AN AESTHETICS OF LIBERATION: GONZALO ARANGO'S NEGLECTED THOUGHT AND CULTIVATING *UN SENTIDO DE VIVIR*

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I focus on the theme of liberation explored through the work of 20th century Colombian poet-philosopher, Gonzalo Arango (1931-1976). Gonzalo Arango founded the countercultural movement, *Nadaísmo*, in 1958 as a response to what he saw as an increasingly oppressive political, ethical, religious, and social climate. I focus on key texts within Arango's oeuvre to demonstrate his aesthetic approach to liberation, while distinguishing between two distinct periods in his work: his *Nadaísmo* period (roughly from 1958-1968) and his post-*Nadaísmo* period (from 1970-1976). Arango's *Nadaísmo* philosophy, grounded in rebellion and liberation, was meant to usher in a cultural renewal by a people (ideally) rebelling against the dogmas of social institutions and contributing to a creative reconstruction of these institutions that reflect the people's own needs and desires for self- and historical development. However, his post-*Nadaísmo* writings reveal a sharp turn toward a theological framework for his liberation philosophy. As I will show, his later period retains the robust commitment to aesthetic living and liberation operating in his early work.

In presenting Arango's vital, yet neglected liberation philosophy, I also critically intervene in the intellectual history of the philosophy of liberation movement. The historiographical work of Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg traces the movement's geographical and temporal origins to Argentina in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Subsequent histories and discussions of the movement reproduce Cerutti-Guldberg's historical work. Thus, today the philosophy of liberation movement is considered synonymous with its Argentinian variant. Yet, this dominant narrative represents a singular and incomplete view of the movement. Contrary to

this history, Gonzalo Arango was already producing an explicit discourse on liberation in late 1950s Colombia, outside the time and place that had been fixed by the currently accepted history. For this reason, I contend that the accepted history of the movement in Latin America must be problematized in a way that questions its limited scope and invites further investigation into liberation discourses taking place outside Argentina.

Arango's response to the exigency of human liberation and the fact of oppression reveals a philosophy rooted in embodied living and affective perception. I argue that this approach represents an unacknowledged current within the philosophy of liberation movement, what I have termed the aesthetic current. As I show, both periods in Arango's career, though divergent, each represent an aesthetics of liberation that withstands the robust critiques to which notable figures of the philosophy of liberation movement have fallen. To that end, I focus on Ofelia Schutte's critical engagement with the Argentine movement, which highlights the limitations and failings of early contributors to the movement, such as Enrique Dussel. Using Schutte's critical work, I draw out five criteria for a genuine philosophy of liberation in order to evaluate Arango's own contribution. It is through Ofelia Schutte's critical treatment of liberation philosophy that I re-situate Gonzalo Arango as an important philosopher of liberation and point to the need for a more inclusive revision of its history.

In focusing on the writings of Gonzalo Arango, my dissertation will be the first in the English-speaking world to reconstruct the philosophical ideas in this author's understudied, but enduringly relevant work. Through an examination of his philosophical development, I will show the contributions and lessons of his work that will enrich current discourses on human liberation and oppression.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Project

Writing a dissertation that seeks to present the complexity of Gonzalo Arango's work, in all its ambiguity, inconsistencies, and evolutions, has been a challenge as much as a labor of love. More importantly, it is an invitation into the work of a versatile and understudied thinker who mixed genres (often combining prose and poetry), challenged accepted literary etiquette and philosophical convention, and understood the value of breaking down the walls between author and work, personal and professional, distance and intimacy. He refused to remain the "rational" and "objective" author and instead saturated the pages of his writings with histrionic expressions, unapologetic emotion, raw confessions, personal anecdotes, and humor that ranged from dark to hopeful, and from playful to derisive. The sense and meaning I draw out of Arango's work, the careful reconstruction of his philosophies (early and late Arango) into a more systematic representation, is one view and one approach with which to shine a light on his lifelong commitment to both write the world he sees and to write the world one can hope for. I hope this project is a beginning and that others will arrive at his work with their own light and to illuminate all that this dissertation could not.

The central aim of my project is one of recovery, which for the purposes of my dissertation, also contains elements of (a) a critical intervention in history to call attention to narratives that neglect and/or exclude through too narrow a conception of a given movement, movements whose history (like their future) should remain open and in the process of

revision/reinvention; (b) connectivity, in that I highlight the way in which Arango's work speaks to conversations (past and present) in the philosophy of liberation, theopoetics, subversive or critical pedagogies, liberation theology, and aesthetics; (c) situatedness, in that I try to call attention to the broader context in which I situate Arango's work, among works of Latin American philosophy which, although separated by distinct traditions and the contemporary lenses through which we engage these works, nevertheless form a greater whole: a situation of concern for the humanization and liberation of a people, which signifies a much larger and unifying context for these seemingly disparate projects—thus one's contemporary philosophic project oriented by liberation or humanization need not confine its engagement to the philosophy of liberation tradition, or its intellectual resources to liberation theology, for example, but instead must look to a much larger breadth of figures and geographies in Latin American philosophy; (d) the project of recovery looks to the silences and gaps within philosophy to recover those projects beyond the margins of established histories and crystallizing canons to ensure that philosophy always remains open and inclusive, in movement and world-traveling.

Thus, my project, like the projects of recovery I mention in this dissertation and all those that were not, but are at this moment gestating and germinating across disciplines, are about establishing and re-establishing connections: an author's and a work's rootedness in larger and fertile fields of thought, or *pensamiento*, history and culture. We can understand connections as simply starting new conversations and reigniting old ones in those newly opened spaces the recovery makes possible. Of these kinds of projects of recovery, Gregory Pappas writes that "'rubbing' these philosophies against each other is of great value to philosophy."[1] In this spirit, I have tried to rub several different philosophies against that of Arango's in order to emphasize the

[1] Gregory Pappas, "Introduction," *Pragmatism in the Americas*, 1st edition, ed. Gregory Fernando Pappas (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 9.

deeper parallels, contrasts, and important challenges to his work. Similarly, I have also highlighted the important challenges Arango's work poses to more contemporary projects, like that of Alejandro Vallega's, whose search for the aesthetic or pre-reflective in liberation and decolonial philosophies has led him to conclude that this is a neglected dimension in liberationist thought.[2]

The Poet-Philosopher: Work and Style

Gonzalo Arango was born in 1931 in Andes, Colombia in the province of Antioquia. He was the thirteenth son, out of fifteen, of Francisco Arango and Magdalena Arias. In 1950, Arango entered the Law School of the University of Antioquia, but left in his third year to pursue his passion as a writer. In a 1952 letter to his father, Arango states that "if I didn't follow my law studies, it was because I understood that it was a small platform on which to give my testimony as a man. My destiny was to be a man, and I chose writer."[3] In other words, Arango had decided that writing would provide him the best platform through which to give his testimony of the world. In the letter he confesses "what I say as a writer is a response to the brutal images the world has shown me...My voice is no more than this: *a plea so that love returns to the Earth*."[4] Arango's approach to this urgency for human freedom and to the process of liberation in a world of violence evolves through a somewhat revolving door of philosophical traditions. Arango was an avid reader of poetry, fiction, and philosophy. However, he never became an adherent of any particular tradition. Instead, Arango sampled and flirted with these philosophical traditions

[2] In chapter 3, I articulate a fuller discussion of Vallega's project and its relation to Arango's work.

[3] Gonzalo Arango, "Mi destino estaba en ser hombre y me elegí escritor," *Gonzaloarango.com*, https://www.gonzaloarango.com/ideas/don-paco-1.html.

[4] Ibid.

before eventually changing his style, terminology, or outright disavowing a particular political ideology, such as communism, or schools of thought, such as existentialism and romanticism. As such, it is more accurate to refer to these traditions as flavors within his writings rather than to refer to the author himself as a nihilist or an existentialist. Eduardo Escobar, a member of the *Nadaísmo* movement since its inception, also notes the chameleon-like quality of Gonzalo Arango. In Escobar's 1989 biography entitled *Gonzalo Arango*, he writes of the poet-philosopher who would "change his skin every year" and at the seemingly simplest of encounters, such as a conversation with a baker or after reading a particular verse, Arango would inexplicably "change direction and life."[5] It is not too far a reach to recognize that Arango's sampling of these traditions was his effort to find the most suitable framework for what amounted to more than a philosophy, but was rather a deeper commitment to life and humanity. His writing, his philosophy, was the platform he chose to express this commitment and communicate what he saw were the urgencies and concerns of his time; namely, the human complacency that amounted to a world of deadened spirits at a time when a commitment to life and freedom was needed.

Arango's tendency to change his skin and to change direction are reflected in his writings as well. He did not adopt a dispassionate style or remain at a personal distance from his work in order to preserve the distinction between author and text, subject and object, or personal and professional. Reading the first few lines of any of his writings instead reveal an author whose life and person bleed into each page. Arango held his own experiences and failings in full view of his readers. His use of drugs and alcohol, his eroticization of women, his musings on love and friendship, his anger and frustration at the government and education system, his ridicule of institutional religion, his enjoyment of music and dancing—these all became matters for philosophical reflection, and, what at times, seemed to be more confessional than analytical.

[5] Eduardo Escobar, *Gonzalo Arango* (Bogotá: Procultura, 1989), 5.

Because of this, one could almost construct his memoir based on the essays and articles he wrote and based on the intimacy and honesty with which he wrote.

Thus, his writings reveal the dynamic subjectivity of their author, his own struggle for meaning and value, and his willingness to explore, abandon, and revise his own intellectual and ideological commitments, even leaving the *Nadaísmo* movement in the 1970s. Almost as if to match his chameleon-like mutability, Arango's body of work includes poetry, plays, a novel, newspaper and magazine articles, essays, numerous manifestos (some as short as half a page), and prose. Often his essays, articles, and manifestos would combine lyrical and bombastic prose with equally exuberant and bellicose poetry. Writing monographs and treatises would have been ill-suited to Arango's preference for aphoristic expressions, unsystematic arguments, and short, dramatic reflections on the human condition and the socio-political climate in Colombia. Although freedom and liberation are unifying themes throughout the more than two decades of his work, he does not provide systematic definitions of the meaning of liberation. Instead, his discourse on liberation engages with its obstacles and the actions we can take in the lived context to bring about its realization. In other words, his philosophy focuses less on the definitions of concepts and more on action, or rather, the externalized expression of concepts such as creativity, spiritual reconstruction, and liberation. The question for Arango is not "How do we define liberation?" but rather "What are the obstructions to human liberation?" and "What action is needed to initiate that process?" Arango focuses on both the need to be liberated *from* structures of oppression and the need to liberate oneself *toward* an end. More specifically, he does not understand liberation as a stage or as an objective achieved in a single event. The process of liberating oneself from a situation of oppression and toward more creative and self-

determined forms of living is an ongoing process of self-realization and action-oriented commitment.

In the first manifesto he wrote for the *Nadaísmo* movement in 1958, Arango stated that contrary to the "abstractions and chimeras of man's Being" *qua* the idealisms of religion and philosophy, our "destiny is terrestrial and temporal. It is realized on concrete planes."[6] Arango's work conceives of the human being as a thoroughly and inextricably historical creature, whose destiny is not realized in afterlife beyond this world, but rather a destiny that finds its beginning and end on this earth. Physical environments, both natural and built, and elements, such as fire and air, occupy a consistent and important place in Arango's work and further demonstrate the author's reverence for an earthly existence.[7] His numerous assertions about the human connection to the earth and soil are symptomatic of an overall rejection of what he saw as the harmful illusions and misguided speculations of religion and philosophy. Body-centered and aesthetic pleasures such as food, alcohol, music, and sex also occupy an important philosophical position in his body of work, though in later writings his more erotic sense of sex is replaced with his understanding of sex as the physical and emotional expression of love. Arango's philosophy is motivated by a necessity to reaffirm life in all its pleasurable and beautiful aspects, while also refusing to minimize or elide the tragic and violent aspects.

Arango developed an aesthetic approach to liberation that was more counter-philosophical than academic and philosophical. His work expresses a deliberate resistance to formulaic methods of argumentation, structured analyses, and logical conclusions in favor of a more embodied and informal writing. Arango was more concerned with eschewing what he saw

[6] Gonzalo Arango, *Primer Manifiesto Nadaísta y Otros Textos* (México: Vanilla Planifolia, 2013), 20-21.

[7] While natural and built environments do occupy an important place throughout his work, I will show in chapters 4 and 5 how his view of built environments changes in his later period.

as restrictive conventions and revaluing those aspects of the experience traditionally stigmatized. This is exemplified by his assertion that “the irrational” considered garbage by “bourgeois puritanism” is in fact what the “Nadaístas are going to reclaim and consecrate...as sites of unexplored richness.”[8] The irrational, for Arango, is simply the biological and psychological material that feeds into and co-determines our rational faculty and our conscious choices. This is the material Arango saw as having been ignored and rendered unimportant by the advent of modern rationalism. Against this privileging of rationality, Arango opted for a style of expression that would deliberately confuse and madden. For example, the title of Arango’s 1966 essay “What is and is not Nadaísmo,” ostensibly promises to deliver clarity on the meaning and delineations of the movement. Instead, Arango proceeds with a series of humorous and insightfully, nonsensical definitions: “Nadaísmo is an astronaut throwing himself from the tenth floor as a protest against the dogma of earth’s gravitation,” “Nadaísmo is the communism of...free love,” “Nadaísmo is like God, because it exists, and no one knows what it is,” “Nadaísmo is to put on the shirt of being alive,” “Nadaísmo *is* the metaphysic of *I smoke therefore I exist* of boredom,” and “For a nadaísta love is not material, nor spiritual. It is both of those things, but in the bed.”[9] These irreverent quasi-definitions demonstrate Arango’s reaction to a philosophical tradition of formal definitions and a call from his contemporaries to explain *Nadaísmo* (both of which involve imposing order and limitations), as well as his reaction to the supposed purity of religion (hypocrisy), and the importance of Reason, which he frequently mocks in his writings.[10]

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[8] Arango, *Primer Manifiesto*, 27.

[9] Gonzalo Arango, “Lo que es y no es el Nadaísmo,” in *De la Nada al Nadaísmo*, Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1966, 78-80.

[10] Immanuel Kant is a favorite target of Arango’s, whom he calls a “rationalist lout” with his “filthy ‘pure reason.’” See “Nadaología del nadaísmo” in *De la Nada al Nadaísmo*, Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1966.

For another example of Arango's playful attitude toward scholarly norms, we can look to his 1966 essay, "The Aesthetic Rebellion." In this piece, Arango offers an explanation of the movement's aesthetic: "You will never find more than yourself and your eternal disenchantment, but be drunk, be amazed, be crazy about being alive, and when death arrives, give it a kick in the rear: that kick is our aesthetic."[11] Here, Arango is purposefully subversive of expectations, absurd, and he frequently employs a lyrical combination of dark humor and brash hope in his writing. He was deeply cautious in how he presented his philosophy precisely because of his commitment to human freedom and potential. For Arango, any attempts to form a system of thought already risks falling into the same dogmatic and oppressive trap that he critiqued in others. He attempted to guard his philosophy against becoming a collection of moral or social prescriptions that impose either an order on others or encourage followers instead of free and self-determining spirits.

Whether writing an article for a newspaper or magazine, a book, or an essay, Arango's style throughout all of these formats is decidedly and rebelliously intimate and informal. He discusses social liberation as easily as he does his nights of drinking and carousing, often in the same essay. He discusses the merits of cultivating a creative and independent spirit as easily as he mocks the business of academia and the Church. He discusses the joy of freedom and friendship as easily as he does the pain of love, friendship, and his own shortcomings. Arango employs humor, at times dark and crude, to get his philosophical points across. He does not hide his emotions, but rather displays his emotions in each piece of writing: anger, joy, regret, anguish, hope, sadness, and elation. Arango enjoyed throwing readers into confusion in an effort to get them to pay attention. He enjoyed playing with readers' expectations and resisting

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[11] Gonzalo Arango, "La rebelión estética," in *De la Nada al Nadaísmo*, 26.

conceptual clarity while at the same time producing texts that are philosophically, socially, and politically insightful. He presents himself exactly as he is, as most of us are: noble and flawed; correct and mistaken; proud and humble; strong and vulnerable. In short, reading Arango's work is awkward, frightening, beautiful, exciting, and illuminating. His work is a critique of a certain brand of philosophical (and literary) writing that encourages, even imposes, strict standards of expression that Arango believed inhibited creativity and the development of one's own unique voice.

