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The Neoliberal Foreclosure of Representation and the Habit of Coloniality

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Summary

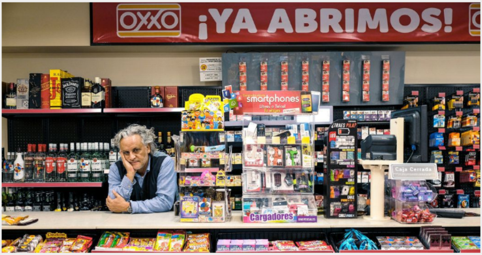
The present essay is an attempt to elucidate the "blind spot" in representation in relationship to coloniality and modernity. The latter, as it is based on the destruction of alterity and of nature, hides the habit of coloniality that normalizes such destruction. Articulating the notion of "fascism in representation" in current aesthetic and political practices, in this essay I seek to problematize the cultural specificities of "environmental struggles" or the struggles for survival of indigenous peoples in Mexico as a result of the habit of coloniality. It is urgent, I conclude, to take responsibility for the fact that the privileges of westernized urban and modern populations are based on the destruction of the commons and of originary peoples.

Key words: representation, modernity, blind spot, coloniality, environmental struggles, indigenous struggles.

1.- Fascist Representation

In aesthetics, representation is a description, an image that stands for something in the world that makes its absence incomplete and only temporarily present. This means that representation is a double operation of repetition and substitution between things and ideas mediated by a sign. An idea represents a thing, but that representation is only possible through a substitution of an other thing that represents the first. The actions underlining aesthetic representation, in other words, are repetition and substitution.[1] But the fact that the representative visibly *signifies* that which has been represented, does not imply that the representative is a model[2] and thus, representation is always inexact or incomplete. As a political category, representation means that an elected politician speaks on behalf of a collective and acts upon their interests. The function of representation is that of mediating between an "original" and its reproduction, between a people's interests and whomever can give them voice.

Representation, however, always runs the risk of being totalitarian, either by proclaiming neutrality by obliterating the point of view in enunciation or by claiming totality (being mimetic). This is why, in certain historical moments, representation becomes fascist. In our era, in aesthetics, fascist representation means that art functions as a derivative, which means that appearances obliterate the totality of abstract relations that generate them.[3] As a consequence, meaning is reified, reflexivity and criticality eliminated along with relationality, ambiguity. When art functions as a derivative, the consequence is that appearances become a series of minor variations derived from the same source.



Example of a derivative work of art: Gabriel Orozco, *Oxxo*, Kurimanzutto Gallery, Mexico City, March 2017.

For its part, fascist political representation implies that the center of power is occupied by its own representation as celebrity or as a brand. The celebrity phenomenon is also a derivative but from the public sphere with the specific role to re-enchant the disenchanted masses, as celebrities, celebrity-politicians and brands are all expressions of what is valued by society.[4] This form of political representation implies the delegitimzation of citizens and the foreclosure of their participation on decisions that concern them. In other words, fascist power dispossesses the represented from their capacity to decide over common matters and politics thus becomes something foreign, alien, external, unreachable and separate from the individual and the collective capacity for self-determination, subsumed to the logic of profit. While the political is reduced to conflict, dissensus and agonism geared at the potential disruption of institutional arrangements in society, and politics to a form of administration, policy and mode of governance, politics has become irreducible to existing or potential social formations.

Example of fascist political representation: Manuel López Obrador as a brand politician for the left; candidate for MORENA in the 2018 presidential elections in Mexico.

Under Donald Trump's administration –one of the representative celebrity politicians of our era, the corporate class is directly taking over the running of government, supported by the white working class who favor less government intervention and taxes[5] . In this particular manifestation of neoliberalism, the discourse separating the spheres of politics and the financial and corporate economy has vanished. In the meantime, the governing rationality continues to disseminate market values to every sphere of life but without its former veneer of liberal values. The fact that power now only represents itself (because there is no longer difference between political power and corporate power, as CEOs are part of Trump's cabinet) means that the political culture of tolerance and difference has been eliminated, having relegated antagonism into essentialist cultural wars that are mere residues of liberal tolerance.

