron saint of b.s., and young Muslim women have not necessarily always been preservers of the real: Scheherazade is the veiled half of the truth for both. And yet, Scheherazade did not invent massive, inflated b.s.: we did, in Spain; and modern, young Muslim women obviously have abandoned the life-preserving instinct of story-telling that Scheherazade had. In any case, the knowledge about how b.s. works seems to be the development of the descendants of Scheherazade. Only now it is the Sultan who seems to have appropriated its power. We must steal fiction back. But possessing the (war) machine is not enough. Paraphrasing Lenin (as well as a fortune cookie that one of us saved and titled “Revolution” before taping it to the wall just over his computer screen): knowing what to do is wisdom, knowing how to do it is skill, and doing it is virtue. But, alas, do we even know what to do? And, more important, whether *we* is “we the people” or “we are the Borg,” is resistance futile?

Doing may itself be counterproductive, as Zizek and others have argued, because the inflated monster feeds precisely on such action. But perhaps we (this is the small “we,” not the “we” of “We the people” or of “we created Trump”) humanists, Hispanists, can and must do what we have always done. Ours is an evolved *speech act*, perhaps inflated from *speech*, to writing, to publish-or-perish. Can we deflate it? Perhaps we can. We still have the classroom. We can do for our students what many upper-class parents who work in and for Silicon Valley are doing for their children: send them to top-notch schools that offer, as the ultimate distinction, computer-free courses. We can actually *talk*, *speak* in classrooms; many of us adhere to the Socratic method, as it should be.

We must, of course, remember that Socrates never wrote anything.

This volume is not quite it, but it insists on twosomes (Castillo-Egginton, Nelson-Baena, Althusser-Balibar, Dorfman-Mattelart, and Deleuze-Guattari), and *Medialogies* itself has been compared to another book written by a two-some (Hardt and Negri's *Empire*), and there is something to be said about such tandem-writing: it is precisely in the cracks between what author A and author B are and say that wisdom—knowing what to do, according to the fortune cookie—is to be obtained. It is in the cracks among the many conflicting views expressed by the contributors to this volume that the basis for action (past diagnosis) can be found. Žižek, that ultimate rationalist, often has stated how he prefers Deleuze “deGuattarized.” Nobody can dispute that reason works finest when uninterrupted, but isn't that true especially of the paranoid discourse, such as Don Quixote's or Cardenio's, who cannot be interrupted lest they stop reasoning completely? The moment we exclude interruption from discourse, we exit the domain of *Logos* proper, and step into the threshold of media. As García Calvo emphasized, reason is only reason when it is *razón común* (common reason).

For many years now, some of us have been saying “we are entering a new Dark Age.” In Spanish, the phrase has been “entramos en una nueva Edad Media,” and Middle Age scholars, such as Umberto Eco, used the same expression (“Middle” instead of “Dark”) maybe simply out of the same Mediterranean unconscious bias, still operating, that created the notion of “Renaissance.” Either way, this feeling of doom was metaphoricized with the Middle Ages, not with the early modern times that constitute a “first inflationary era” of media to our second one. Needless to say, C&E use the more crucial of the elements (media inflation) as the main factor in their analogy and in these dire times of ours. The analogy with any “dark age” misses that primordial of elements. Still, one cannot simply make the notion disappear that we have come back to an age that is darker than the Renaissance or the Baroque, and darker than the Middle Ages of, say, Romanesque abbeys, Gothic cathedrals, Dante, Chaucer, or Juan Ruiz. All of these comparisons, and not just the ones that compare apples to oranges, but also even the ones that *Medialogies* neatly undertakes between apples and apples (between medialogies), are risky, and one must fine-tune the terms of comparison if one wants them to be more than shortcuts of convenience. But, most of all, the enterprise (*empresa*) of poiesis should have taught us by now that no single signifier/signified relation is to be glorified as the long-lost Great Signifier. One possible advantage of using—as a weapon, if you like—the New Dark Ages trope in this discussion can be the analogy between our loss of culture and that of the fabled Fall of the Roman Empire into the hands of the Barbarians. Boethius staring Theodoric, literally in the face, writing in his dungeon his *Consolation of Philosophy*. And—as the gross analogy goes—the times of the effort to preserve a knowledge that was no more: Isidore of Seville, writing the first encyclopedia, which today makes us

sigh with recognition, nostalgia, and patronizing attitude, every time we read “citation needed” on a Wikipedia entry (Isidore is, aptly and officially, the Patron Saint of the Internet). And then the monasteries and their libraries (think of our post-modern Eco again, with *The Name of the Rose*) in which, through the tension between preservation and destruction—let’s say by serendipitous fire—the Canon is passed, supposed civilization is preserved. Or Aristotle, read and translated by Muslims and Jews, and re-translated in Alexandria or in Toledo. We can use that analogical mode of the New Dark Ages to see our role in them. Perhaps we are a current Boethius or Isidore, or the guardians of the remains of what was, in our universities (yes, they are the new monasteries, and we are the new monks). But here is the problem: our monastery is the Corporate University. If we are to be the salvaging monks, we must begin by re-inventing monasticism, even monkhood perhaps, by being pre-Benedictine, pre- (or post-) *ora et labora*, by living on a pillar for years. Aren’t those pillars in the middle of the desert the probable ruined remnants of ivory towers?