Arango's work is diverse and broad in its subject matter and thus can contribute to the conversations taking place in Latin American philosophy, social and political philosophy, existentialism, aesthetics, theopoetics, and philosophy of liberation. In a field such as philosophy, particularly anglo-Western traditions that are historically dominated by abstraction, conceptually heavy expositions, and the fetishization of theory over embodied thought and action—in short, with a philosophical inheritance of prioritizing mind, theory, rationality, and the systemization and rigidity of meaning—Arango's approach prioritizes the body and the sensual, lived experience, creative disorder, absurdity, and a reverent sense of the irrational. For Arango, meaning should not be fixed or pre-given for the purposes of mass consumption. Meaning-making is constitutive of what it means to be human and it is an individual responsibility in the same way one's life is an individual responsibility that does not isolate the individual from a larger social and world context.

Arango's deliberately unsystematic, ambiguous, and histrionic style, and his tendency toward short and unfocused pieces, constitutes both the pleasures and challenges of analyzing his writings. The evolution of his thought underwent significant changes throughout his career as he responds to the changes taking place within Colombia and outside its borders. His work reveals a

constant interplay between the particularity of his circumstances and the more generalizable existential issues to which he speaks. It will be the work of this dissertation to present a more coherent picture of Arango's philosophical career and to provide readers with a critical and exegetical account of his liberation philosophy.

CHAPTER II

PHILOSOPHY OF LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Objections to the Philosophy of Liberation History

The historical narrative of the philosophy of liberation (PoL) movement began with Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg's historiographical work in the 1980s. His monograph on the philosophy of Latin American liberation, *Filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana*, was published in 1983. In 1988-89, he published "Actual Situations and Perspectives of Latin American Philosophy for Liberation," which serves as a brief, but updated introduction to the movement's intellectual currents and suggestions for the movement's future. In both publications, Cerutti-Guldberg makes three important claims about the PoL movement. The first claim (1) he makes is temporal: that the PoL movement emerged in the early 1970s. The second claim (2) is geographical: that the movement originated in Argentina. Cerutti-Guldberg explicitly states that the "Latin American philosophy of liberation arose in Argentina in the 1970s."[12] In the third claim (3a), he identifies four currents within the movement: the ontologicist, the analectic, the historicist, and the problematizing. This latter terminology for the currents is taken from his 1988-89 publication and differs from the concepts he employs in his 1983 book. In the *Filosofía*, Cerutti-Guldberg refers to the ontologicist and analectical currents as "the dogmatism of concrete 'ambiguity'" and the "populism of abstract ambiguity," respectively.[13]

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[12] Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, "Actual Situation and Perspectives of Latin American Philosophy for Liberation," *The Philosophical Forum* XX, no. 1-2 (1988-89): 43.

[13] Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, *Filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983), 203.

More recently, in 2004, Carlos Beorlegui published *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano*. Although his work is a broader account of the history of Latin American philosophical thought, he devotes considerable attention to the precursors, origins, and subsequent outgrowths of the PoL movement. Beorlegui accepts the geographical and temporal claims laid out in Cerutti-Guldberg's above publications, while also accepting the four-current model albeit with a slight modification to that third claim. Beorlegui adds two additional currents (3b) to the movement: Zubirian realism or what he also calls metaphysical realism, represented by Ignacio Ellacuría and the economicist current represented by Franz Hinkelammert.[14]

In the most recent account of the philosophy of liberation movement, Eduardo Mendieta has written an entry for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* aptly titled "Philosophy of Liberation" (2016). Mendieta provides a history of the debates that influenced and grounded the movement. For example, the Valladolid debate between Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas in the 16th century to regional emancipation movements and independence figures of the 19th century such as Simón Bolivar and Servando Teresa de Mier. Mendieta also explains the formative debate over whether there is a Latin American philosophy launched between Leopoldo Zea and Augusto Salazar Bondy in the 1960s, and which is largely credited as having shaped the subsequent discourses that took place in the PoL movement. The majority of the article is devoted to what Mendieta refers to as the "strict" and "broad" conceptions of the PoL movement. Mendieta notes that "some critics and historiographers of the philosophy of liberation make reference to a 'strict' and a 'broad' conception of the philosophy of liberation, in order to refer to the immediate context of its earliest articulations, and to its later general dissemination and

[14] Carlos Beorlegui, *Historia del pensamiento filosófico latinoamericano: una búsqueda incesante de la identidad*, 3rd ed. (Spain: Publicaciones de la Universidad de Deusto, 2010), 694.

development."[15] Thus, the strict conception refers to the emergence of the movement in 1960s Argentina, while the broad conception refers to the later developments and dissemination of the philosophy of liberation in the beginning to mid-1970s to regions outside Argentina. However, Mendieta assumes the aforementioned three claims of Cerutti-Guldberg and Beorlegui, but in so doing, he also assumes the problems inherent in their accounts while also presenting readers with a curated view of the movement that fails to account for its more heterogeneous character. For this reason, in addressing the problems of the historical narrative of the movement, I will focus on Mendieta's recent publication and expand on additional issues I find with Mendieta's account.

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, my work on the philosophy of Gonzalo Arango serves as a challenge to the dominant history of the PoL movement. Gonzalo Arango was already producing an explicit discourse on liberation in the late 1950s, which challenges claim 1 of the dominant narrative. Arango produces this discourse from the particularity of the Colombian context, which challenges the second geographical claim of the narrative. To date, and as claims 3a and 3b show, there are six accepted and recognized intellectual currents in the movement However, Arango's own unique approach to liberation does not fit into and cannot be subsumed under any of these currents. Therefore, I also argue that a new seventh current of the movement must be added, the aesthetic current, represented by Gonzalo Arango's liberation philosophy. One of the problems with reproducing dominant narratives is that it each reproduction fails to critically re-examine the foundations of that narrative, and so, neglects the possibility of liberation discourses taking place outside of the temporal and geographical boundaries set by the strict conception of the movement. Gonzalo Arango's work demonstrates that, contrary to the

[15] Eduardo Mendieta, "Philosophy of Liberation," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (December 2016): 7, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/liberation/. However, citing Cerutti-Guldberg, Ofelia Schutte has the second meeting of the Congress listed as taking place in 1972, c.f. "Origins and Tendencies of the Philosophy of Liberation in Latin American Thought: A Critique of Dussel's Ethics," *The Philosophical Forum* 22, no. 3 (1991): 1.

movement's accepted history, liberation discourses were taking place in other regions in Latin America both contemporary to the Argentine variant of the movement, and importantly, prior to the movement's initial formulation.

Such a challenge to the history also opens up a space for renewed research into and excavation of the liberation philosophies that have been left out of the movement's "origin story." In fact, such research would reveal multiple origin stories and a broader understanding of the multiple variations of the movement emerging in different regions, inside academia and outside the academic context (as is the case with Gonzalo Arango), as well as liberation discourses emerging from various fields and platforms beyond monographs and journal articles, such as in essays, magazines, newspapers, and works of fiction. The topic of liberation, emancipation, and the antagonisms between the individual and the social and between the people and the government, are themes being treated in both works of non-fiction and more creative treatments such as can be found in fiction and poetry. Therefore, any discourse or theory taking up these themes as subjects of its discourse has multiple and rich resources to look to and which can inform its own analysis of these issues.

There are additional reasons for my focus on Mendieta's article. His treatment of the PoL movement reveals a particular focus and conception of it as a critique of European influence and Euro-American values and standards. He writes that "it [PoL] defines itself as a critique of Eurocentrism and the hegemony of European philosophy;"[16] that one of its aim is to critique and challenge basic assumptions and themes of "Euro-American philosophy;"[17] and "that an indisputable point of departure for all philosophers of liberation is the consciousness of the

[16] Ibid. 1.

[17] Ibid. 2.

economic, social, political and cultural dependence of Latin America on Europe and the United States,"[18] to demonstrate a few examples from his article. A preliminary point I will make is that there is significant literature on the use of American or America as problematic when it assumes North America or the United States as the only referents rather than being inclusive of Central and South America. Given other claims made in the article and given some of the figures of the PoL movement Mendieta cites, it stands to reason that he means Euro-Anglo American or Euro-North American philosophy that is challenged by some of the movement's exponents. However, understanding Mendieta's "American" claim in its broadest and most geographically inclusive sense actually offers a more accurate and complete conception of the movement geographical borders as I will demonstrate in subsequent sections of this chapter. Mendieta's presentation of the movement as defined by, having as its aim, and its indisputable point of departure being a critique of Europe, European philosophy, and Euro-North American philosophy characterizes a portion, not the whole, of the movement's scholarship and intellectual output. Furthermore, the narrative he develops in the article occludes and neglects the work of liberationist figures that do not fit into that criterion.

In this chapter, I will present five works of liberation philosophy that advance critiques of American philosophy, understood to include North, Central, and South, as well as critiques of liberation philosophies specifically, philosophy in general. The works Luis Villoro, Jorge Portilla, Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, Ofelia Schutte, and Gonzalo Arango challenge the narrative Mendieta develops in his account of the PoL movement. Particularly in the work of Villoro, Cerutti-Guldberg, Schutte, and Arango, the objects of critique are not *only* Europe and North America, but they rather take as their objects of critique any form or mechanism of oppression and domination. In presenting the work of Gonzalo Arango, I will further challenge this narrative

[18] Ibid. 9.

while also using his work as a broader objection to the PoL's dominant history, particularly claims 1-3b as outlined above. Lastly, Mendieta provides a passing mention of Ofelia Schutte's work on liberation philosophy, which he cites as "a critical confrontation with some key theses of liberation philosophy."[19] Schutte does provide a critical examination of the work of key figures in the movement, but her book *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* also advances important theses on what constitutes a genuine philosophy of liberation. From *Cultural Identity*, I draw out robust criteria and evaluative model for a philosophy of liberation that has yet to be utilized as a measure for such philosophies. It is these criteria that I will use to evaluate the liberation philosophy of Gonzalo Arango in chapter six, where I critically analyze his aesthetic approach to liberation.

Luis Villoro

Luis Villoro is not included or mentioned in Mendieta's article. However, Villoro was also a member of *El Grupo Hiperión* (the Hyperion Group) along with Leopoldo Zea in the late 1950s and the 1960s. In an early article by Villoro entitled "The Genesis and Project of Existentialism in Mexico" (1949), there are two important takeaways to note. The first is the reason he gives for the acceptance and utilization of existentialism in Mexico (and by the Hyperion Group itself) in the mid-20th century. Villoro finds that there is a desired change in inquiry: a transition from describing reality itself to revealing being itself, the ontic features that make a psychology and historical changes possible, and most importantly, provide the foundations for transformation at an individual and social level.[20] For Villoro, the suitability of

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[19] Ibid. 9.

[20] Luis Villoro, "Genesis y Proyecto del Existencialismo en México," *Filosofía y letras; revista de la Facultad de Filosofía y letras* 8, no. 36 (1949): 241-42.

existential doctrines can be found in their centering "the being of man in his setting himself free."[21] Therefore, existentialism is understood at that moment as providing the best framework for not only human freedom but also in providing the individual with a framework by which one chooses to free herself. The second instructive element of Villoro's paper is his attitude toward the use and acceptance of foreign philosophies, for example, European philosophy. Villoro remarks that "the acceptance or rejection, the transformation or application of a foreign doctrine, is always conditioned by an attitude that takes the thinker to the reality in which one lives."[22] In other words, choice and power are not lost or given away through the acceptance or use of European philosophy. Nor does a betrayal of one's own position or circumstances occur because of the acceptance or utilization of foreign philosophies. If one finds meaning or an applicability in a philosophy it is because that person, *lo Mexicanx* in the specific context of his article, has already made some choice (in aim or desire) given the particularity of his or her reality. One's own positionality before a situation conditions whether and to what degree a foreign doctrine is accepted.[23] Villoro gives the example of José Gaos's disciples, of which Villoro is one, for whom historicism was replaced by existentialism. "The fact that this new change appears in the acceptance and assimilation of the foreign doctrines will imply...a fundamental change in the attitude toward one's reality."[24] It is the foreign doctrine that is made subordinate to one's specific regional and cultural situation, rather than that reality being subordinated to, and made to fit into, the foreign doctrines. The foreign philosophy is assimilated into different circumstances

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[21] Ibid. 241.

[22] Ibid. 234.

[23] Ibid. 234.

[24] Ibid. 240.

and transformed in a way that it can speak to those circumstances and the people in them. Put in another way, the question is not “How can one’s reality be made to fit the doctrine?”, but rather “How can the doctrine be made suitable or helpful for one’s reality?” Villoro is not opposed to foreign philosophies and does not grant them a special power over the people. Instead, Villoro argues that *lo Mexicanx* retains his or her power before the foreign philosophies and the acceptance or choosing of a particular philosophy, such as French or German existentialism, is conditioned by the concrete circumstances of *lo Mexicanx*. Additionally, the individual imposes her own will on the philosophy, changing it as needed so that it speaks to the empirical realities of one’s own situation and the social, cultural, and political realities a people are situated in.

In 1978, Luis Villoro delivers a paper entitled “Philosophy and Domination” at the National College in Mexico City. In the essay, Villoro reflects on and analyzes the dual and contradictory purposes philosophy has served, as both a justifier of oppressive power and as an activity disruptive of oppressive power: as both “a thought of dominion and a thought of liberation.”[25] For Villoro, the proper aim of philosophy should be liberation and philosophical activity should be liberating. Philosophical activity must lead to a “reform of understanding,” which he briefly sketches out in three interrelated stages: a reform of concepts, a reform of beliefs, and a reform of understanding. The last stage, a reform of understanding, “frees the mind of its subordination to imposed beliefs and it puts it in an openness to accept the beliefs it can see for itself.”[26] This reformative process is a continuous activity with the expectation that one continues to ensure he or she is basing her beliefs on increasingly firmer and renewing ground.[27]

[25] Luis Villoro, “Filosofía y dominación,” in *El concepto de ideología y otros ensayos* (México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985): 136.

[26] Ibid. 139-40.

[27] Ibid. 145.

Additionally, one's understanding is not "reformed" and then inoculated from the risks of groundless opinion, institutional conformity, externally imposed beliefs and values, and so on. Instead, the reformative process must remain an ongoing activity in which one examines and reexamines her concepts and beliefs, in a process of continually renewing both one's beliefs and one's justifications for these beliefs. In this way, one ensures his or her own conscious acceptance or rejection of these beliefs over and against a passive and uncritical acceptance. Therefore, an individual can free his mind from the dominant logics of the society in which he finds himself while also reflecting on and evaluating the ethical merit and truth value of such externally imposed beliefs.

Villoro's conception of a philosophy of liberation is not merely a freedom from, but also a freedom towards. One is *freed from* a situation of oppression in order to move *towards* a new life or what he refers to as *la vida buena* (the good life). This "good life is not realized by following the conventions repeated day by day that maintain the unity of society and permit the continuity of order."[28] In other words, the good life cannot be realized while one maintains or remains committed to reproducing the habits and conventions of the old social order. This new, good life requires first a change in attitude toward one's society and toward one's position within that society. Hence, a break or rupture must occur between the individual and the society. One must come to the realization that the conventions and beliefs—a routinized and passive way of living and being—of the society are in some way inadequate (e.g. in terms of justness) and necessitate transformation. Villoro writes that "in whatever forms the new life presents itself, they agree on one point: it is always liberation and authenticity. This existing society of domination does not attain that life: to get access to it, one must break with the conformism of

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[28] Ibid. 142.

ideologies or moral conventions."[29] Liberation from the established value and belief system of the dominating society at the same time signals a gradual movement toward a new and good life that is in some way more just or more consonant with justice than the old life. Villoro's conception of a philosophy of liberation then requires that (1) an internal liberation occur in which the individual examines and reforms her conceptual apparatus, her beliefs, and her understanding; (2) one breaks with the values and practices of the society she is in that maintain dominance and established order; and (3) one begins the move toward a new/good life based on a sustainable liberation and authenticity.

This reformation and liberation is not without its dimension of community. Villoro affirms that "the reform of understanding usually goes together with a project of life reform, and eventually, a reform of the community."[30] However, one of the most important ideas in the article and in much of Villoro's body of work is that liberation must never devolve into its antitheses as can often happen with movements and philosophies of liberation. Two examples of the antitheses he highlights are indoctrination and ideology. In both cases, one is no longer in charge of their own process of reasoning nor the productive process of critical reflection on self and world (or society). Instead, "the transmission of philosophy can only be the awakening of the free reason of another," while philosophy's "codification in a doctrine is the threat that weighs on all liberating thought" both personal and collective liberation.[31] In Villoro, one of the features of a philosophy of liberation is that it is an invitation, and it "consists of inviting a change of

[29] Ibid. 143.