In this context and behind the recent debates on the politics of racial representation, lies a troubling notion of purity and self-entitlement fueling the culture wars that are prevailing over empathy and solidarity. The demand for purity and self-entitlement in representation are hindering the much needed solidarity networks to be woven amongst communities fighting for their short and medium term survival, and the inhabitants or urban zones whose privileges depend on the destruction of such struggling communities. As we will see below, the demands for purity in racial representation are tied to what I call the "habit of coloniality." This means that coloniality is a habit in the sense of the normalization of civilizatory discourses of progress and betterment that justify massive destruction of populations and of nature. The current wave of neocolonization is further legitimized by the discourse of development, economic growth and sustainability. And the 500 year old normalization of colonization is blocking the creation of the much needed solidarity bridges between privileged populations and indigenous populations.

The dynamic of the demands of purity and self-entitlement in representation may be exemplified with the debate that emerged from the call by Hannah Black and the coalition of artists and scholars of color to destroy Diana Schultz's painting of Emmett Till on display at this year's Whitney Biennale, which in their view is insensitive. For them, a "painting of a dead black boy by a white artist cannot 'correctly' represent white shame" and it is "an example of an unacceptable practice of white artists transmuting black suffering into profit."[6] Another recent case are the accusations against North American artist Jimmy Durham by the Cherokee community of falsely appropriating their ethnic identity.[7] The issue of representation as only possible or guaranteed by skin color or lineage is a sign of fascist forms of aesthetic-politic representation under our current Trump era. In the call to censor Diana Schultz's painting, representativity is premised by entitlement: in the "Who" and "whom" in the "Who speaks and acts, for whom and how?" of representation, difference is obliterated and the speaker, her racial politics and the truth of the speech must be identical in order to be legitimized. And fascist representation is the demand for an undifferentiated, transparent equation between signifier and signified, the source and its derivatives, the supposition of the existence of an original and its copy, total equivalence between voice and discourse.

At the core of Western Modernism in both aesthetic and political representation, however, the danger of fascism has always been present, and this is why radical representation has always included a practice of self-reflexivity. For instance, in his "documentary" about the Black Panthers, in collaboration with D.A. Pennebaker,[8] Jean-Luc Godard interviews – or rather records, as he is visibly intimidated by the leader and barely dares to address him – Eldridge Cleaver giving his views about the Black struggle. Later on in the movie, Cleaver's recorded speech is replayed and repeated by a white actor in various contexts: at a school, the streets of New York, a classroom full of Black teenagers and dressed up as a Native American. The film highlights the mutations Cleaver's speech undergoes as it is spoken through a white body in various contexts. By using an array of strategies for reflexivity, Godard seeks to make the viewer aware of how the film's representation of the Black Panthers' Struggle is contingent upon Godard and Pennebaker's white, male gazes. Placing self-reflexivity at the core of the movie enables the filmmakers to express solidarity with the black struggle.

As Godard's film seeks to pedagogically show, in representation something always needs to be exposed or represented, and yet, the desire to expose or represent is colonizing. At the same time concealing, and failing to represent or speak on behalf of others, is as colonizing. It is perhaps Diana Schultz's lack of reflexivity as a white, privileged painter seeking to express solidarity by speaking on behalf of Black struggles what triggered the controversy around her painting. Self-reflexivity is a tool to bring awareness to the colonizing dangers of representation, to evidence representation's epistemological shortcomings and the representing subjects' blind spots. We live, however, in an era in which fascist forms have taken over and reinforcing, as we will see, the habit of coloniality. This has manifested in the essentialization and reduction of political struggles to the safeguarding of culture, foreclosing necessary forms of radical, decolonizing representation.[9]

2.- The Habit of Coloniality

It is widely believed that the cause of the politico-ecological catastrophe we are facing is an economic system obsessed with growth.[10] And yet, I would like to argue that in as far as neoliberalism is the subsumption of everything to profit, our current political impasse and the seemingly impossibility to politicize the Anthropocene are due to what I call the habit of coloniality. The entrenchment of the habit of coloniality implies that, in spite of post-colonial, multicultural and human rights movements, fascist forms of aesthetic and political representation are coming back with a vengeance enabling the current wave of primitive accumulation to flourish. This means that the blatant invisibility (and I dare say, irrelevance) of indigenous struggles against primitive accumulation in the global political field is due to the 500 year old blind spot originated in coloniality. Moreover as a habit, coloniality has made us privileged populations insensible to the ordeals of indigenous peoples and to the fact that they are also our own.