We should try to become pre-Benedictine or para-Benedictine for the same reason that we should try to become pre-Socratic or para-Socratic. The triumph of that enormous effort in preservation always had a malignant force behind it. The Benedictine *scriptorium* is the predecessor of the printing press. But *inflation* is the key word here, and inflation happened with the expansion of mercantile Europe. The printed book *had to become* the fetish; its virtuality transferred a million times into a million screens of screens.

So perhaps our duty is to dim the lights. To abandon the axiom of Goethe’s fabled last words, according to which more light should be our dying wish. Let’s dim the lights so we can see, because the lights on our eyes are now, all too clearly, too bright to see by: they are stage lights. In a respite of darkness we may—just possibly—glimpse what was and is behind that blinding light. Plato had it half right: from the cavern, we see but the shadows projected by a light always behind us. But he was only half right because he forgot to add that brightening the fire would not solve anything: it would simply deepen the chasm, make darkness thicker and shadows more pronounced. From Goethean/Faustian “Light! More Light!” we must recover, with the sanity of irony.

Or maybe we turn off the spotlights, which create as many shadows as focal points of intensity, and turn on the house lights, so that spectators and actors inhabit and negotiate a more transparent space. Isn’t this what happens when Lope de Rueda brings his rustic theatrical apparatus and richly nuanced yet humble language to plaza? Or when Cervantes publishes his *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos, nunca representados* for mass consumption, so that the reader might “ver de espacio lo que pasa apriesa” (see slowly what happens quickly)? Or when Zayas brings the “tasteful” commentary of the male spectators of the *sarao* in her *Desengaños amorosos*—tasteless, really, in its hunger for novelty and violence—into direct contact with the horrible

violence of the tales? By bringing up the house lights, Cervantes reveals the doubts of the Governor concerning what he is *not* seeing on the stage of the marvelous *Retablo*, all the while illuminating the strenuous efforts of the other spectators to bring Chanfalla's phantasms to life, along with the void in the threadbare *retablo*-screen itself. Such a strategy results in a power transfer from the conman/impresario to the objects of the con, converting their fears and desires into the subjects that, in the end, create the monstrous spectacle on the stage, which brings us full circle back to the question of whether we deserve or created Trump.

If we opt for the role of creator, then we should revisit Kant's disinterested judgment of beauty, since it removes the interest from the beautiful object toward the self-interest of the discerning subject. And it is here where reality literacy would have to begin, not in the object represented, nor in the media that inflates the object's value to a transcendental degree, but rather in the desire of the subject herself. For Latour, such a project requires changing the emphasis of the relation from *value* to *values*, as in institutional values. If we have moved beyond Truth Politics to Power Politics, then the deciphering and framing techniques we teach our students would have to ground their methodology in identifiable values. We could start with things like the transparent negotiation of meaning, the importance of dialogue, and respect for the *other*. They would be based, in short, on a universal relativism that rigorously anchors interpretation and *creation* in historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts: in other words, the *razón de ser* (reason for being) of the language disciplines, be they classical or modern, *dead or alive*.

A memorable Far Side vignette by Gary Larson (published in newspapers all over the United States on June 25, 1993) shows Mr. and Mrs. Satan in their living room. Beautiful Margaret is now Satan's wife, not Faust's. Now middle-aged, she sits comfortably on an arm chair reading a book, wearing tacky glasses, while Satan—also middle-aged and portly—stares, through the big window framed with curtains, at the damned on the other side, on “hell-proper,” who are simply drawn as silhouettes, as shadows with signs of being unspeakably tortured. Hell is a theater, or a movie—we can't be sure if that big window is “the fourth wall” or a screen—but it is obvious that Mr. and Mrs. Satan don't share the same space with the damned. Maybe we are all in hell, but some are simply damned while others read their books or watch. What Satan says to Mrs. Satan may very well be the antidote to the paranoid “More light!”: “Tell me, Margaret, am I a butthead?”

Notes

1. See Latour's *An Inquiry in Modes of Existence*.
2. See Slavoj Žižek's *For They Know not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*.
3. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*.
4. Yes, this term is meant to both cite Benedict Anderson's insightful concept as well as shade current iterations with delusional and apocalyptic overtones.
5. See Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern*.
6. This possible critique to Simerka's optimism is based on comments by Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio. In *Vendrán más años malos y nos harán más ciegos*, he writes: "Cuando el humor se constituye en género es que ha resuelto apartarse respetuosamente de las cosas serias, a fin de que éstas puedan ejercer sin embarazo su petulante tiranía. Así, la pretendida rebelión del humorismo contra las cosas serias resulta un pacto secreto de complicidad" (37) (When humor constitutes itself as a genre, it is because it has decided to respectfully step aside from serious things, so that they can execute unmolested their petulant tyranny. Thus, the supposed rebellion of humor against serious things results in a secret pact of complicity).
7. See Rey Lopez's "La negación del *cornice* en las *Novelas ejemplares*."
8. See Bauman's *Wasted Lives*.
9. See a clip of Lewis Black's comedy sketch www.youtube.com/watch?v=seuCWDSi8WQ.

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