[30] Ibid. 145.

[31] Ibid. 147.

attitude so that another can freely choose a new practice of life."[32] By contrast, there are those who would appropriate a doctrine of liberation in order to legitimate their agenda, policies, and practices. They assume the appearance and flavor of a liberating philosophy in order to solidify their place in a group and to garner the social and political power that might come from amassing loyal followers. This is not the transmission of a genuine philosophy of liberation, but rather the transmission of "a collection of beliefs so that the other attaches his or her life to them."[33] For Villoro, ideology conceals philosophical thought in the service of domination.[34] Ideology moves us away from the active processes of reflection, questioning, and reform within one's own reason, without which, philosophy can then be used as a justifier of power, domination, and subordination. Philosophy must retain its potential to disrupt dominating logics and its potential to facilitate necessary ruptures between the individual and a (social, political, or economic) situation of oppression.

In a particularly thorough and systematic article from 1999, "Regarding the Principle of Injustice: Exclusion," Villoro argues that any worthwhile ethical reflection must be grounded in one's personal knowledge of the world around her.[35] We do not live in ideal societies and undoubtedly there are regions that endure a disproportionate amount of violence, material disadvantage, economic disparities, political instability, and social conflict. Yet many ethicists and philosophical theorists who cast their eye toward fairer and more just societies take as their starting point the features of an ideal society, features of a just society, criteria or definition of

[32] Ibid. 148.

[33] Ibid. 148.

[34] Ibid. 151.

[35] Luis Villoro, "Sobre el principio de la injusticia: la exclusión," *Isegoría* 22 (2002): 104. doi:10.3989/isegoria.2000.i22.524.

justice, and so on. Villoro's main point in the article is that we must try an alternative approach. He recommends starting from the absence of justice, or more specifically, "from the perception of real injustice in order to project that which could ideally remedy it."[36] For Villoro, it is no less crucial and perhaps more productive to elucidate what injustice is, in its concrete forms, and then move to viable ways of remedying such injustices. This changes the starting point from an abstract conception of the ideal society that does not exist to engaging with the concrete and lived experiences of oppression. Accordingly, this different starting point would enable a more nuanced understanding of injustice as it appears in actual situations and affects "socially situated subjects" as opposed to the hypothetical subjects so often appearing in ideal theories of justice.[37] Gregory Pappas points to this fact in Villoro's work when he writes that the "core of [Villoro's] proposal is that…we must try out a 'negative' path, that is, to try to understand justice from its absence, from experiences of injustice."[38] Throughout his life's work, Villoro demonstrated a preoccupation with the concepts of domination and injustice, as well as ways of overcoming such oppression through liberating movements and practices of freedom. Villoro "is not trying to derive some universal conception of justice;" rather his "task is always about specific needs and specific differences in a particular historical context" and about the "resolution of a concrete injustice."[39] Pappas makes a further note of Villoro's admiration for the Zapatista movement, as well as the later revelation that Villoro was a member of the Zapatistas. In the Zapatista movement, Villoro learned that "the exercise of counterpower (resistance) should be based on a

[36] Ibid. 104.

[37] Ibid. 105.

[38] Gregory Pappas, "Zapatismo, Luis Villoro, and American Pragmatism on Democracy, Power, and Injustice," *The Pluralist* 12, no. 1 (2017): 90. doi:10.5406/pluralist.12.1.0085.

[39] Ibid. 95.

moral sensitivity and awareness of certain risks one incurs in the choice of one's means in the struggle for justice."[40] The weight and seriousness of risk and the responsibility of choosing one's means in the struggle are undoubtedly more felt and learned through an engagement with the empirical realities of injustice and struggles for liberation than through a theoretical treatment of ideal societies. Most importantly, Villoro sought to understand power, domination, and injustice in an effort to engage with the concrete possibilities of social reform and structural transformation.

One could infer from Villoro's articles then that a philosophy of liberation, whether personal and/or collective, consists of liberation *from* the actual forms injustice can take and *toward* a new and renewed sense of living. Regarding one's personal liberation, Villoro posits that a new idea of justice has its origins in the disruptive movement in which a person breaks with the (inadequate) social consensus.[41] He identifies four stages in the process of arriving at an "increasingly rational conception of justice," or similarly, one's liberation from injustice and oppressive conditions.[42] The first stage consists of an experience of injustice, principally, that of exclusion from social and/or political consensus. Exclusion, for example, can be experienced in the form of discrimination, marginalization in terms of social or material benefits, or the experience that one's interests are not adequately represented or considered in the sphere of politics and public policy. The second stage involves one reflecting on the form(s) of exclusion and recognizing it as a situation of injustice. In the third stage, the individual rejects the social community, no longer considering herself an agent of that community, and instead constitutes

[40] Ibid. 88.

[41] Villoro, "Sobre el principio," 111.

[42] Ibid. 111.

herself as a "new moral subject" and a "free agent."[43] In the final and fourth stage, the new moral agent then considers new ideas and principles of justice.[44] Again, we see that in Villoro's work there is not only a liberation *from*, but that there is a liberation *toward* something; namely, *la vida buena*, as an end to be arrived at through a more inclusive and organic process that has been informed by the specific circumstances of injustice it is in the process of superseding.

Jorge Portilla

Jorge Portilla was also a member of *El Grupo Hiperión* and in 1966 his seminal work *Fenomenología del relajo* (Phenomenology of Relajo) and several of his essays were posthumously published, all of which he had written between 1948 and 1962. In the *Fenomenología*, Portilla provides readers with a description of *relajo*, a phenomenon he points to in Mexican culture and which he sees as a problem for the attainment of personal and community values that facilitate the unity and development of a culture. The *relajiento* is the individual who is the agent of a *relajo* event and the person who turns away from proposed values, while also disrupting others' ability to commit those values. Portilla analyzes the relationship between freedom and *relajo*, as well as articulating a description of freedom itself and the relation between freedom and liberation. Portilla is not recognized as a liberation philosopher. However, I argue that one can apply Villoro's injustice-justice methodology, the inversion of starting point, to Portilla's work. As described above, Villoro advocated starting from an understanding of injustice and a look at concrete instances of injustice in order to formulate a conception of justice or *la vida buena*. That is, he believes if one is to theorize about justice, one must first start by looking at specific instances of its absence. A reading of Jorge Portilla's work invites the same

[43] Ibid. 111.

[44] Ibid. 111.

inversion, though applied to the concept of liberation. Portilla's *Fenomenología*, what can also be thought of as a phenomenology of nonliberation, takes as its starting point cultural examples, through the figures of the *relajiento* and *apretado*, of unfreedom and nonliberation (or the foreclosed possibility of liberation). The *Fenomenología* aims at a descriptive understanding of these two important figures and demarcates the lines between exercises of freedom and the futility of exercising a mere pseudofreedom. Thus, where Villoro writes that one must start "from the perception of real injustice in order to project that which could ideally remedy it,"[45] one could start from the perception of real nonliberation in order to understand the demands liberation and to project that which would remedy its absence. This is what Portilla offers us through his examination of the *relajo* and *apretado* individuals and it is from this phenomenology of nonliberation that I abstract his philosophy of liberation.

The *Relajiento*

It is important to first briefly explain a *relajo* phenomenon. As Portilla describes it, *relajo* is the unity of "three discernible moments" and this unity or phenomenon expresses a larger problem and deeper meaning that Portilla calls "the suspension of seriousness."[46] The three moments of *relajo*, to be understood as concurrent moments, consist of (1) the "displacement of attention;" (2) the *relajo* individual effecting a "lack of solidarity with the proposed value;" and (3) the outward expression that invites others to participate in the lack of solidarity.[47] The outward manifestation of *relajo* could be as minimal as a word, laugh, snark, or a gesticulation.

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[45] Ibid. 104.

[46] Carlos Alberto Sánchez, *The Suspension of Seriousness: On the Phenomenology of Jorge Portilla* (Albany: State University of New York, 2012), 128, 130.

[47] Ibid. 130.

To use the classroom as an example, we can imagine an instance in which a student starts what seems to be a humorous side conversation with another student while the teacher is giving a lecture. The laughter that is heard and the lively murmur of the conversation itself are the outward expressions of relajo. The displacement of attention occurs as the *relajo* individual moves her attention away from the value being proposed, such as learning or listening to the teacher, and toward "something completely alien to the circumstance itself."[48] The displacement of attention also occurs as now the teacher and the students take note of this conversation and whose attention is now displaced from the proposed value. The lack of solidarity occurs when the *relajiento* turns away from the proposed value in an act of negation. Importantly, Portilla adds that this is not "a direct negation of the *value*," but rather a negation of "the link that unites the subject to the value."[49] As such, the *relajo* is an act of a lack of solidarity with the value and with the community trying to realize it.

What is already hinted at here and which will become clearer are the prominent positions given to value and community in Portilla's phenomenology of nonliberation. A *relajo* event is the frustration and degradation of a value commitment and its affirmation within a community. For example, justice, punctuality, and truth are values to which a person and a community can say "yes." As Portilla would put it, these values place a demand on us to use our freedom to affirm a devotion to those values, which is at the same time, an affirmation of self and community. A commitment to value requires seriousness since "seriousness *is* the intimate and deep commitment to which I make a pledge with myself in order to maintain a value within

[48] Ibid. 130.

[49] Ibid. 131. Emphasis in original.

existence."[50] We work toward the realization of those values in our person, our community, in our everyday lives. However, for Portilla, such values are closer to regulative ideals of which one can never claim full or complete possession. Instead, "all of our acts are ordered toward the realization of some value," and as such, "this pursuit of value allows us to constitute ourselves, but my being as a being in possession of some value(s) will always be just out of reach."[51] A *relajo* event obstructs the pursuit of value for others, yet the *relajiento* individual also obstructs her own path to value affirmation. As such, it is "a self-destructive movement" as will be elaborated subsequently.[52]

For Portilla, value is fundamentally connected to and constitutive of human life, freedom, and identity. Value creates the order through which human beings can make themselves and exercise a positive freedom toward achieving the ends which they set for themselves. One chooses, for example, the means through which to realize punctuality, professional success, a family, and environmental stewardship. This implies at once responsibility, commitment, futurity, and the active use of one's freedom for future ends. In contrast, the *relajiento* is an "individual without a future" who "refuses to take anything seriously...assumes no responsibility for anything," and is stuck in a negative pseudo-freedom that sabotages the freedom of others.[53] In a world steeped in values, the *relajiento* continuously turns away from value affirmation, instead saying "no," and fleeing from it in endless acts of negation. The *relajiento* refuses the opportunities for self-construction and only succeeds in failure and infecundity, in self-annihilating acts. The *relajiento* does not change or flourish internally nor does he or she make

[50] Ibid. 129. Emphasis added.

[51] Ibid. 141-42.

[52] Ibid. 147.

[53] Ibid. 147, 187-89.

any real changes in the world since that requires positive freedom. The *relajiento* does not even succeed in destroying value since it can never be permanently annihilated in world inextricably full of value. The *relajiento* merely obstructs the paths of action for others in their pursuit of value. Value is ever present for us to affirm and we can and do continuously find new means of realizing it. The negative freedom of the *relajiento*, the purely "freedom from," will fail to attain any genuine liberation since the "freedom to...the positive freedom that is indeed genuine liberation" involves "an opening up of the path for effective action in the realization of values."[54] The *relajiento* exists only in successive presences looking backward, reacting to the immediate past in which a value was presented. This backward flight erases the possibilities of the *relajiento's* future and negates the possibility of his or her progressive emergence in the future. Though the *relajiento* rejects value commitment and disrupts it realization for others, this is only temporary. Since the others are always open to value affirmation, they remain in a positive freedom that constantly pursues new means of realizing and generating the values that pull one into the future. Thus, their future continuously emerges on an ever expanding horizon of possibility.

The *Apretado*

The *apretado* is the "essential counterfigure" of the *relajiento* and at the other extreme of the human response to value. Whereas the *relajiento* seeks to negate and flee from value affirmation, the *apretado* assumes that his or her being is already in possession of particular values.[55] *Apretado* individuals conceive of "themselves as an impenetrable block of *value-filled*

[54] Ibid. 187.

[55] Ibid. 190.

being," for whom values "are real ingredients of their being" rather than the "unattainable transcendence that outlines the pathways" of our behavior.[56] For example, the professor who values his status as a professor and as one of the elite who is professionally successful claims those qualities as fixtures of his very being. They are unquestionable possessions for him and he is evidently among those privileged few who have acquired values to their fullest and most complete expression. Where ever he goes, whether at the grocery store or having dinner, he *is* always a professor and professionally successful. This is also how he distinguishes himself from and above those he perceives as less successful and as having less than himself.

In contrast to the *relajiento's* suspension of seriousness, Portilla considers the *apretado's* sense to be the spirit of seriousness. The "spirit of seriousness is that attitude of consciousness that refuses to take notice of the distance between 'being' and 'value.'"[57] Like the *relajiento*, the *apretado* represents an absence of freedom. Portilla characterizes the *apretado* as a slave in several respects and as someone who is ultimately and always a slave to others. The *apretado* is (a) a slave "of the dispossessed," of those he believes are of less value (possessions, status, intelligence, etc.) than himself.[58] The *apretado* needs these "others" in order to be different and separate from them and in order to assume his superiority in their presence.[59] The *apretado* needs to be a part of exclusive circles and establishments as a means of validating his desirability and acceptance as a value-filled being. He needs to exclude others from these memberships in order to maintain this quality of exclusivity and in order to distinguish himself from those others who are not possessors of value. The *apretado* is (b) a slave to the "possessors," to those whom he

[56] Ibid. 193.

[57] Ibid. 191.

[58] Ibid. 196.

[59] Ibid. 193.

always sees as possessing more or better than himself, and as such, he both fears and flatters them.[60] The *apretado* is (c) a slave to appearances: how he looks, dresses, and how others see him are what govern his life and behavior. *Apretado* individuals are (d) slaves to their own spirit of seriousness: they cling to their illusion of value-possession and always consider their image under threat of negation.[61] Lastly, the *apretado* is (e) a slave to property and "doomed to pursue it or to simulate it in order to be valuable."[62] It seems that the *apretado* lacks an authentic and positive identity. Her identity is based on illusion and a slavish dependency. The *apretado's* identity is merely a reflection of, and reliant upon, the perception of others rather than being self-constituted. Thus, the *apretado* individual's is only constituted and validated by others. For Portilla, *apretado* individuals are "the living denial of freedom."[63]

The *relajiento* and the *apretado* are not hypothetical entities or thought experiments. For Portilla, these figures represent what he observed within Mexican culture. He sought to shed light on the *relajiento* and *apretado* phenomena in his *Fenomenología*, demonstrating not only the substance and contours of unfreedom/nonliberation, but also highlighting the substance and meaning of freedom and liberation. The *relajiento* and the *apretado* are clear representations of an absence of freedom and the preclusion of the possibility of liberation. Portilla is clear in positing that genuine liberation is based on a positive freedom, while the *relajiento* and the *apretado* only succeed in producing a negative, pseudo, and sterile freedom. From Portilla's phenomenology of nonliberation, one can construct a philosophy of liberation. Portilla's conception of liberation seems to be the removal of obstacles, both objects internal to individuals

[60] Ibid. 196.

[61] Ibid. 196.

[62] Ibid. 196.

[63] Ibid. 196.

(attitudes, prejudices, for example) and external obstacles in the world (e.g. political repression, underfunded education system, economic inequities). He points to a liberation that is "the total elimination of the societal and natural barriers that prevent the full realization of all the virtualities of the person and of the group."[64] In other words, it is a liberation *from* internal and external obstacles and *toward* the increasing humanization of a person and group such that they are able to realize the full extent of their value-affirming potential.