The habit of coloniality is intrinsically related to modernity, which could be defined as a movement that conceals while unveils the colonial destruction and annihilation that are necessary for modern progress to unfold. That is because the modern *Weltende der Welt* (the *worlding of the world* in Heidegger) and the production of a historical reality by science, knowledge and design are premised on the replacement or destruction of the old or primitive with the new or modern. This movement normalizes the destruction of alterity and of nature and it is precisely the basis of the habit of coloniality. Habit, according to Elaine Scarry, either closes down sensation entirely or builds up perception as its own interior, that is to say, habit creates sentience either opening or closing the world.[11] The habit of coloniality is engrained in the Western unconscious that predicates destruction and the eradication of alterity in the name of universality, progress, betterment and growth, and the concealment of that annihilation has been the condition of Modernity itself. As Rolando Vázquez argues, "the narrative of salvation of modernity was built on the denial of the genocidal violence of colonialism,"[12] as the first mass colonial genocide, was the early expression of a system geared towards the consumption of human and non-human life, the consumption of earth.[13]

In Mexico and Latin America, the ordeals of indigenous peoples are known as "environmental conflicts" and the source are the neoliberal strategies of dispossession and expropriation of "natural resources" or rather, of "the commons." These strategies have materialized in the introduction of an industrialized food production system in the hands of transnational companies that excludes small producers and has destroyed sustainability; in the expansion of extraction and exploitation of the natural commons through mining concessions; in the construction of infrastructure projects like highways, ports, tourist enclaves, trash deposits or dams, all designed to centralize energy in big cities and to connect territories rich in "resources" and "cheap labor" to the flows of global exchange. To have an idea of the scale of the dispossession that is taking place, we must bear in mind that in the past 15 years, the Mexican government has given 24 thousand concessions only for open sky mining. We must also remember that under agreements such as NAFTA, transnational corporations are entitled to file lawsuits against local governments who fail to stop local interference with their "resource" extraction efforts.[14] To block these neoliberal processes of capital accumulation, new forms of resistance known as "environmental struggles" are emerging seeking to gain access and control of the means of subsistence (like land and seeds) accompanied by new forms of communal recomposition. In this regard, Mina Lorena Navarro explains the defense of territory across Latin America as a new sensibility of peoples and their environment, and as the actualization of "non-predatory" liferworlds[15] against capitalist and extractivist relationships.

And yet, these forms of political subjectivation, which stand in direct opposition to capitalism, either remain *other* because the habit of coloniality makes them to be perceived as non-modern, or they are seen through the romantic lens of the belief that indigenous communities are key in preventing natural disasters and curving climate change. From this point of view, indigenous struggles are considered to be "a road to the future," because in their territorial struggles and battles against transnational companies extracting minerals, polluting water, destroying lands and emptying out their soils, they are fighting environmental catastrophe (on behalf of us all).[16] This belief that originary peoples are helping to 'save the future' and to shape new forms to inhabit the world, however, is highly problematic. Part of the problem is the fact that 'environmental justice' struggles remain localized, bound to cultural-specificity, connections amongst them precarious. In so far as environmental struggles are grounded on "environmental identities," the prevailing political framework to defend territories amalgamates cultural identities, ways of life and self-perception, grounded on the connection of given groups or communities to their physical environment, the relationship between environmental and cultural values and behaviors.[17] Under this frame, environmental injustice goes hand in hand with cultural loss. But most importantly, environmental struggles remain unlinked to the responsibilities that privileged inhabitants of urban areas have as the main consumers of "resources" such as real estate, food in supermarkets, bauxite, fossil fuel or shale gas.

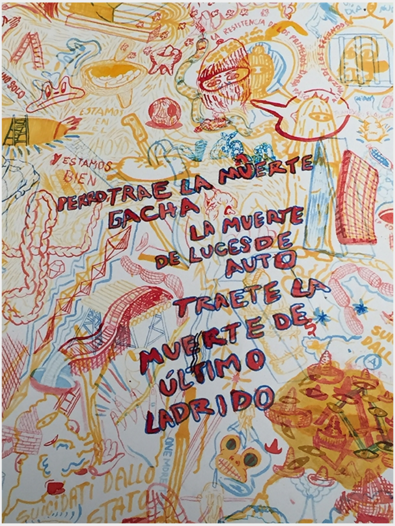
We must bear in mind that within indigenous communities that mobilize to defend their lands from narco-exploitation or from mega-projects like mining and hydroelectric plants, repression and killing are the rule. The State has beaten, tortured, imprisoned and murdered many of those who have fought against pollution and land theft, deforestation, destruction of forests and rivers.[18] In a way, their territories – considered by neoliberal common sense to be 'markets' – become states of exception where an apparatus of dispossession is put into place. Mina Lorena Navarro describes this apparatus as built on institutional legality, consensus and legitimacy, cooptation and capture, disciplining and normalization, criminalization, repression, militarization and counter-insurgency. The apparatus implies a continuum of material and representational violence that goes in crescendo as the State becomes the guarantor of the accumulation of capital.[19] The apparatus is accompanied by transnational legitimization tools like NAFTA and specifically, the "Plan Colombia" and "Plan Mérida" signify a transnational model of neocolonial war, genocide and ethnocide, laboratories of dispossession and uprooting.[20]