Freedom, for Portilla, is an ever-present backdrop of our existence, but it can also be an end in itself. One purpose of liberation could be to increase our personal and political freedoms. A reconstruction of Portilla's philosophy readily finds criteria of liberation, the cornerstones of which are value and community. His philosophy of liberation would entail (1) exercising a positive freedom, a "freedom to;" (2) accepting responsibility for the commitment to values and bringing those values into existence; (3) not obstructing the pathways for others to realize value; (4) creating paths for others to realize value and exercise positive freedom; and (5) engaging with and participating in communities—that is, embracing an attitude of solidarity and fellowship rather than attitudes of isolation or exclusion. Claims 1 & 2 position a person to better remove and overcome the internal and external obstacles that might prevent the individual's pursuit of liberation and value. The first two criteria are also the foundations of self-construction, and thus, continuously propel the individual into a future open to the possibilities and means of progressive humanization. Claims 3, 4, and 5 focus on the value of social liberation and on each individual contributing to the health and humanization of one's communities. Criteria 3-5 focus on the use of positive freedom for the good of others, as well as building and strengthening community. These criteria form an interrelated unity that is directed toward human freedom and liberation. Portilla's understanding of liberation and the implicit values in these criteria, such as

[64] Ibid. 165.

justice, solidarity, and fellowship also point to attitudes and practices that harm a community and hinder the process of liberation. In fact, it is clear from Portilla's philosophy that liberation must be an ongoing process. The overcoming of counterproductive attitudes and prejudices, which is Portilla's sense of internal liberation, requires time and self-awareness. Human existence then can be understood as "a sequence of successive liberations," as a process rather than a single event.[65] The greater the absence of these five criteria, the more unfree a person is and the more distant he or she (or a community) is from the possibilities of liberation.

Up to this point I have presented two examples, the work of Luis Villoro and Jorge Portilla, which challenge the reliance of Mendieta's article on a conception of the philosophy of liberation movement that is a critique of European and North American cultural imperialism. Luis Villoro, when addressing the idea of foreign doctrines and foreign philosophies, situates the recipients of those doctrines in a powerful position rather than in a naïve or passive position. For Villoro, one chooses to appropriate the foreign philosophy precisely because he or she finds value in it regarding one's own specific culture, region, and society. Additionally, that person critically engages with her own situation, while also actively engaging with the foreign philosophy and changing it in ways that the philosophy can better speak to one's concrete circumstances. Importantly, Villoro warns against *any* philosophy or doctrine that encourages conformity or encourages the uncritical acceptance of its beliefs and claims. He warns against doctrines that prevent others from using their own independent thought, reflection, and reason.

In Jorge Portilla's work, we find a phenomenological study of two examples of unfree individuals. Portilla demonstrates that the *relajiento* and the *apretado* operate under a pseudofreedom that forecloses the possibility of being liberated and of realizing a future in which they achieve as fully as possible their human potential. Portilla's *Fenomenología* arises out of the

[65] Ibid. 167.

context of Mexican culture and though he endeavors to take a descriptive and objective viewpoint, it is clear that his focus on the *relajiento* and the *apretado* is at the very least a warning or critique that aims at elucidating the problems of rejecting value, solidarity, and community, as well as operating under illusions of freedom and superiority.

Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg and Ofelia Schutte

As Ofelia Schutte notes in *Cultural Identity*, Cerutti-Guldberg "opposes the paradigm that advocates a sharp rupture with...the European philosophical tradition" and instead advocates that Latin American political philosophy, in which he situates philosophy of liberation, "is a way to be united with this tradition."[66] Cerutti-Guldberg himself has critiqued some sectors of the movement, specifically the populist sectors. In *Filosofía de la liberación latinoamericana*, he writes of his early involvement in the movement, specifically in what he terms the critical sector of the movement: "we mounted ourselves almost aggressively against that populism that everywhere exuded the supposedly 'liberating' discourse."[67] In his 1988-89 article, Cerutti-Guldberg maintains that under the auspices of his problematizing current "the problem is neither intellectual originality or its frivolous search, but to take charge of the real urgencies generated by the Latin American socio-historical and political *praxis*...and in this step the entire world-philosophical tradition must be made available."[68] For Cerutti-Guldberg, a philosophy of liberation cannot start from or recover *un punto de puridad* (a point of purity), whether ontological, cultural, or intellectual, as such an end is groundless. All philosophies, including

[66] Ofelia Schutte, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 195.

[67] Cerutti-Guldberg, *Filosofía de la liberación*, 189.

[68] Cerutti-Guldberg, "Actual Situation and Perspectives," 54.

European, must be made available and mined as a resource toward the goal of liberation. The relevant and usable parts of such philosophies must be made to work in the service of Latin American liberation. For Cerutti-Guldberg "what matters is the 'process of liberation' since this is the subject that generates and criticizes its own formulation."[69] The implication here is that a PoL that takes, for example, *el pueblo* (the people) as its subject will lose its capacity to criticize its own theory of liberation. As he continues, the process of liberation should not be separated from the theory that formulates it; rather, the theory must engage this process as its subject.[70] Further, Cerutti-Guldberg maintains that philosophers and academics are not the privileged leaders or necessary intermediaries, but instead are parts contributing to the process of liberation.[71] The profession of philosophy itself will need to act against *any* "philosophical imperialism...even when these pretensions come with Latin American adjectives."[72] Cerutti-Guldberg's point here is that the source of domination is not only European or North American cultures, but similar to Villoro, one must realize that any philosophy regardless of it geographical or cultural origin can become imperialistic and authoritarian rather than liberating.

Ofelia Schutte takes up a methodology similar to the problematizing current, and to a degree, builds upon and expands some of the themes in Cerutti-Guldberg's work. Schutte's point of departure is liberation philosophies within Latin American thought and a critical engagement with them. Schutte aims her critique not at European or North American philosophy, but at Latin American theories of liberation. Among the ontologically oriented liberation thinkers, such as

[69] Ibid. 56.

[70] Ibid. 56.

[71] Ibid. 55-56.

[72] Ibid. 55.

those in the ontologicist current, Schutte notes the lack of empirically informed critiques.[73] The populist liberation sectors hold that modernity is the cause of oppression. Modernity has alienated the intellectuals from the plight of the people. Lastly, the populist sectors claim that modernity perpetrated the chasm between reason and faith. Schutte finds these claims "false" and "far from credible" precisely because they ignore "empirical claims and particular details."[74] The populist sectors advance a view of the issues and solutions that is disconnected from the empirical realities. Thus, it loses its power to genuinely reveal and respond to the oppressive situations it claims to address. The genuine advocate of reform, she writes, "has a democratic orientation and does not seek to impose his or her own personal beliefs" on others.[75] What is most important is to give one's attention to whether a liberation theory "will position itself on the side of absolutism or on that of critique."[76] In other words, that a theory alleges itself as liberationist does not guarantee that it is absent of or not vulnerable to authoritarianism, absolutist claims, and uncritical views. In short, a liberation theory is not necessarily liberating or empowering of the subjects or members of communities to which it claims to speak. For Schutte, empirically informed reasoning and empirically informed theories that take into account the realities and histories of specific social, political, economic, and religious issues are better guarded against the risk and consequences of the fallacy of composition. Schutte makes frequent mention of liberationist thought that confuses the part with the whole, such as confusing certain European or North American practices with the whole of anglo-Western culture. For Schutte, one cannot take for granted that a philosophy of liberation will be liberating or even that it is

[73] Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 197.

[74] Ibid. 198-99.

[75] Ibid. 199.

[76] Ibid. 199.

genuinely a philosophy *for* liberation. A close examination is needed in order to reveal the underlying ideologies, agendas, fallacies, and tactics utilized which determine the actual liberating merit of these philosophies. Schutte emphasizes that "when a theory begins to confuse the greater part of North America and European culture with imperialism, or the position of individuals living in these societies with an imperialistic ideology...such a misunderstanding causes concern...this in turn reminds us of a phenomenon such as fascism."[77]

In Schutte's work, as in Cerutti-Guldberg's, a prominent position is given to the activity of critique. We see in both philosophers that critique is not culturally or geographically exclusive. Instead, the critique is aimed at systems of domination, possible sources of injustice, and at specific issues that demand attention and remedy or reform. Schutte, Cerutti-Guldberg, and Villoro are concerned with forms of domination and injustice that emanate from any region and the specific economic, religious, political, philosophical, or social practices in Latin America, Europe, or North America that contribute to domination and injustice. For Schutte and Cerutti-Guldberg, the process of critique should also be aimed back at the theory and at philosophy itself. Critique must operate at an ever active and present level in one's philosophical theories, particularly those contributing to or claiming to be a philosophy of liberation. In addition to Schutte's evaluation of philosophies of liberation, what she provides in *Cultural Identity* are robust criteria for what constitutes a genuine philosophy of liberation. Although Schutte does not explicitly present her points as criteria for a liberation philosophy, one can nevertheless extract these points into criteria that, unfortunately, have not been significantly utilized as a guiding or evaluative measure for liberation philosophies. This aspect of her book has been understudied and underrecognized as an important contribution to the canon of

[77] Ibid. 200.

liberation philosophy, some which as Mendieta comments, consider themselves to be operating at the level of metaphilosophy.[78] Her criteria include (1) the absence of absolutism; (2) the absence of paternalism; (3) the permanent presence of a self-critical capacity; (4) being empirically informed; and (5) to take an explicit stance on specific social issues. Additionally, Schutte introduces "symptoms" to look out for and which point to at the very least the possibility of an "unhealthy" liberation philosophy: the fallacy of composition and the illusion of purity. Each criterion will get a more in-depth discussion in chapter six, where I will apply her criteria to Arango's work as an evaluative measure of his philosophy of liberation.

So far I have addressed issues specific to Mendieta's article and introduced counterpoints to these issues. I have presented a handful of liberationist thinkers who challenge Mendieta's focus on the populist sectors of the movement and his anti-Europe and North American rendering of the movement. Villoro, Portilla, Cerutti-Guldberg, and Schutte are critical of any philosophy that is authoritarian (particularly those operating under the guise of liberating) and Cerutti-Guldberg and Ofelia Schutte in particular scrutinize Latin American philosophy and the Argentine philosophy of liberation movement. For this reason, the point I made earlier that interpreting Mendieta's use of "American" and "Euro-American" in their broad and inclusive senses would yield a more accurate conception of the movement's critical orientation; that is, it would have included critiques aimed not only at United Statesian and North American philosophy, but at Latin American philosophy as well. Mendieta's presentation of the PoL movement as *the conception* of the movement is more accurately *a particular conception* of it. Thus, I have sought to highlight and problematize Mendieta's claim that the PoL movement defines and presents itself as a challenge to and critique of European and North American philosophy. His own presentation in this recent article reveals a slant toward the populist sectors

[78] Mendieta, "Philosophy of Liberation," 2.

of the PoL (such as the work of Enrique Dussel), who although clearly influenced by thinkers such as Martin Heidegger and Karl Marx do advocate breaks with various forms of dependence (e.g. cultural and intellectual) on Europe and North America. Cerutti-Guldberg, a long-time and prominent figure of the movement, for example, puts his work in what he terms the "*sector crítico del populismo*" (sector critical of populism, or, the critical sector).[79] Cerutti-Guldberg's work in the problematizing current clearly lacks a critique aimed at Europe and North America. His critique grew out of an increasing opposition toward the populist liberation philosophies and developed into a constructive problematization of liberation philosophies and the profession and practice of philosophy itself.

Additionally, in Mendieta's article, Ofelia Schutte's work garnered a passing mention, and as such, I also sought to highlight her profound contributions to the philosophy of liberation movement, both her critical evaluations of liberationist figures and her criteria for a genuine philosophy of liberation. As mentioned, I will also provide a more detailed discussion of her criteria in chapter six. In the next section of this chapter, I will introduce the liberation thinker Gonzalo Arango in order to address the objections I highlighted earlier regarding the PoL movement's intellectual history. I will focus on Arango's work as it bears on and challenges claims (1) and (2): the temporal claim, that the PoL movement emerged in the early 1970s, and the geographical claim, that the movement originated in Argentina. Claims (3a), Cerutti-Guldberg's assertion that there are four currents in the movement, and (3b), Beorlegui's posited two additional currents while affirming the four previous, will be addressed more fully in chapter three where I provide a more detailed and focused account of Arango's *nadaísta* aesthetics of liberation.

[79] Cerutti-Guldberg, *Filosofía de la liberación*, 186.

Gonzalo Arango

The starting point of Gonzalo Arango's liberation philosophy is the specific mechanisms of oppression within Colombia. For example, the political, educational, and religious institutions in Colombia, as well as the classism he sees among the intellectuals and bourgeoisie. In one of Arango's earliest essays, he writes that "the only things in crisis in Colombia are the human beings" and that this current crisis "is in the very essence of the moral, political and economic structure of the country."[80] In this essay, he castigates the politicians, the intellectuals, and the bourgeois classes. Colombia's politicians, its two-party system of Liberal and Conservative, and its bourgeoisie classes are frequent targets in his non-fiction, poetry, and works of fiction. Unsurprisingly, and invoking today's popular sentiment toward U.S. politicians, Arango charges Colombia's politicians with avarice, opportunism, and complacency. The politicians undertake a politics of waiting, but "it is *their* opportunity that they wait for and deep down they do not aspire but to Power, to be the executioners of the day and so that others become their victims."[81] For Arango, politics is nothing but "the denigrating phenomenon by which men and women are not human beings, but rather passive objects of inviolable slogans."[82] Arango recognizes the deep inequities in the exercise of power. The minority that has power in the education system, in politics, in economic matters, and in religion oppress the moral and creative development of others. The political parties, rather than concentrating on substantial social reforms, Arango posits, merely wait for their party to be elected to power so that power can be used for the advantage of their own party and to seek retaliation against the opposing camp. Arango also

[80] Gonzalo Arango, "La moral del miedo," *Índice Cultural*. Bogotá, n.º 26, febrero - marzo de 1956, p.p.: 15-17. https://www.gonzaloarango.com/ideas/la-moral-del-miedo.html.

[81] Ibid. Emphasis in original.

[82] Ibid.

places responsibility for the crisis on educational and religious institutions, which he maintains, use their influence to indoctrinate a passive populace.

Arango's point is that as a result of all these dominating forces, each with their own mythologizing doctrines, the people become passive receptacles in which to deposit beliefs, not merely political slogans. In Arango's view, political slogans and what he sees as other harmful propaganda of other institutions, such as religion, act as determinations on human thought and behavior. In this way, they also begin to determine human life. Yet, as much as this societal influence has been seized by the powerful, Arango also emphasizes that this life governance has been handed over to them through the people's complacency. Thus, in this early essay one already identifies some of the major themes that would become staples of his subsequent writings: resignation, freedom, responsibility, and rebellion. For example, Arango writes that "we have resigned ourselves to the problems resolving on their own" rather than making ourselves responsible for our own freedom.[83] Arango advocates the need for a political struggle for the restoration of social justice and individual freedoms, not as a "program or immediate solution" since, as he asserts, the reality of Colombia "is too dark" to speak for the future.[84] However, "good faith and moral responsibility in each act of the governors and in each of the governed could be a solution to the fear and uncertainty in which we live."[85] The solution he proposes indicates a process, an extended rebellion against oppression and fear that takes place in each individual, but requires the profound acceptance of responsibility. One must take

[83] Ibid.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Ibid.

responsibility for her life, actions, and self-development. In doing so, one is already rebelling against the dominating institutions that sustain themselves through the people's conformity.

These same existential themes are taken up in Arango's first manifesto, though the tone is decidedly more aggressive, bolder, and the aim of which is *despertar la gente* (to wake the people up) and *recordar* (to remind) people of their power. Arango's initial focus in his early essays is the situation in Colombia, though these essays are also interspersed with broader implications for the human condition. For example, this can be seen in his consistent emphasis on the human need for life and freedom in a world of oppression and death.[86] Arango's philosophy of liberation is inseparable from the concept of responsibility. This is particularly noticeable in his early period writings from 1952 until the mid-1960s. For Arango, the people are not to be liberated by another, by an intellectual or a politician. His emphasis is on personal liberation through recognition of the mechanisms that oppress and through rebellion. Rebellion involves taking responsibility for one's life, person, and choices. In other words, reclaiming one's personal power to live self-determinedly and thereby reducing the power of the institutions that make claims on our behaviors, beliefs, and values.

In his first manifesto written in 1958, Arango urges the people of Colombia to question the legitimacy of what they have inherited from the institutions historically deployed to indoctrinate the populace with particular ideologies: for example, political and religious institutions. One should "as far as possible...respond to the authenticity or simulation of the truths that have been handed down to us as certain."[87] In other words, one must as much as possible reflect on and address not only the truths that have been handed down, but one should

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[86] Gonzalo Arango, "Poesía y terror," in *De la Nada al Nadaísmo* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1977), 52.