Without a doubt, what is at stake in indigenous peoples' struggles is not freedom, equality or justice but the short to medium term survival of their communities and of humanity at large. And in spite of the fact that it is becoming more and more difficult to deny that territorial conflicts interact reciprocally with environmental transformation, and that this relationship unfolds from the constant displacement of populations and their separation from their means of subsistence, I want to argue that these struggles are being extremely difficult to represent outside of their own local specificities. This is precisely due to the habit of coloniality, which is behind the symbolic and discursive efficacy of apparatus of dispossession described by Navarro.[21]

3.- The Difficulty in Representing Originary Peoples' Struggles

In general, climate change is understood as an unintended effect of Modernity. As we have seen, Modernity bears a blind spot that lodges the habit of coloniality, and that is the reason why a frame to represent environmental struggles that would relate coloniality to the anthropocene thesis is lacking. For Eyal Weizman, from the point of view of colonization, climate change has never been collateral damage but a declared goal. In a very important and recent book, he develops a radical and useful hypothesis to explain contemporary conflicts by connecting colonialism to environmental changes. Weizman's main case study is the "battle for the Neguev," the Israeli State campaign, on the one hand, to uproot the Bedouins surviving in the area, and on the other, to plant forests and expand the forestation line. Weizman studies the Negev desert's movable frontier as it advances and retrocedes in response to colonization, displacement, urbanization, agricultural trends, urbanization and climate change, all phenomena intrinsically tied to dispossession. In the Neguev, "making the desert bloom" is in effect, changing the climate.[22] A similar history linking displacement and global warming could be written about Lake Chalco. In the 19th Century under Porfirio Díaz's regime, Spanish entrepreneur Iñigo Noriega Lazo sought to expand arable lands by dessicating Xico, the lake adjacent to Chalco and Xochimilco, in the outskirts of Mexico City. Similarly to Israeli governments' efforts to move the Negev desert's border to expand the limits of arable land while putting the nomads under State control, Noriega Lazo forced the lake's originary peoples to work as peasants in his Hacienda. In the Neguev, as in Chalco and Atenco, climate, originary populations displacement, relocalization and control go hand in hand. The intrinsic relationship between modernisation and climate change has derived in visible forms of colonialism, posited today as environmental violence as soil degradation, destruction of forests and fields, pollution and rerouting of water.

The fact that destruction is systematic, unstoppable and subsumed to neoliberal common sense makes us see the habit of coloniality as the reason for the difficulty in representing aesthetically and politically indigenous peoples in struggle from Mexico. For instance, members of the Mexico City based collective, Colectiva Cráter Invertido have done counter-information work in solidarity with the community of Ostula, in the State Michoacán. The inhabitants of Ostula are currently fighting against talamontes, narcos and the military to defend their sovereignty, forms of life and ways to make a living. Symptomatically, the young artists have been unable to draw a link between their political activism in Ostula to political work in the city or to a project of decolonization. And yet, the struggles with which the collective have engaged remain present in their imaginary, fanzines, posters and drawings. They symptomatically avoid the work of aesthetic-political representation of Ostula because they want to avoid making pamphleteer art.


ESTAMOS EN EL HOYO
Y ESTAMOS BIEN
PERRO TRAE LA MUERTE GACHA
LA MUERTE DE LUCES DE AUTO
TRAETE LA MUERTE DE ÚLTIMO LADRIDO
SUICIDATI DALLO STATO
ONE MORE

Collective drawing by Cráter Invertido, shown at the Venice Biennale 2015.

In 2015, the Communality Congress took place at the University in Puebla gathering academics from all of Latin America to discuss the links between decolonization, environmental struggles and new forms of community organization. Somehow, the word "communality" came across as the substitute for "socialism" as the new politically correct ideology to which progressive researchers now must subscribe. The obvious question that raises: How to translate *communality* to urban contexts? remained absent from the discussions in exercises of theoretical surplus extraction from praxis. Another example of the functioning of the blind spot inherent to the double bind of modernity brought about by coloniality are the celebratory conversations taking place around Norman Foster's Mexico City airport project. The airport is being built in Atenco, an expropriated *ejido* (communal land) in which localized resistance has been taking place since 2006, when president Vicente Fox announced the project. That year, resistance was followed by massive repression characterized by the use of gender violence. In spite of the fact that the Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra (FPDT) gained international visibility in their struggle against the Atenco airport, their struggle and repression are now forgotten as the creative class is pitching projects to Foster to include them, and the privileged sector of the population rejoices on how the airport will make life easier for everyone in the city. The fact that the heavy human and environmental "collateral damage"[23] the airport is generating has been obliterated from public consciousness is indisputably an issue of matter of class and race difference, which precisely constitutes of the blind spot of coloniality. In its neoliberal manifestation, coloniality embodies a new cycle of dispossession began in Latin America supported on the belief that the lands where indigenous peoples live are more valuable than the labor they can provide.

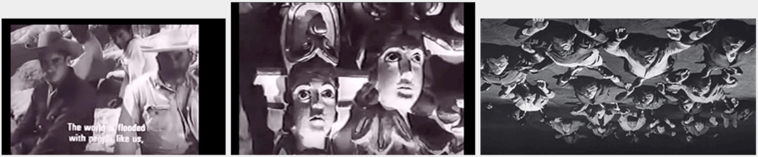
The fact that destruction is systematic and subsumed to neoliberal common sense gives us a glimpse of the habit of coloniality inherent in aesthetic and political representation of indigenous peoples in Mexico. Here Cristina Rivera Garza's most recent book becomes of most relevance. In it, the writer, poet and theorist offers an image of Juan Rulfo as an embodiment of Modernity's double bind –and thus of the habit of coloniality: as an agent that legitimized the Mexican modernizing process in mid-Century Mexico, while questioned in his literature and memorialized in his photographs the very traces of peoples that were at the brink of disappearing.[24] Rivera Garza compares Rulfo's gaze to that of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History: a retrospective gaze that observes in all detail the disaster caused by the winds pulling it toward the future. Rivera Garza's reading of Rulfo is avowedly personal: on the one hand, it is based on a consideration on the material conditions that enabled Rulfo to make a living: as a transnational corporation employee and State bureaucrat. On the other hand, in a daft exercise of situated knowledge, her reading is inspired by Rivera Garza's hikes through the valleys and mountains in contemporary Oaxaca where Rulfo's work as an employee was key in displacing the originary populations. Moreover, that region is the cradle of *communality*, a practice of territory that opposes individuality geared at autonomous forms of organization, mutual cooperation and interdependence that emerged in the 1980s and theorized by Mixe thinker Floriberto Díaz and Zapoteco researcher Jaime Martínez Luna.

Earlier this year, the Juan Rulfo Foundation withdrew from its plan to participate in the 9th annual Book and Rose Fair at the UNAM. The Foundation was objecting to the planned presentation of Cristina Rivera Garza's new book on Rulfo, *Había mucha neblina o humo o no sé que,* (There was a lot of fog or smoke or I do not know) which it considered to be "defamatory." Garza's book offers an image of Juan Rulfo as an embodiment of Modernity's double bind. On the one hand, as an employee of Goodrich Euzkadi, a transnational company which expanded the emerging tourism industry and as an advisor and researcher for the Papaloapan Commission, the State organ responsible for extracting "natural resources" in Southern Mexico – including, most notably, the Miguel Alemán Dam in Nuevo Soyaltepec in Oaxaca, - Rulfo was an agent that legitimized the emblematic projects of Mexican modernity in the mid 20th Century. On the other hand, in his writing and his photographs, Rulfo memorialized the very peoples that his work risked disappearing. Rivera Garza compares Rulfo's vision to that of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History: a retrospective gaze that observes – even relishes – all the details of the disaster caused by the winds pulling it toward the future.