[87] Gonzalo Arango, "Primer manifiesto," 30-31.

also evaluate the ways in which others are claiming these truths for their own purposes. For example, a church that simultaneously preaches compassion and forgiveness, while also condemning particular sexual orientations and competing religious ideologies. One can reflect on the authenticity of these truths, how they are practiced by governing institutions, and choose how to respond to them, either through affirmation or rejection. One can now question whether a particular religion, church, or priest genuinely practices or represents this truth or whether the bearers of such truth are merely imitations and pretense. In either case, the process of reflection and examination Arango proposes (similar to Villoro's) is itself valuable for deepening one's critical awareness. Additionally, the process of questioning social and state structures is itself a liberating and rebellious act.

Arango warns of societal lies and the pretenses of the influential, all of which are used to create an established order and remove the spaces for dissent and independent thought. For this reason, and similar to Villoro and Cerutti-Guldberg, Arango advocates for the need for a reform of belief and understanding and an epistemological break with the society that dominates and oppresses. Arango writes that "within the current Colombian cultural order, all truth traditionally recognized as truth must be negated as false...For now, the only meaning of intellectual freedom consists in the negation."[88] One begins by negating the truths that we have inherited and that we internalize and which we have been accepting uncritically. In this way, the truths become the objects in view and under review. They are separated from the person and placed at an epistemic distance, and are now matters for a scrutinizing and critical gaze, rather than a passive acceptance. According to Arango, to passively accept and submit to such prepackaged truths as

[88] Ibid. 31.

certainties and as truths for one's own life would be cowardice and resignation.[89] Instead, "commitment in the rebellion and the protest against the established order and dominant hierarchies" means that the aim of this intellectual rebellion, this epistemological break, must be in the service of justice, freedom, and human dignity.[90]

A rebellion against and liberation from the established order includes a rejection of Arango's frequent target of critique, Rationalism, which he sees as limiting the depth of human experience and knowledge. For Arango, Rationalism is only one way of coming to know and experience the world, yet it dominates as a way of understanding, derogates from other forms of knowing, and occludes much of the world to us. In his manifesto, he cautions

> Do not abandon this world governed and dominated by an arrogant rationalism that wants to explain everything, and explains it foolishly with miserable concepts that limit this world to words, without suspecting that in the mysterious depth of this apparent world, and beyond words, there exists the trembling possibilities of Being.[91]

Arango's point here, a point echoed throughout his writings, is that we are currently unfree and limited. We are unfree because we resign ourselves to the beliefs, explanations, and views handed to us from the society we find ourselves in. We are unfree because we have not yet accepted the responsibility of creating our own truths to live by and our own values to pursue. As such, we are unfree because we have not yet rebelled. We are limited because we view the world through the concepts and explanations that have already been codified. We experience the world through rational propositions and our interactions with the world are mediated by conventions and what is socially acceptable. Arango advocates instead "a revolutionary spirit" whose aim is

[89] Ibid. 31.

[90] Ibid. 31.

[91] Ibid. 29.

"destroying the prevailing myths and dogmas."[92] Our development is hindered by the various established and dominant methods that mediate between our being in the world and the world around us; that is, which mediate our encounter with the world and our perceptions of it.

Rationalism becomes an occlusion and imprisonment, whose high walls foreclose our self-discovery of new ways of being in and interacting with the world. The seeds or beginnings of our liberation find their germination in our initial negation or rejection of the unquestioned and dominating values, norms, and beliefs. Arango acknowledges that the fight against the established orders "will be unequal, considering the concentrated power available to our enemies: the economy of the country, the universities, religion, the press and other vehicles for the expression of thought."[93] These vehicles for the expression of thought reproduce the dominant logics of the country and operate as sites of conformity. However, achieving complete success, a finished revolution, or some other idealized version of the struggle is not the point. The process of the struggle, the process of revolution is what matters, and as he writes, "the end does not matter, from the point of view of the struggle. Because not arriving is also the fulfillment of a Destiny."[94] Through Arango's countercultural movement, *Nadaísmo*, he invites and advocates non-conformism and irreverence toward the prevailing aesthetic, cultural, religious, and social precepts.[95] As early as 1952, in Arango's only novel, his views on power, responsibility, and freedom are already developing. In 1958, he produces his first explicit discourse on liberation and oppression from not only outside Argentina, but also outside of

[92] Ibid. 31.

[93] Ibid. 31.

[94] Ibid. 52.

[95] Ibid. 25-26.

academia. His philosophy continued to evolve until his death in 1976, but his work always focused on freedom, liberation, oppression, and life.

Philosophers of Liberation

What I have demonstrated in this chapter is that the philosophy of liberation as Mendieta has presented it in his article is an incomplete view of the movement. It is but one interpretation of some of the philosophers of liberation. I have introduced the work of Luis Villoro, Jorge Portilla, Ofelia Schutte, Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, and Gonzalo Arango to show that these philosophers, most of who are left out of the history's current narrative, do not aim their critiques at Euro and North American philosophy and hegemony. Where critiques of Euro-North American centrism and influence are present, for example, in the work of Arango, such counter West critiques are not the fulcrum of their work. The fulcrum of their work is the problematic of oppression and the need for liberation. Villoro focuses on the problems of exclusion and ideology, which hinder the free exercise of reason. The need for liberation arises when one endures exclusionary practices from the particular society in which he or she is situated and she begins to construct for herself a new conception of the good life; in other words, the just reforms of one's society based on her experiences of injustice. Jorge Portilla examines the phenomenology of two types of the unfree individual through the figures of the *relajiento* and the *apretado*. From Portilla's phenomenological account, one abstracts a philosophy of both personal and communal liberation based on conscious and deliberate changes in attitude (the process of internal liberation) and the overcoming of external obstructions for the pursuit of one's values and the shared values of a community (the process of external liberation). Cerutti-Guldberg critiques populist liberation philosophies, particularly the work of Enrique Dussel, as

well as critiquing philosophy of liberation itself. He argues for a liberation philosophy that is permanently self-critical so that it remains open to the changing needs of a world-wide struggle for liberation. Ofelia Schutte critically evaluates the work of populist and traditionalist liberation philosophies. Similar to Cerutti-Guldberg, Schutte ultimately finds that philosophies which utilize anti-progressive or authoritarian tactics are not genuinely liberating, but instead are dangerously reminiscent of fascist ideologies.[96] Gonzalo Arango's work centers on the problematic of oppression within Colombia and the need for a human liberation from institutional indoctrinations, such as religious beliefs, political ideologies, literary and philosophical idealisms, and the hegemony of Rationalism. His work also concentrates on the human condition in general, which he believes has deteriorated to resignation and fear. Arango urges revolution and rebellion in the name of liberation, justice, and the restoration of human dignity and radical creativity.

Within the still nascent development of liberationist thought and philosophy, one variant of the philosophy of liberation movement was taking place among Argentine academics in the late 1960s. It was not until 1971 at the Second National Congress of Philosophy in Argentina that the philosophy of liberation label was given to the growing body of work and discussion taking place through workshops and publications. However, it would be a mistake to consider the Argentine movement the exclusive origin or starting point for philosophies of liberation. It is but one vein of liberation discourses taking place throughout Latin America before and contemporary to the Argentine philosophy of liberation movement. An intellectual history of the philosophy of liberation (not only the Argentine liberation philosophy movement) must inquire into and include other regions in which liberation discourses were developing in not only academia, but outside academia (as is the case with Gonzalo Arango) to ensure that the history

[96] Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 200.

remains open, inclusive, and recognizes important voices both within and outside of the academy.

CHAPTER III

NADAÍSMO AND AN AESTHETICS OF LIBERATION

Situating the Aesthetic: The Search for a Liberating Aesthetic

In Alejandro Vallega's recent publication *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority* he notes that "we have lost the possibility of seeing aesthetic experience as the liberating expression of consciousness" and as what has the power to perpetually challenge the oppressive orders of power in which we are embedded, such as Vallega's focus on the coloniality of power and knowledge.[97] In *Latin American Philosophy*, Vallega reviews several philosophers whose work he considers decolonial or within the tradition of liberation philosophy. In doing so, Vallega attempts to locate the missing or overlooked, yet crucial aesthetic dimensions in decolonial and liberation philosophies. For Vallega, "Western instrumental rationalism" has unfortunately prevailed over the inclusion of aesthetic experience and aesthetic sensibilities as viable and fruitful elements of discourse.[98] He finds that the privileging of reason or the "primacy of reason" has come at the sacrifice of adequate attention given to the development of an aesthetic that intersects with, for example, the history of coloniality, mechanisms of oppression, and structural injustices.[99] Vallega seeks to recover the aesthetic aspects he sees in the work of the authors and artists he examines in his book, most notably in the work of Enrique Dussel. A central goal Vallega sets for his book is "to propose an aesthetics of

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[97] Alejandro Vallega, *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 73.

[98] Ibid. 72-73.

[99] Ibid. 199.

liberation, a decolonial aesthetics" that recalls to the forefront of philosophy aesthetics as a rich source of inquiry and resistance.[100] Importantly, Vallega's project is motivated by his observation that philosophies of liberation have yet to engage a decolonial aesthetics or an aesthetics of liberation even though such an aesthetics is "a fundamental dimension of liberatory thinking."[101]

Alejandro Vallega's project is an important one as it seeks to recover the dimension of the aesthetic, a rich and deep reservoir of relatively unexamined content, for philosophic (especially those with liberatory projects) inquiry. This content is precisely what Gonzalo Arango sought to recover and reclaim for *nadaísta* poetry. In the *Primer Manifiesto*, he proclaims that "Nadaísta poetry is a revolution against the traditional aesthetic, that implies the discovery of a new aesthetic that will open all of the controls under which has remained hidden a mysterious poetic world; the subconscious world that is like the general repository of a warehouse of the spirit, which provides the demands of the reflexive consciousness."[102] The traditional aesthetic for Arango seems to be that culture of aesthetics that grew out of the long tradition and influence of classical aesthetics.[103] It is this culture of classical aesthetics that he rebukes for its "measured and calculated beauty," its engagement with beauty through technique, form, and objectivity, and its embrace of a beauty that is mawkish and feminine. To give one

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[100] Ibid. 4.

[101] Ibid. 73.

[102] Arango, *Primer manifiesto*, 26.

[103] It is likely that Immanuel Kant is one of the figures of Classic aesthetics that Arango has in mind when he lodges these critiques. It is worth iterating that Immanuel Kant is a favorite target of Arango's, whom he calls a "rationalist lout" with his "filthy 'pure reason.'" See "Nadaología del nadaísmo" in De la Nada al Nadaísmo, Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1966, 82.

example, he refers to "that detestable betrayal of beauty that is Romanticism."[104] This is, in part, what gave Arango's philosophy (both poetry and prose) its radical flavor. His work, which uses coarse and explicit language, revels in its own subversion and derision of accepted models of literary technique and aesthetic form. His work unapologetically explores the terrifying dimensions of the beautiful rather than the pleasing quality of the beautiful. Arango is looking to disrupt the traditional narratives of the beautiful he reads in literature and philosophy. As Arango reads the history of the beautiful, he does not identify an innocuous essence, but rather its capacity to oppress originality and new, expansive visions of the beautiful. In Arangoian fashion, he weaponizes beauty for the struggle. Anyone who imbibes the *nadaísta* ethos must risk the transgression required if one wants to radicalize the meaning and function of beauty for the purposes of subverting the status quo.

The new aesthetic, as Arango envisions it, will draw from *all* the content of our subconscious that reverberates below the level of our explicit awareness, but which will inform and satiate the demands of its intentionality. For Arango, classical notions of aesthetic values, such as beauty, cannot exist as absolute categories, but instead must remain open and relative. It is the task of each subject, each poet, to judge and generate beauty according to one's own radicalized tastes (now oriented toward revolution and subversion). In this way, beauty becomes an instrument in the struggle for radical self-development and its value is reclaimed for this struggle, over and against the Established Order (with its culture of rhetorical beauty). Beauty then is imbued with the flavor of the struggle. It becomes a protest against a culture and an Order that seeks to fix the meaning of beauty in a stable orbit above culture, or worse yet for Arango, in

[104] Ibid. 26.

a world of “entelechies and forms.”[105] Trying to fix beauty in an ideal form or abstract it above the concrete circumstances of a people and a culture is to essentialize it in an inaccessible and meta-physical plane as in the work of an author he was once read with such interest as a schoolboy.[106] In short, this removes the creative power and agency from the people, and as such, immediately violates the *nadaísta* commitment to freedom and a grassroots constituted aesthetic.

However, before moving into a fuller discussion of Arango’s aesthetics of liberation, it is important to understand how Vallega defines aesthetics within his own project. Greater clarity on Vallega’s definition of aesthetics and his standards for an aesthetics of liberation would form a useful backdrop for a discussion of Arango’s own work. Vallega most fully develops his sense of aesthetics and an aesthetics of liberation in his chapter “Latin American Philosophy and Liberation.” In this chapter, Vallega almost exclusively focuses on the work of Enrique Dussel whose project of liberation Vallega claims “would make the most impact” in comparison to the Argentine movement’s other figures, such as Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, Hugo Assmann, Augusto Salazar Bondy, and Rodolfo Kusch.[107] Although Vallega more fully develops his sense of aesthetics and an aesthetics of liberation through Dussel’s work, he acknowledges that “this is a fundamental dimension that remains unexplored by Dussel’s thought” and that while Dussel’s work is ethical and political “he does not develop an ‘aesthetics’ of liberation.”[108] However, Vallega seizes on Dussel’s concept of exteriority; that is, life and thought from the periphery and beyond the dominating monologics of the center. For Vallega, Dussel transforms “exteriority”

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[105] Ibid. 25.

[106] Jaime Jaramillo Escobar, “Gonzalo Arango, el de Andes,” *Gonzaloarango.com*. https://www.gonzaloarango.com/vida/jaramillo-jaime-1.html.

[107] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 52-53

[108] Ibid. 7.

into a dynamic and fertile space: “Dussel begins to open a space of *radical* exteriority that bears a powerful creativity from beyond and yet toward the radical transformation of the system.”[109] Adding to “exteriority” Vallega cites Dussel’s deployment of the concept of proximity as a further aesthetic dimension in his work. More specifically, Vallega sees proximity as the aesthetic sensibility of exteriority. Dussel seems to understand proximity as an affective spatiality, a more originary starting point “beyond physical closeness, anterior to the truth of being.”[110] Dussel goes on to say that by proximity he does not mean a closeness to things, such as a table or chair, but rather he is “speaking here of approaching a person, of shortening the distance between someone who can accept or reject us,” and as such, “reciprocity is risked.[111] Proximity then is the face-to-face relationality, or rather person-to-person experience that is anterior to the person-to-nature relation.[112]

Vallega follows Dussel’s concept of proximity as what gives us “a basic beginning for being in the world in a way that no longer puts the world...at our disposal and us at an arm’s length from our sense of existence with others.”[113] As I understand Dussel’s use of proximity, it is not the kiss of a lover, but rather the feeling of intimacy and the enjoyment of such a caress. It is not the mother nursing a child, but rather the feeling of protection and warmth, and the enjoyment of being responsible for another in need and the joy of fulfilling the desire to nourish or help. Proximity is not the handshake or hug of a friend, but rather the attitude of fellowship. For Vallega, this “sense of proximity in radical exteriority is the grounding for the

[109] Ibid. 60. Emphasis in original.

[110] Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 16-17.

[111] Ibid. 17, 19.

[112] Ibid. 18-19.

[113] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 69.

transformations sought by the philosophy of liberation" and constitutes its missing aesthetic dimension.[114] Vallega sees proximity in radical exteriority as a life-sensibility, as a robust aesthetic experience of dispositions and sensibilities that at the pre-conceptual level are able to inform and direct rational arguments, the construction of institutions, and configurations of being.[115] Therefore, this aesthetic experience of proximate exteriority appears "as a definitive field of struggle" in which persons and communities constantly struggle for and recover life's distinctness (for example, against the homogenization and colonization of power and knowledge) and on which a politics and ethics of liberation depend.[116]

Vallega's understanding then of aesthetics is necessarily an aesthetics of liberation or decoloniality meaning "the experience of liberation and configuration of consciousness in the undergoing of bodily life...in its corporeal mental-affective occurrences," which are "not yet discursive or institutional...not yet determined by conceptual knowledge."[117] Given both Vallega's concern and the concern of certain liberation philosophers and decolonial thinkers over the coloniality of power and knowledge, it is clear why the pre-conceptual dimension of this aesthetic experience of proximate exteriority, an arising of life and thought from the periphery, would constitute a fertile field for resistance, for the "possible unfolding of liberating consciousness...and as the perpetual challenge to operative orderings of life under structures of power."[118] It is from and through that aesthetic sensibility one can construct alternative and distinct configurations of being (personal, communal, institutional, and epistemological) beyond

[114] Ibid. 70-71.