These two sides coincided, finally, in Rulfo's position as head of publishing at the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, a State organization created to look after the needs of all indigenous Mexicans. It was founded in 1948 with the goal of integrating indigenous peoples to "national" culture by "acculturating them," to "elevate their condition." INI's policies were characterized by a homogenization of Mexico's "ethnic groups," which they considered to be a "problem" to be solved. Anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who was director of the INI argued that the marginality of indigenous peoples was due to stagnation provoked by language differences. For Gamio, the solution to stagnation was State intervention implementing a policy to help them, seeking in reality, to assimilate them to the Mexican Nation-State project and to the criteria of development and progress. In this way, as Gilberto López y Rivas explains, the "indigenista bureaucracy" selected the destiny that the "incoproation" processes would have to national society but without taking into account their rights to decide their own road to progress. In spite of the fact that indigenismo was characterized by using a rhetoric of respecting indigenous language and customs, to consider indigenous peoples as "behind," justified a practice of destruction of their ethnic and social structures. In that manner, cultural and racial prejudices based on the supremacy of the European over the indigenous, sharpened the domination of a social group over another, excluding indigenous peoples from the country's government apparatus.[25] Certainly the Goodrich Euzkadi, the Papaloapan Commission, and the Instituto Nacional Indigenista are part of the same force that threatened autonomous life and community work in the name of development and modernization. In the 1950s, the euphemism "reacomodo," which means rearrangement or reshuffling, designated indigenous extermination, obscuring the colonial matrix. "Reshuffling" intended to bring progress to Mexico in the form of a solution to the "indigenous problem."

That Rivera Garza's contradictory portrait of Rulfo would be considered defamatory is itself is representative of modernity's habit of coloniality. An active agent of the Mexican State's modernization project and passionate believer in progress, Rulfo's reports to the Papaloapan Commission amplified 1950s attitudes about Oaxaca as one of Mexico's 'backwards' regions, whose natives were seen as primitive and thus, inexistent: their territory was officially qualified as "virgin" (or empty). Describing the living conditions of Chinantecos and Mazatecos in the Soyaltepec Valley region, Rulfo helped to justify the government's efforts to displace and dispossess them, thus taking an active, first hand part in their "reacomodo." Nevertheless, Rivera Garza also portrays Rulfo as an advocate working in solidarity with indigenous communities looking melancholically at their ruin and misery though his photographs documenting the imminent loss of vital, indigenous material culture.

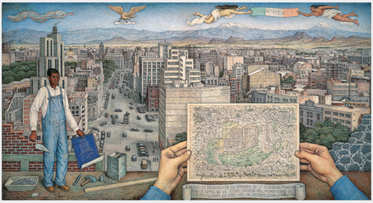
This tension is apparent in Rulfo's other works as well, such as the short story "Talpa" (1950),[26] as well as in his films, *La fórmula secreta (Coca Cola en la sangre)* (the secret formula: Coca-Cola in the Blood) (1965), and *El despojo* (1976). "Talpa" is a confessional monologue that describes the narrator's travels accompanying his brother, Tanilo, and his wife, TK, to see the legendary Virgin of Talpa in hopes that she will heal Tanilo from a terminal illness. The narrator describes Tanilo's mutilated body in detail as it disintegrates during the pilgrimage through arid, hot and dusty land. The trip becomes an aimless voyage toward nothing but guilt: the narrator and Tanilo's wife are in love, and both know that Tanilo will not survive the trip. Yet they press him onwards, secretly desiring to "finish him off" forever. Tanilo's death march in search of the savior Virgin becomes an allegory of indigenous "reacomodo." The displacement justified by reference to the redemption promised by modernity and the nation-state is in fact an aimless, self-destructive trip towards annihilation. In a sequence from *La fórmula secreta* we see a shot of indigenous peoples as peasants, then figured in the baroque church Tonanzintla (as indigenous represented through a hybrid of Prehispanic and Spanish figuration), and then, in modern clothes suspended from a vault. The sequence poses a question: How will originary peoples be figured or represented by the Modernizing process they are undergoing, once that is, they have Coca-cola in the blood? What place or role will Modern Mexico offer them? The film ends with a long list of transnational companies besieging Mexico in the 1960s. Although animated by the belief in a modern future for all, Rulfo's literary and cinematic work traces the suffering and abjection of indigenous peoples' social and cultural deaths. When indigenous societies came to be in touch with modernism during the second half of the 20th Century, their organizational structures and traditional knowledge forms begin to disappear a second time under the redemptive discourse of the "end of primitive societies."



Fotograms from Rulfo's *El despojo*.