[115] Ibid. 71-72.

[116] Ibid. 72.

[117] Ibid. 72.

[118] Ibid. 73.

those configured by the dominating logics of the center. Vallega concludes that "this aesthetic sensibility, this sense of being in proximate exteriority, must be an essential, active part of a philosophy of liberation that makes its claim out of lived experience...this is what the philosophy of liberation has yet to engage."[119] However, it is precisely this latter point that I will dispute. As I will demonstrate, Gonzalo Arango is in fact a philosopher of liberation who explicitly engaged the aesthetic in his work such that his liberation philosophy constitutes what I call the aesthetic current in the philosophies of liberation movement.

As discussed in chapter two, the Argentine iteration of the PoL movement is viewed as originating in late 1960s Argentina and there are currently six recognized currents: the ontological, the analectical, the historicist, the problematizing, Zubirian realism, and the economicist. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, I will show that Gonzalo Arango was engaging in a robust (and Life-oriented) liberation philosophy more than ten years before the Argentine movement; that he was doing so outside of the movement's supposedly originating geography; that he was proposing an aesthetic approach or current as yet unrecognized by the movement's prevailing narrative; and that contrary to Vallega's conclusion, there existed a philosophy of liberation already engaging aesthetic sensibility and experience.

The Aesthetics of *Nadaísmo*: Beginnings

In 1956 Arango writes an essay deeply critical of the politics and intellectuals of Colombia, describing politics as merely "the denigrating phenomenon by which men and women are not human beings, but rather passive objects of inviolable slogans."[120] His essay was

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[119] Ibid. 73.

[120] Arango, "La moral del miedo."

published in 1956 in the journal *Índice Cultural* in the same year that Arango was still working with the conservative dictatorship of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. At 22 years old, Arango joins the National Action Movement (MAN), a political group founded by Rojas Pinilla and which had the aim (ultimately unsuccessful) of uniting various political parties and labor unions in support of Rojas Pinilla's military regime. After the fall of the dictator's regime in 1957, Arango had to flee to Cali as mobs angry at the regime unleashed into the streets of Medellín.[121] In his account of the *Nadaísmo* movement, Armando Romero, also a former member of the movement, notes that Arango's path toward liberal and revolutionary thought was a gradual process and that "we must not forget that Rojas Pinilla represented an alternative against the traditional political parties."[122] However, one can read into Arango's 1956 essay, "The Morality of Fear," both the beginnings of a revolutionary thought and spirit, as well as an evident dissatisfaction in Rojas Pinilla's policies and regime. Arango asserts that politics may change course, but what remains the same is those who were the victims of the past become the executioners of the present.[123]

Arango further declares that "during this game of party interests, which in Colombian is the destruction of a few idols for the substitution of others" it is always the people who suffer and are sacrificed.[124] He asks "Why not attempt in the politics of the country a struggle for Power in which the people are not victims of any victory?"[125] His response is that "we firmly try a political struggle in good faith that could achieve social justice, individual freedoms in thought

[121] Armando Romero, *El Nadaísmo colombiano, o, La búsqueda de una vanguardia perdida* (Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1988), 35.

[122] Ibid. 35.

[123] Arango, "La moral del miedo."

[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

and action, in the realization of high ideals of culture" and the reintegration of the social values that are often violated by the institutions that supposedly uphold them.[126] Freedom, responsibility, and resignation are three important concepts introduced in this essay and which become philosophical staples in his subsequent *nadaísta* writings. The conditions for a political struggle and rebellion must include accepting responsibility for our freedom, for the present, and for the future, as well overcoming what Arango sees as an attitude of resignation: that everything eventually passes, happens for the best, is unavoidable, inevitable, or "problems resolving on their own."[127] For Arango, continued passivity and resignation cannot lead to meaningful or substantial change. It is up to each person to recognize his or her own power, which includes taking responsibility for one's freedom to act and to use it to mark out a path for a more just future.[128]

From 1958 to 1967, Arango publishes his most existential and nihilistic writings, though in the late 1960s there is a noticeable shift. In 1966 as he begins moving away from *Nadaísmo*, his writings become less individualistic, gradually losing their capricious style and structure gaining a more focused and retrospective dimension as he explores historical figures and past events in his own life. Additionally, his writings become more grounded as he no longer advocates madness and chaos, but instead engages more practically with concrete social issues. Nevertheless, his *Nadaísmo* period gives birth to a radical sense of aesthetics, a bold and darkly humorous style, and a liberation philosophy that gives an important place to the poet and poetry, which are rarely, if ever, given such a productive and prominent role in liberation philosophies.

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid.

However, in 1958, Arango is still in a self-imposed political asylum in Cali, Colombia. It is in this year that he crafts one of the most recognized pieces of literature for the *Nadaísmo* movement, the *Primer Manifiesto Nadaísta.* At this point, his thought has "profoundly radicalized" and he reads the *Manifiesto* one night in a local haunt on the famous *Avenida Sexta* (Sixth Avenue) to a group of discontent young men, arousing their concern and support.[129] That same year, in 1958, Arango publishes the *Manifiesto* in Medellín as the Colombian government puts its new power-sharing agreement into practical effect. The liberal candidate Alberto Lleras Camargo is elected to the presidency in Colombia, while the conservative party is set to patiently wait the next four years for its turn to power. The *Manifesto* spares very few groups from its vitriolic criticisms. It condemns the Catholic Church, certain facets of philosophy, the education system in Colombia, politicians and intellectuals, and a particular group of youths Arango refers to as the Cocacolos (similar to today's hipsters), to name a few of the *Manifiesto's* targets. However, the *Manifiesto* also serves as the fullest expression up to that point (including his 1952 novel, *Después del hombre*) of Arango's evolving notions of life and aesthetics. In section I of the Manifesto, Arango writes that *Nadaísmo*

> is a freedom open to the possibilities of Colombian culture, with a minimum of assumptions of the struggle that will evolve with time toward an evaluative estimation of man, a form of new beauty, and an aspiration without romantic or metaphysical idealisms toward a society evolved in cultural and artistic order.[130]

There are several important points to note in this passage. Arango intends *Nadaísmo* to be an environment without borders or physical location, a fertile beginning for anyone and from which individuals choose a radical self-determination. This is a movement that is intended to inspire action and to remind people to choose living, not a routinized existence. Life requires

[129] Romero, *El Nadaísmo colombiano*, 35-36.

[130] Gonzalo Arango, *Primer manifiesto*, 23-24.

choice, spontaneity, and the awareness of human life in all its plenitude of possibilities. In choosing one also generates new possibilities and pathways for action. In this way, the movement is highly generative. Arango chose writing as his platform to *despertar la gente* (wake the people up) and under the loose theoretical underpinnings of his *nadaísta* philosophy. When he writes of striving toward a new beauty, it is a non-essentialized and non-absolutized conception of beauty. One can read this new beauty as the form the Colombian *hu*man will take once committed to this struggle, which is at the same time a struggle for its liberation.

Nadaísmo has few aspirations, except to spark the inherently generative quality (which is life and life-affirming itself) of human nature since the unique creative capacity that humans possess when in accordance with this generative quality (almost God-like in Arango's estimation), leads to diverse and surprising manifestations in culture and art. However, for Arango, this must first be preceded by the realization that what needs to be overcome is the people's passive acceptance of institutional authorities and the idealistic precepts (effectively, propaganda and banners in Arango's view) of the current cultural order. This passive acceptance of "truths," norms, conventions of thought and habits of conduct, is qualitatively the same as resigning one's position as a creator of truth, history and culture. Culture, Colombian culture as it stood in Arango's eyes, had stagnated under the weight of these old structures on human activity, which ceased producing the new and as yet un-thought of. The Arangoian and *nadaísta* call for a revolutionary spiritual reconstruction of the individual is also a call for a rebirth of culture.[131]

Arango's observations on traditionalized culture recall the words of Miguel de Unamuno, who identifies the people with culture (not the structures or institutions) and the individual with the universal. In a 1933 talk, Unamuno notes that culture is the conversations of the people in

[131] Ibid. 23-24.

everyday living, at cafes for example, which are the real "people's university of Spain."[132] He continues to say "all my life I have fought to defend my own individuality, and I thought that in doing so I was also standing up for the freedom and the individuality of my country, Spain, which I bear inside myself."[133] Unamuno's perspective on culture and individuality provides us with a more generous lens with which to view Arango's work. The individualistic ethos of Arango's writings need not preclude or exclude a commitment to a cultural or even universal project since "there is nothing more universal than the individual, for what is the property of each is the property of all," as Unamuno notes.[134] The individual is not the particular, but always at the same time universal. And perhaps this sense better illuminates the connection between Arango's pronouncements about the individual and culture. As Arango sees it in his time, the individual has stopped producing culture in a genuine, free, and spontaneous way since the Colombian individual (the Colombian *man*, for Arango) has ceased being an individual to conform to traditionalized (the ossification of) culture. Arango's bold style and controversial work can indeed (and had) provoke conversation among the people. When in 1964 Arango writes that one should practice the truth of her life as a universal truth, a reading of that in light of Unamuno invites a less individualistic interpretation in favor of that is oriented toward recognizing the individual as someone always connected to and representative of a larger

[132] Miguel de Unamuno, "Miguel de Unamuno on the Future of Culture," trans. Edgardo Canton, *UNESCO Courier* 46, no. 11 (1993): 42.

[133] Ibid. 43.

[134] Miguel de Unamuno, *Tragic Sense of Life*, trans. J.E. Crawford Flitch (New York: Dover Publications, 1954), 45.

culture.[135] Additionally, the desire for freedom of expression, the right to be a contributor to and representative of one's culture, are of shared and universal concern.

Thus, an important aspect of that earlier quoted passage from the *Primer Manifiesto* and throughout much of Arango's early writings (1958-1966), is the emphasis on cultural renewal through an individually discovered sense of aesthetic living. What Arango seeks to reawaken is the people's *sentido de vivir*, their sense or meaning of living. The shocking language and aggressive tone of his *nadaísta* writings were meant to jolt the people out of their resignation and for them to become aware of the epistemological and cultural indoctrination taking place through the media, the education system, politics, and religion. The impulse toward individual reconstruction, constructing a new (apolitical) identity for oneself, initiates the necessary rupture between oneself and the Social Order and the Order he or she is embedded in. For Arango, that Order is precisely what inhibits individual power and one's radical creativity: power is in the hands of institutions and the elite, and creativity must come from the root of one's spirit, not from technique, schools of thought, or other pre-given and pre-approved models. Instead, Arango emphasizes the idea of newness and spontaneity regarding not only aesthetic values but also a new ethics that is informed by a people's renewed sense of aesthetic living.[136] In this way, constructing one's spirit or sense of living becomes an artistic and creative project.

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[135] Gonzalo Arango, "El Sermón atómico," in *Obra Negra* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1974), 43.

[136] Arango, *Primer manifiesto*, 43.

Poetry and the Poet

Far from sentimentality and mere verbalism,[137] Arango arms the poet and poetry to serve vital functions in his liberation philosophy and in the concrete project of liberation. Poet is meant to be a testimony of the truth of the world and the truth of oneself: these are expressions of rebellion in that they refuse to reproduce the occlusive mythology of the oppressors. Therefore, when Arango writes "Man is corrupt from head to tail; he must de-mentalize the flesh and Adamize the spirit," he is speaking of an epistemic purge and a purge of inherited values so that humanity may return to a state of spiritual innocence, understood as a neutral state from which a spiritual reconstruction can begin.[138] For the poet, Arango reserves a particular mission: to be a "stoker of life of its radiant energy...to scatter the seeds of the future on the winds of heaven.[139] As we will see shortly, in light of this mission for the poets, one is especially inclined to understand Arango's unique definition of poetry as deliberately broadening the boundaries of what poetry is (to include human action) and who has the potential to be a poet (anyone committed to the fight). To begin with, Arango defines poetry as "all completely gratuitous actions of the spirit and disinterested in ethical, social, political or rational assumptions that men formulate as programs of happiness and justice."[140] Here in the Manifesto, poetry is given a new sense and meaning. Poetry is not about rhyme, structure, literary schools, or even writing. Poetry becomes an action of the human spirit that is unnecessary to, and not a function of, some other

[137] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), 87.

[138] Gonzalo Arango, "Manifiesto nadaísta al *homo sapiens*," in *De la Nada al Nadaísmo* (Bogotá: Ediciones Tercer Mundo, 1966), 90.

[139] Gonzalo Arango, "El poeta es el fogonero de la vida," *Última página* (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2000), 244.

[140] Arango, *Primer manifiesto*, 24.

end, ideal, or system. Poetry is not propaganda for ethical, political, social, or rational systems of thought. It is not a product of the Established Order or an expression of inherited beliefs, but rather it is the process and product of rebellion, awakening, rupture, and disinheritance. Poetry is an "exercise of the creative spirit originating in the sensitive powers" and which Arango limits "to the field of a pure, useless subjectivity, and to the solitary act of Being."[141] Poetry originates in the human senses—our abilities to smell, touch, see, and hear the world around us—but also in our emotions and receptivity to the experiences and phenomena around us. Our lives are not only cognitive, but more importantly, sensuous and affective. The sensuous and affective, the pre-conceptual, is the origin of poetry. To put it another way, this pre-conceptual level is the origin of free actions of the human spirit. This brings us closer to Vallega's sense of an aesthetics of liberation, which he understands as a return to a pre-conceptual level of experience and which has the potential to direct the construction of new institutions and configurations of being. This is clearly an aim of Arango's early liberation philosophy, his *Nadaísmo*, which seeks to challenge and discredit the established orders of power and knowledge and remind others of their inherent power to choose, create, and self-determine.

Furthermore, Vallega cites as a situation of the oppressed that "when colonizing power takes over life, living desire becomes the function of the production and preservation of power within the system."[142] This point is operating within the liberation philosophy of Gonzalo Arango as will become clearer. Arango's understanding of a revolutionary poetry as the expression of a revolutionary human spirit signifies a poetry that emanates from a place that is underneath the overlay of beliefs and knowledge imposed by the organizations of power within a

[141] Ibid. 24.

[142] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 71.

system. This form of revolutionary poetry has the potential to open up new pathways for being, understanding, and experiencing the world. And since as Vallega writes, colonizing power takes over the individual's living desire, it is understandable that Arango emphasizes a useless poetry. Poetry is a key in this struggle because it is not merely pen to paper, but human action itself: the poetry of uprising. "Poetry is the freedom that disorders what reason has organized… [it is] a rebellion against laws and traditional ways, against the aesthetic and scholastic precepts that have unsuccessfully challenged truth and the definition of beauty."[143] In other words, poetry is a space in which one exercises freedom and rebellion in the face of status quo culture, which at the same time is a dead culture, not a living, moving culture that swells with the creativity of its people.

For Arango, poetry aspires to a "solitary beauty," "a pure and useless beauty, and that can only be the product of a Nadaísta aesthetic."[144] It is important to recall that earlier Arango had limited poetry to the field of a pure and useless subjectivity and to the solitary act of Being. If Arango sees the Established Order in which the Colombian people are embedded as a machine of which the people are merely encouraged to be obedient parts, meant to keep that Order or machine in operation, then his choices of the concepts "solitary," "pure," and "useless" become clear. Poetry is that liberating action of the human spirit precisely because one chooses to break from the machine, from one's assumed role and function in that order, and from one's passive and resigned acceptance of it. However, rebellion and rupture immediately separate one from the Order and being becomes for itself, rather than a being of the Order. Through such a rupture an individual becomes gradually purified of the epistemic, moral, and aesthetic precepts that exercised their control. Consequently, an individual, a being and subjectivity, is then of no use to the system. Instead, he or she exists alone from it and in a state of rebellion. This can be applied

[143] Arango, *Primer manifiesto*, 25.

[144] Ibid. 25.

to beauty as well. The being for itself, the subjectivity in rebellion, whose liberating actions constitute poetry, aspires to new forms and definitions of beauty that are no longer of any use to the Established Order and instead challenge it. These new forms of beauty exist alone from the system, separate from its accepted list of definitions and values.

The *nadaísta* aesthetic then attempts to intervene in the calcification of culture and of a people, the former effectively frozen under the control and influence of regressive institutions; while the latter are hindered in their development as free and creative spirits. This *nadaísta* aesthetic is a commitment to life and human spirit in all their creative power and movement. It is, in short, a passion for living and generating entirely new meaning and configurations of being. To borrow again from Freire's work, I see in Arango's use of "true words"—that is, his sense of the aesthetic, liberation, and poetry, for example—this dual dimension of reflection and action.[145] These are not concepts to merely reflect on, but rather have that necessary and complementary dimension of action. Given Arango's desire to challenge and discredit the Established Order at epistemic and axiological levels, one can read into his *nadaísta* writings the Freirean call for the people to come to critical consciousness and to take charge of creating and reinventing knowledge. For Freire, this knowledge must come from the oppressed, from those prevented from exercising their creative power and their potential to live in and transform the world as human beings, not things. The necrophilous tendency of the Oppressive Order to in-animate the people is precisely why Arango issues such strident calls to conscientization.[146] Using language

[145] Freire, *Pedagogy*, 88.

[146] Adopting the term from Miguel de Unamuno, Erich Fromm notes that the necrophilous pathology has a passion for what is dead and mechanical, and thus, seeks to turn what is living into something dead or dying. See Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 10, 331.

such as "rise from the putrid pit of resignations"[147] and "the planet smells of dead souls. No more resignation...We are going to live!"[148] is Arango's attempt to counteract the displacement of selfhood by mass indoctrination. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Arango's *nadaísta* writings parallel each other in key areas. Both authors highlight an oppressor-oppressed dynamic, though Freire provides a more fruitful analysis of the relation and their respective psychologies. Arango and Freire focus on the oppressed realizing their own power, their own oppressive situations, and thus, initiating their own liberation. This is an important departure from the saved-by-the-philosopher or intellectual paradigm Schutte critiques in her seminal work on the philosophy of liberation movement.[149] Both authors also focus on the inhibitory and prohibitory effects of oppression on a person's creative powers.[150]

The *nadaísta* poetry is at once freedom, protest, uprising, liberation, and revolution. Given Arango's definition of poetry, we all have the potential to be poets. We all have the potential to break from the oppressive order, to rise from our resignation, and create new pathways for ourselves. In subsequent essays Arango continues to develop his radical sense of aesthetics—an aesthetics of liberation—and he continues to develop the vital roles of the poet and poetry. In 1966, Arango writes a series of short essays that give shape to his notions of beauty that are at the center of his aesthetics of liberation. Concerning the state of his time, Arango observes a crisis of the human soul. Within these "oppressed souls" contradictory passions and idealisms fight for a supremacy that does not culminate in any productive insight or

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[147] Gonzalo Arango, "El Sermón atómico," 45.

[148] Gonzalo Arango, "Manifiesto nadaísta al *homo sapiens*," 90.

[149] Schutte's critique will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. However, for her critical evaluation of the works and figures of the Argentine philosophy of liberation movement see chapter 6 of *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993).

[150] See Freire's *Pedagogy*, chapter 2.

resolution.[151] For the human world is a "dark reality" and "the response of the poet to this state of anxiety and perpetual insanity, is that image of angry, broken, and uncertain beauty, a faithful reflection of the events and chaos in which we are submerged."[152] This point echoes back to his notion of beauty that is terrifying, the poet's responsibility to give an honest testimony of the world, and his disdain for the idealisms and romanticism that mythologizes rather than reveals reality. The poet who is committed to the struggle must produce the kind of beauty that reflects her own state and the state of human or world affairs. He continues that "a world in crisis produces a transit beauty...corresponding to the disturbance that inspires it."[153] For Arango, it is clear that the poet has an ethico-aesthetic responsibility to respond to the empirical realities of the world and should not repose in silence, seclusion, or passivity since poetry is a "testimony of the world" and thus the poet has a responsibility remain aware and responsive to his or her time.[154]

In "Poetry and Terror," Arango contends that beauty must relate to a certain idea of terror, "of an explosion in all the dimensions of the spirit and of the life of the human being."[155] This explosion is the necessary shock to resurrect human life all its dimensions, including the spirit. The human spirit has so far resigned itself to a life that has been co-opted by the rules and interests of the prevailing structures of power, which act as constraints on the spirit. The terrifying, truthful beauty awakens the spirit from almost inert-like slumber, its submersion, and

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[151] Gonzalo Arango, "Manifiesto Poético," in *Obra Negra* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1974), 81.

[152] Ibid. 81.

[153] Ibid. 81.

[154] Ibid. 81.

[155] Gonzalo Arango, "Poesía y terror," 50.

invites a new beginning that takes hold in all the dimensions of human life and spirit. In this way, not only is a spiritual reconstruction made possible, but a new cultural and artistic order is made possible. Therefore, the terror of which Arango speaks also refers to one's break from the familiarity of the Established Order, from what Vallega might call "Latin America's culture of oppression."[156] One might see the beauty and terror (and risk) in exploring new and transformative modes of being. In this way, "the greatness of poetry will now consist in discovering the beauty in terror."[157] Such terror is the beginning of a radical freedom and responsibility in which each person must reclaim the entirety of her life in what will be a constructive and reconstructive process of self- and world making. In short, each person becomes the poet through free and creative actions of the human spirit. As Arango concludes, "poetry always was, and it is also today, Life and Freedom. There is no other mission for the poet: to ensure the continued relevance of those two words in the world of oppression and death."[158] In our dark reality, one must not fall into resignation and passivity at the sacrifice of one's "creative power" and ability to reveal and transform the world, as Freire writes.[159] Each person must be a poet of the world, committed to the fight—to the process of liberation and humanization—and through thought and action, ensure the continued relevance of Life and Freedom in a world of oppression and death.

[156] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 61.

[157] Arango, "Poesía y terror," 51.

[158] Ibid. 52

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[159] Freire, *Pedagogy*, 73.

An Aesthetics of Liberation: *Nadaísmo*

Vallega notes that the concept of life is at the center of Dussel's philosophy of liberation. Vallega writes that life is "a single fundamental element in Dussel's thought...Dussel makes clear that it is life that ultimately orients the politics of liberation."[160] For Dussel, an ethics of liberation is grounded in a material and formal principle. The material principle is the reproduction and growth of human life; it is human survival.[161] The formal principle is based on a redefinition of universality, understood as the validity given to the material principle through an "anti-hegemonic communication community."[162] More specifically, the material principle is given validity through new norms, laws, institutions, etc., which can be achieved once the oppressed gain critical consciousness, criticize the dominating valid community, and work towards the transformation of the system and toward a more just society and just institutions.[163] If exteriority is life at the exterior, the lives of those who are oppressed or excluded, then his material ethical principle concerns the survival and growth of those very lives. Synthesizing Dussel's work, Vallega asserts that he (1) positions "life as the source of the politics and ethics of liberation;" (2) posits proximate exteriority as the sensibility "which informs every configuration of senses of existence and humanity."[164] Thus, Vallega finds in Dussel's work that proximate exteriority is an essential sensibility inseparable from an aesthetic existence, from embodied experiences and it is a fertile position from which to think a liberation philosophy and

[160] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 67.

[161] Enrique Dussel, "The Architectonic of the Ethics of Liberation: On material ethics and formal moralities," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 23, no. 3 (1997): 7. doi:10.1177/019145379702300301.

[162] Ibid. 17-18.

[163] Ibid. 13, 18-21.

[164] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 71.

develop a liberating consciousness.[165] Yet, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, Vallega highlights a lacuna in liberation and decolonial thought; namely, the need for an aesthetics of liberation or decolonial aesthetics in which bodily, affective, and sensuous levels of experience are seen as resources for undoing cultures of oppression, creating new (non-dominating/non-hegemonic) ways of being, and which should inform and shape philosophies of liberation. In analyzing the work of liberation and decolonial thinkers, such as Dussel, Vallega is attempting to create a space for an aesthetics of liberation, or rather, to develop "the path toward aesthetics of liberation."[166]

This is precisely the conversation Arango can speak to and intervene in, not only liberation philosophy, but also an aesthetics of liberation. Far from being absent or not engaged with in liberation philosophies, Arango's work as an example of an aesthetics of liberation is simply overlooked and largely unknown in most philosophical circles including Latin American philosophy. As such, it is worthwhile to develop his *nadaísta* aesthetics of liberation more fully in this chapter. Furthermore, I will demonstrate the way life becomes more than a conceptual focus of his *nadaísta* philosophy and instead shows a liberation theory rooted in Life and the everyday realities of a people.

Nadaísmo and Life

Earlier I introduced the *nadaísta* aesthetic as dis-order, as a disruption in the Established Order of power and knowledge that constrains ways of being (or configurations of being in Vallega's terms), ways of thinking about the world, and ways of experiencing it. Additionally,

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[165] Ibid. 73-74.

[166] Ibid. 77.

the *nadaísta* aesthetic has a profoundly constructive dimension in which after one breaks with the Established Order, a move not unlike one's coming to critical consciousness, an individual is in a better position to reflect upon, evaluate, and critique the accepted beliefs and values of the system. Consequently, one is now positioned to construct new beliefs and values and open a space for creating new modes of being in and with the world. This praxis of liberation again shows a strong affinity between Arango's philosophy and Freire's pedagogy: the necessary and complementary relation of critical awareness and agentic action aimed at transforming the world. However, while Freire uses the terminology of humanization, Arango focuses on an affiliation to Life and human living. In fact it often appears in his work as if the strength of one's devotion to Life and human living determines the extent to which someone is able to engage with, discover, and add to their own humanity. Nevertheless, Freire seizes on the importance of Fromm's use of biophilia as the kind of tendency or impulse that rightly motivates humanizing projects such as liberation from (necrophilous) oppression and community-making.

Although there is little to suggest Arango is reading or is familiar with Erich Fromm's work, one can still clearly see the necrophilous and biophilous passions operative in his *nadaísta* writings. At times, these two passions seem to form a productive relation in his work. The destruction of the Established Order (or of its influence) and the death of Old Being are simply the conditions for the new (spirit, life, order, etc.) to emerge. Beginning with Arango's 1958 Manifesto, this destructive passion is evident. Yet, the constructive (or generative) passion—the life-affirming—is as clear and evident. I would argue that the biophilous impulse has far greater weight for Arango since the destructiveness is a means (and a literary device) to life and humanity affirming ends. In the *Primer Manifiesto* for example, Arango writes that "Colombian society needs this Nadaísta revolution" and the aims of the *nadaístas* are "to discredit the already

existing order," to encourage and advocate for the creation of a new society, and "fighting to liberate the spirit from resignation."[167] He continues,

> "the mission is this: Do not leave one faith intact, nor one idol in its place. All that is consecrated as praiseworthy in the prevailing order in Colombia will be examined and revised. We will preserve only that which is oriented toward the revolution."[168]

There are two important points to take away from his claims here. The first is that we read echoes from his 1952 essay "The Morality of Fear" and a testimony that he repeats in subsequent essays. Arango witnesses a people in crisis amid a dark reality of violence, oppression, and death. He points to the problematic of human beings who are resigned to injustice and the passive acceptance of externally imposed beliefs, values, and interests. In this way, he seeks to discredit the already existing order: by illuminating both its mechanisms of oppression and the people's relinquishment of power. This discrediting movement intensifies in his 1960s essays as we will see. Secondly, the mission of the *nadaístas* and the mission they task the people with is destructive, critical, and constructive. These are three interrelated movements, though the critical dimension (like Freire's praxis) continues to operate and guide/inform the destructive and constructive movements. Both reflection and action are needed in Arango's spiritual reconstruction and socio-cultural revolution. As Fromm notes, "most people are a blend of necrophilous and biophilous tendencies, and the conflict between the two is often the source of a productive development."[169] In critically examining and evaluating the already established "idols" (beliefs and values), one chooses to either reject (destroy its influence) or accept what will be useful to the revolutionary process of creating a new culture, future, and spirit

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[167] Gonzalo Arango, *Primer manifiesto*, 51.

[168] Ibid. 52.

[169] Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974, 330, Footnote 3.

(generative). Choosing one's future as a liberatory and new future taking greater shape through one's own self-determined actions constitutes a deeply constructive (and imaginative) process.

In the "Atomic Sermon" (1964), part exhortation and part prose poetry, Arango stresses the movement's devotion to life and liberation. *Nadaísmo* "is a liberation and at the same time an affiliation to Life," where Life and liberation receive ever greater fullness and development upon the death of old ways being as each individual moves toward new possibilities of being.[170] All of this is realized in "a Reconstructive Revolution within oneself, and in one's relations with the world."[171] There is a dynamic creativity at work in this process of liberation. Rather than choosing among accepted modes of conduct and manners of living, one is free to create and experiment with new possibilities of engaging with the world and others. "*Rise up!*," Arango urges, "*grow under the sun / bless this world / live in the plenitude of awareness / fulfill the appetites of desire / realize the vital impulses of our being*."[172] In a style that conveys speaking directly to his audience, as would a preacher on his pulpit, Arango's sense of life is one clearly connecting to bodily existence, to affective and sensuous living. New modes of living and being would originate in an aesthetic level of experience, in one's appetites, desires, and impulses. What is further indicated here is that life is meant to be lived in its fullness, with a palpable and engaged awareness of our inner life and experience and the world around us. It is in this essay that Arango claims a different sense of immortality than one finds in religion and Platonic heritages. The metaphysical and the physical are no longer separated, nor are the aesthetic and ethical. Everything merges in life and human living. This revolution he advocates is both

[170] Arango, "El Sermón," 42.

[171] Ibid. 42.

[172] Ibid. 42, 43.

"humble and proud," based not on conquering the world or others, but to conquer oneself and make full use of one's own inherent power "through a heightened spiritual sense, a sense that unifies our earthly and eternal being."[173] Here the most sacred human value becomes the dignity of one's body,[174] one's embodiedness in the world (not one's soul in an afterlife). The *nadaísta* revolution means conquering oneself and one's own life so that neither remains the inscribable property of dominant powers. Additionally, the body is re-valued and becomes a site of ethical import.

Recalling Vallega's point that for the oppressed whether imposed upon by the center or internally by Latin American oligarchs[175] the colonizing power takes over their lives and co-opts their desires such that human desire and action functions for the system, serving to sustain and preserve established power within the system.[176] For this reason, Arango advocates a uselessness, for example, a useless subjectivity; that is, being useless to the established system and the preservation of its power. He warns "do not recognize the power of the powerful," "there is an indestructible power in you," thus, "*Practice as universal truth the truth of your life / Do not follow the flags of stupid political parties / do not govern your life by creeds that a few swine, who do not believe in anything, fabricate*" for there is an "oppressed god inside of you," "free your god," and "liberate your energy."[177] This is the immortal in us. It is that inherent power that comes from our essential humanness: to choose, to create, to enjoy life with full awareness. Arango's insights are not only aimed at the people of Colombia, but as we see in his essays, he is

[173] Ibid. 42-43.

[174] Ibid. 43.

[175] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 61.

[176] Ibid. 71.

[177] Arango, "El Sermón atómico," 43. Emphasis in original.

speaking to the human condition in general. Human beings have this inherent power, a small "god" inside ourselves, but such power has become lost and oppressed in the prefabricated patterns of civilization: rules, norms, laws, definitions, and conceptions from without, not arising from the root of one's own spirit, one's own life sensibility. For Arango, we live in a "criminal Civilization," where if necessary one must convert the terror "into an ethic of salvation," into what must become the beauty of an explosion in all the dimensions of the human spirit and physical life.[178] Further, that one must embrace the terrifying opportunity and necessity of a total responsibility: "Every fiber of your being is responsible for the destiny of the world... infinite power to choose the world that you dream, in that world in which you aspire to live...It is in your hands to choose your destiny."[179] It is also in this way, as poet-revolutionaries, we ensure the continued relevance of Life and Freedom in what Arango sees is a world of oppression and death.

In spite of the dark reality Arango calls attention to in some of his essays, life for him, remains a "Glorious Human Adventure" that is beautiful, violent, fearful, humorous, disappointing, and exciting.[180] His *nadaísta* philosophy is not about creating utopia or world peace, but rather finding the strength to endure the difficult, to overcome the unjust, and to take hold of our power to choose and create new ways of living in the world, and making it more livable for ourselves. For then one can be proud "that each of your actions is responsible for the earth and the sky...you will decide with your will, you will choose with your freedom...the power

[178] Ibid. 44.