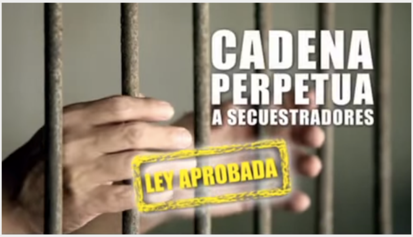
In 2003, Rulfo's Instituto Nacional Indigenista became the "National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples" with the premise that indigenous peoples should participate in the construction of development projects and that they have the right to preserve their ethnic identity. They revised the homogenization of Mexico's population brought about by the logic of the "Unión Nacional." But in spite of the fact that the National Commission's task is to recognize indigenous cultures and the plurality of Mexico, to promote sustainable development and to enable indigenous peoples' access to economic modernity, the human experience of indigenous peoples, their bodies and cultures, their status as beings apart is further underlined. The new indigenist politics of the National Commission could be considered as a direct result of the San Andrés proposal, the list of demands by the National Zapatista Army set forth in 1996 articulated in workshops gathering politicians, intellectuals and ingigenous representatives as a starting point to negotiate with the Federal Government. In it, they claimed the right of indigenous peoples to protect their languages, normative systems, uses and customs as long as they were compatible with human rights as defined by the country's laws and international treaties. Shortly after the agreement was signed in February 1996, the government disavowed it and broke dialogue. The San Andrés Agreement included "recognition in national legislation of communities as entities with public right and the right to freely associate in municipalities with populations composed by indigenous majorities…"[27]

Through the lens of the National Commission they "have things of their own," like customs which need to be recorded and admired and now, under the global corporate hunt for patents, indigenous traditional herbs and medicinal remedies along with belief systems, ways of organizing, rituals and artifacts are currently under siege. Difference is relativized and continues to justify a relationship of inequality and the right to command over them. The very aesthetization of their difference has made them apt for citizenship and made them bearers of rights, tokens of diversity and a market in itself. Under the globalized neoliberal siege, how can they protect themselves, their lands and their knowledges, having been made vulnerable by international agreements?[28]



Juan O'Gorman, *Mexico City*, 1949.

On the one hand, Modernity placed indigenous peoples and their lands as the basis, grounds and (re)sources of the nation, as peasants or workers, and thus as a main resource of a developing nation. On the other hand, indigenous peoples were conceived as insurgent subjects and agents of the revolution fighting for an egalitarian and *mestizo* Mexican nation. During the 20th Century, Mexico's indigenous roots were a recurrent imaginary referent. The idea of an indigenous, subversive and freeing Mexico went hand in hand with the symbolic representation of an underground history, a spectral "other," and unconscious constitutive over symbolic overdetemrination ofer poMexico's political power structure, which makes modern Mexico's sovereignty be authoritarian and violent because it expresses the other and her annihilation.[29] For its part, neoliberal common sense has reconverted them to maquiladora laborers, *sicarios*, kidnapers, vigilante police, migrants deported from the US. In this schema, the local bourgeoisie functions as the broker between transnational corporations and the natives and resources to be exploited. Here equality means inclusion as debtors and consumers, and those who remain outside circuits of consumption and debt, are the "other" of the *homo oeconomicus* and are systematically criminalized. New versions of the 1950s *reacomodo* have emerged, precisely trying to incorporate them to the system as consumers and debtors by displacing them to "sustainable rural cities,"[30] or to normalize their annihilation and dispossession through the discourses of the "Failed State " and "The War against Drugs." Furthermore, the fact that they are the primary conduits of fear, threat and danger justifies the brutal use of police or military force against them with the ultimate goal of displacing or repressing them.



Affiche from the Ecologist Green Party with brown hands behind bars.

It is clear that whether in literature, philosophy, the arts, or politics, discourses on Mexico's native populations are still being dominated by the events of colonization, slavery and dispossession, and that the knowledge that has been produced about them has influenced the ways in which they are represented (from symbolic imaginaries to government and private initiative policies). This means that indigenous populations keep appearing as alterity, as spectacle, as subjects of anthropology and ethnography,[31] and recently, as markets to be exploited and as fodder to necrocapitalism. In sum, indigenous peoples are characterized by the falsification of their selves by the other. We must take into account that under the current neoliberal regime, indigenous peoples have passed from being a "problem" to be dealt with through modernization and civilization to redundant populations to be managed through more repression, displacement and genocide. Although the means to eliminate originary peoples do not necessarily always imply physical death (which happens anyways with the spread of malnutrition and illnesses like cancer and diabetes), their most habitual mode of elimination is by exclusion, confinement, and by placing them on the State of exception through massive occupation of their territories by the military, open air mining and monocultures. As territories specialized in providing natural resources and traditional knowledges are created through changes in legislation, the war against "underdevelopment," is a war against redundant populations as surplus value is derived from their destruction and death.

Documentation of protests against the "Highway of Death" in Texcoco-Teotihuacán for the new airport.

Toward Relational, Decolonizing Representation?

It is telling that the figuration of the indigenous peoples fighting "projects of death," as they call "resource" extraction or infrastructure projects is faceless. Here we can recall the Zapatista iconic baklava framed by Subcomandante Marcos' declaration: "We are all behind the mask." Facelessness as a form a-representativity that is at work in current indigenous struggles makes it evident that the disappeared indigenous body is only made visible through capitalist colonialist relationships. We must take into account that while colonizing projects are not new, they remain under way in one form or another under the varnish of inclusion and celebration of difference, masking governments' and corporations' attempts to take over their territories and to transform them into profitable powers, entrepreneurs' efforts to appropriate the techniques and materials to dress, their cooking ingredients; these new developments are bringing indigenous groups into direct confrontation with a wider range of Western power blocs. The problem is that these blocs either see their projects as being in the service of the greater good for all of humanity, or as helping towards the emancipation of oppressed communities by "underdevelopment." This is the reason why indigenous knowledges, cultures and languages remain sites of anti-capitalist struggle, although culturally-specific, bound to territory and thus unable to draw bridges amongst struggles elsewhere or amongst different political agents. For instance the inhabitants of Cherán, Michoacán, dismantled State political institutions complicit with deforestation of their territories and were therefore failing to include all subjects in political matters. In Cherán, a new precarious politicized subject emerged but that remains to be perceived as *other*, as non-modern, foreign and difficult to represent. This difficulty in representation is as bound to the habit of coloniality as is to the current fascist mandate for "pure" (self) representation that leaves no room for incorporating difference or reflexivity.

PUJOL
Cocina mexicana de autor

Menu from Pujol the restaurant in Mexico City "Inhabitants from San Juan Teltigas, Oaxaca, gather grasshoppers in corn and alfalfa plantation".

A recent version of habit of coloniality, has posited design and arts as the solution to provide new perceptions and affects, to reinvent life and the means to defend autonomous zones and protect the environment. Under this frame, cultural transformation is thought to infuse and direct new political organization and to bridge the gap between grassroots action and the politician's policy room, where "creative ecologies of collective resistance [can create] new combinations of images and stories, music and participation, solidarities and sacrifices… [enabling] a 'Great Transition.'"[32] The problem is that representation remains bound to culture, as opposed to politics, falling under the danger of fascist representation by essentializing culture(s). Moreover, if the West's concept of culture remains the only legitimate form of emancipatory politics, easily universalized and not really 'owned' by anyone, as Linda Tuhiwai has argued, it remains a form through which West keeps on reaffirming itself as the center of all legitimate knowledge and form of action,[33] prey to the danger of becoming a new imposition of Western authority over all aspects of indigenous struggles.

In the face of an urgent need to neutralize the extractive model, block accumulation by dispossession, end environmental degradation and the destruction of human beings,[34] it is clear that we liberals have dwelled on the Modern double bind that Rulfo navigated melancholically and hopefully for too long and with dire consequences. What is at stake is our relation to the earth and to understand modernity's way of worlding the world as the annihilation of worlds.[35] Non-fascist aesthetic-political representation aware of the habit of coloniality would encompass the counter-knowledges produced in struggles which are also different epistemologies and which may lead to the dissolution of representation in favor of relational relationships. Following Rolando Vazquez, relationality is a mode of realization that recalls and foregrounds, that sustains and gives, that is before the before. It is a coming into presence grounded in precedence, as a receptive presence, as opposed to representation (which always bears a blind spot). Non-colonial representation would imply to acknowledge the other of modernity, which is colonization, and to challenge the tenets of modernity itself.[36] That is the aesthetic, political and intellectual task at hand.

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[8] There are two versions of the movie, one edited by Godard and signed by the Dziga Vertov Group and another one by Pennebaker, titled respectively: *One A.M (One American Movie)* and *One P.M (One Parallel Movie or One Pennebaker Movie)* (1968)

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[14] Two recent examples in Colombia are Gran Colombia Gold against the Colombian government for the Marmato project and South African miner, Anglo Gold Ashanti struggling to retain access to 33 million ounces of gold at their La Colosa site. See: Taylor, L. (10 de abril de 2017). Canada's Gran Colombia Gold files $700 million lawsuit against Colombia over Marmato Project, Financial Post online. Página web: http://business.financialpost.com/news/mining/canadas-gran-colombia-gold-files-700-million-lawsuit-against-colombia-over-marmato-project

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[36] Ibid.