[179] Ibid. 44.

[180] Ibid. 42.

to be the conscience of life" and "to give an opportunity to infinite human possibilities."[181] In other words, one must choose to liberate him or herself by taking responsibility and remaining always sensuously, emotionally, and intelligently attuned to the world. In short, it is a genuine commitment to life. For Arango, without that commitment one is simply surviving life as a being functioning for the power of the powerful, but not living it as a free spirit, as a poet-revolutionary. Yet, a commitment to life also means an awareness of that which is integral to life: death, and recognize that our death is an inescapable end. But it is in the awareness that our life also includes our death that Arango further relates to a sense of immortality. He recommends we "surrender to *living mortally*, in body and soul...I call that passion for living and dying immortality."[182] Therefore, life does not include an eternal soul, the desire to transcend time and space, the persistence of our subjectivities in God, or any other-than-earthly fates. To live means to live with one's mortality, which makes it all the more vital that each person lives fully and freely. As such, one "is only alive if you are aware, if you are free, if you give the land you inherited a wonderful meaning."[183] Life, then, is more than a fundamental element in Arango's philosophy. It is constitutes the foundation of his *nadaísta* liberation philosophy and to the *nadaísta* aesthetic, as well as being an orienting principle for his aesthetics of liberation.

In one of Arango's most beautiful and darkly humorous passages from "The Aesthetic Rebellion," which is worth quoting at length, he declares:

> And in terms of the aesthetic, do not torment yourself over that futility, do not make aesthetics a pain in the stomach. The world is beautiful and marvelous once again, maybe for the last time, and only our life is new under the sun. Go down through the gorges to the chasms of beauty, and ascend through all those dreams to the other side of reality.

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[181] Ibid. 44.

[182] Ibid. 45. Emphasis in original.

[183] Ibid. 44.

> You will never find more than yourself and your eternal disenchantment, but be drunk, be amazed, be crazy about being alive, and when death arrives, give it a kick in the rear: that kick is our aesthetic.[184]

The *nadaístas* refrained from defining aesthetics and from enumerating formal descriptions for the *nadaísta* aesthetic. For Arango, such a move to systematize and enforce meaning would run contrary to *Nadaísmo*'s ethos of creativity, spontaneity, individuality, freedom, and its deliberately anti-systematic thought. Arango rejects the temptation to introduce a new set of constraints through his philosophy, whether aesthetic or moral. Thus, Arango opts for a more playful than systematic thought with loose and lyrical prescriptions rather than sets of rigid and formal principles. As we see in the above passage, he offers a playful and humorous definition of the *nadaísta* aesthetic. A reading and re-readings of it demonstrate that it perpetually resists the static position in which explicitness and precision would place it. The definition and the *nadaísta* aesthetic remain ambiguous and necessarily playful, and thus, remain open, dynamic, and fertile for, and inclusive of, meaning. Lastly, one could delve into dreams and idealisms, but when inevitably returning to and being confronted with reality, what awaits is always you and your eternal disenchantment. Our illusions are dreams that keep us asleep and unaware, but upon awakening from those dreams you are always still there in a world that is dark and beautiful, and still distant from the images of our illusions. Yet, the *nadaísta* aesthetic is the constant commitment and recommitment to life, to our embodied existence as sensuous and affective beings in a world that we can choose to imbue with new beauty. The aesthetic, the kick at death, is precisely a passion for mortal life, for our lives which will exist only once and have never existed before, and at one inevitable point, will cease to exist. If one is not passionate about life and living, then one is already dead.

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[184] Gonzalo Arango, "La rebelión estética," 26.

Nadaísmo: At the End

It is not merely Life as a general category that is crucial to the *nadaísta* liberation philosophy, but also the tangible and daily fact of human lives, their specific and distinct existences. Arango points to the root (the human) of each life as the potential for choosing a radical creativity: a reconstructive revolution of the self that is based on a critical consciousness or awakened spirit who shares in re-shaping and re-forming the established system of beliefs and values in which she had partaken. This creative and life-affirming project is also a liberatory one. In choosing to be a poet-revolutionary, one chooses to write a new self into being. Life continues to occupy a central role in Arango's liberation philosophy in the post-*Nadaísmo*. However, as I will show, his conception of life becomes broader and his notion of liberation more fellowship oriented. In the late 1960s, Arango becomes more spiritual and after his official break with the movement he founded, his work changes and diverges in significant ways. In the 1970s, he writes his last three books of poetry, in which much philosophy, spirituality, and social-political criticism can be found. It is in large part these works of poetry that I will turn to in chapter four, where I put Arango's late work in conversation with the work of figures from the theology of liberation movement.

What I have demonstrated in this chapter is that contrary to Vallega's assertion that there has yet to be an aesthetics of liberation, Gonzalo Arango was already writing such a discourse in mid-20th century. Additionally, I have shown that Arango contributes a seventh, unacknowledged current to the history of the philosophy of liberation movement and to the tradition of philosophies of liberation. In chapter four I will continue the discussion of his aesthetic current in the context of his post-*Nadaísmo* period. In each chapter, which is a reflection of my overall project, I situate the neglected work of Arango within different and

wider circles of conversation. This is to show that not only does Arango's work reach the substance of these conversations, but his work is responding to the same concerns of identity or selfhood, the concrete reality of oppression, and the imperative of human liberation. Additionally, I have sought, through Arango's work, to reveal the deeper connections among various works separated by region, time, and intellectual tradition, but works in whose "rubbing together" one locates a common spirit and aim, as well as demonstrating the greater interconnectivity among these philosophical projects. The narrow intellectual history of the PoL movement and the partitions drawn up between philosophy of liberation and liberation theology, only serve to displace and exclude thinkers committed to the project of human liberation (internal and external liberation), as well as serving to fragment the broader history of figures in and the contemporary burgeoning landscape of Latin American philosophy.

CHAPTER IV

POST-*NADAÍSMO* AND THE THEOLOGICAL TURN

I. Goodbye to *Nadaísmo*

Armando Romero, Colombian poet and once a member of the *nadaístas*, notes a final and decisive break between Gonzalo Arango and the *nadaístas*. In the late 1960s, the *Nadaísmo* movement received an influx of new writers, but such an influx only made the movement "more fractious, more elusive, and to a certain extent, more abstract."[185] Amid this increasingly fractious environment, in 1968 Arango attends a christening of the National Army's training ship, the Glory. One of the honored guests is liberal president Carlos Lleras Restrepo, whom Arango praises at the event. Both his praises of the president and his attendance at the event incited a fury among his fellow *nadaístas*. Romero writes that "the reaction of the *nadaístas* was violent at the verbal level, exchanging strong letters of disapproval."[186] Eduardo Escobar, poet and prominent figure of *Nadaísmo*, recalls of the break: "one could not believe that it was the same man...with whom we had mimeographed until sunrise the manifesto of protest directed against the same president."[187] Arango's attendance was seen as treasonous to the movement's principles. In 1969, Arango publishes "Between '*nadaísmo*-yes' and '*nadaísmo*-no'" in *Cromos* as a response to the public condemnations by his friends. "I will not attempt a defense" he writes,

> of the *nadaísta* honor, which according to you, I threw overboard in my speech from the sailboat *Gloria*...where necessary, we mutually give ourselves a healthy knockdown in

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[185] Romero, *El Nadaísmo colombiano,* 65.

[186] Ibid. 66.

[187] Escobar, *Gonzalo Arango*, 53.

> the mud of our contradictions, so we do not fall into the capital sin of converting *nadaísmo* into an intellectual dogmatism...The experience I have in the fight is that to combat that which is inhuman of society, you do not have to be at the margin, nor facing it from the other side, but insert yourself into it...What I do find ambiguous and suspicious in your revolutionary attitude is that they coincide with the most negative and reactionary "ideals" of the opposition.[188]

This marked a turning point in Arango's thought and in his relation to the *Nadaísmo* movement, although he continued to be a subversive writer. In the above fragments, the implication is that the movement had become dogmatic, vacillating between a notion of the pure ideals of the revolution and a reactionary negativity against anything outside of that. Arango now looked for a middle position in which he retained the original spirit of *Nadaísmo* as the free development of life and the human being, but also looking beyond the borders *Nadaísmo* had built around itself over the years. In other words, he is looking for a middle-ground between *Nadaísmo*-yes and no *Nadaísmo* at all. It is at this stage that Arango begins to question the value of solely critiquing, and transforming, the system from the margins and instead argues for the value of a supplemental route: that of transforming the system by inserting, not integrating, oneself into it.

The following year, in 1970 with Lleras Restrepo's liberal presidency coming to an end, Arango backs conservative party candidate Belisario Betancur who ultimately loses to fellow conservative candidate Misael Pastrana. This marked the end of Arango's public venture into politics and his attempts to transform the system from within. That same year, Arango and some of his fellow *nadaístas*, such as Eduardo Escobar and Jaime Jaramillo Escobar, collaborated one last time on the magazine *Nadaísmo 70*, which put out eight issues over 1970 and 1971. However, from 1971 on, "*Nadaísmo* had entered into hibernation."[189] In a 1972 letter to Eduardo Escobar, Arango comments that "we no longer have to protest nor rebel against society, the

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[188] Gonzalo Arango, "Entre 'nadaísmo-sí' y 'nadaísmo-no'," *Última página* (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2000), 294-95, 297, 300. Emphasis in original.

[189] Romero, *El Nadaísmo colombiano,* 67.

government, the systems: we must leave them. If one keeps fighting them, then ultimately one is in them."[190] Here is another shift in the evolution of Arango's thought: from fighting the system at the margins to fighting the system from within and then leaving society and the government completely otherwise one risks remaining confined within a control and dependency system. The new society Arango had called for in his *nadaísta* writings failed to manifest and to him *Nadaísmo* had become dogmatic, reactionary, and a victim of its own mythology. In short, *Nadaísmo* had become another system of control, its members exhibiting the attitude and tactics of the opposition. Arango confesses to developing a "dark image of human culture: a civilization of comfortable dead."[191] In other words, a human culture whose life and desires are not their own, who have given to resignation instead of to a passion for self-determination, and who have turned away from a radical responsibility and creativity to remain in familiar patterns and old ways of thinking and being. In this same letter Arango warns that to try to be something in particular is to immediately limit oneself and when looking for something with interest one has already lost it.[192] Both are merely a fraction of reality and thought and hence foreclose exploration of the full possibilities of life and being. Instead, "always be nothing to be everything."[193] In other words, relinquish the desire to being someone or something specific. Do not force an identity or goal(s) on oneself and one's life since doing so inhibits a more spontaneous and radically free self-development and closes the individual to the multitude of life possibilities that constantly emerge from each free action.

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[190] Gonzalo Arango, "Carta a Eduardo Escobar," *Gonzaloarango.com*. https://www.gonzaloarango.com/ideas/cartaeduardo.html.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Ibid.

II. The Theological Turn

In one of Arango's last *avisos* (reminders) for Eduardo Escobar, he warns that instruments and things should only be used as means of liberation, not as links that chain us to the system.[194] The above claim is one prelude to what became more intensely expressed in Arango's 1970s writings: anti-capitalist sentiment and near-apocalyptic warnings about the rise and allure of consumer materialism. Although Arango's post-*Nadaísmo* period is his shortest writing period compared to more than a decade of prolific *nadaísta* writings, it is a vital resource of the author's philosophic thought. His post-*Nadaísmo* period demonstrates a significant shift and maturation in Arango's own philosophy, which we get chiefly through his last works of poetry, and in which he discusses a diversity of topics from politics to formal education, from sex to love, violence and peace, qualities of a good life, and the art of being. Yet, this is the most neglected and under-referenced stage of his career. In Colombian newspapers, historical works, and academic articles to this day, Arango is almost exclusively discussed in connection to *Nadaísmo*.

From the period of 1972 until Arango's death in 1976, the majority of his philosophical thought is expressed through his last three works of poetry: *Providencia* (1972), *Fuego en el altar* (1974), and *Adangelios*, published posthumously in 1985. During Arango's *nadaísta* period, the emphases were on breaking from the established order, reclaiming one's individual power, and engaging in a process of self and world re-creation in radically new and different ways. His aesthetics was predicated on an individualism positioned against the oppression and imposition of a social system bloated with inherited values and norms. For Arango, this established order was already a denial of human freedom, liberation, and creativity. For this

[194] Ibid.

reason, Arango leaves his notion of aesthetics undefined and broad. "So as not to limit the aspirations for the liberation of the human being, Nadaísmo has refrained from formulating an aesthetic, from introducing a new system of moral constraints on the spirit, and new prescriptive schemes on the arts."[195] To provide a definition or criteria for the aesthetic is to inhibit and put constraints on the term, but also on the power others have to constitute the term through their own reflections and actions. Broadly, aesthetics becomes subversive thought and action: an aesthetics of liberation. A *nadaísta* aesthetics as human experience, now oriented by Arango's assertions of systematic domination and human oppression, becomes the experience of the process of liberating oneself through rejection and radical creativity.

By contrast, Arango's post-*nadaísta* thought is mediated by his turn toward God and the values cemented in Christian doctrine. However, Arango remained deeply critical of organized religion, particularly Christianity, which he believed fostered an epistemic and moral dependency among the people. Thus, although Arango makes a theological turn, it is not a turn toward organized religion or doctrine. He remains critical of religious orthodoxy, while integrating traditional moral values into his liberation philosophy. Love, fellowship, faith, and communication, for example, become instruments of our liberation from sin and the necessary means through which we increase our intimacy with each other, nature, and God. Distancing himself from the individualism and nihilism of *Nadaísmo*, we see in Arango's later work an overt shift to a community of relations with shared values and pursuits: the human-human relation which Arango believes must be mediated by love and communication; the human-God relation which he argues must be cultivated through faith and a rejection of structural and personal sin; and our relation to *la tierra* (the earth), which Arango believes should be a sacred bond since *la tierra* is both our only dwelling and the indwelling of God. Arango's *nadaísta*

[195] Arango, "La rebelión estética," 24.

writings privilege the individual and individuality since the main premise of his liberation philosophy is that the Established Order represses individual freedom, development, and creativity. Thus in 1966, he asserts that "in the "field of liberty and creation: Every man for himself!"[196] By contrast, his post-*Nadaísmo* poetics reveal a markedly different tone and message: our mission is to be "alarm clocks of love among humans;" our "path is only and one / unite all the world;" in reality we can "discover our soul in the green of the leaf / the hop of the toad;" and finally, that we must "Live for Christ with humility / and sacrifice: fertile sources / of God in man."[197] Therefore, we see that Arango's focus is not merely relations, but more so, interrelations and the need for a human community and spiritual unity that are coextensive with physical nature (a life community without the rigid hierarchy of species). Arango keeps to his 1966 pronouncement: "Poetry always was, and it is also today, Life and Freedom. There is no other mission for the poet: to ensure the continued relevance of those two words in the world of oppression and death."[198] Arango's last three works of poetry are oriented toward this task and toward those who are poor, lost, and oppressed. His poetry reveals a contemplation of God and God's relation to Its living creations; for "God is life blowing in the harmony / of being and the infinite."[199] Arango's poetry is a call for a human assembly under the auspices of faith, love, and hope. It is a call for the contemplation of this connection between God and life, the Divine and the profane, being and infinitude.

Arango's pronouncements evoke the words of the Peruvian philosopher and theologian, Gustavo Gutiérrez, who in 1999 writes, "the theology of liberation, like any theology is

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[196] Ibid. 25.

[197] Gonzalo Arango, *Todo es mio en el sentido en que nada me pertenece* (Santa fe de Bogotá: Plaza y Janes, 1991), 19, 20, 35, 98.

[198] Gonzalo Arango, "Poesía y terror," 52.

[199] Arango, "Dios es vida," *Todo es mio*, 25-26. Translated as "God is Life."

about...God and God's love...and its orientation towards the proclamation of the God of life in a reality characterized by the premature and unjust death of many people."[200] Gutiérrez asserts that the gift and acceptance of God's love brings a profound happiness to those who follow the way and the conduct of Jesus Christ.[201] He continues, "to communicate this happiness is to evangelise."[202] Arango's last works of poetry are such an attempt: an urgent reminder that the *hodos* (the way and conduct) of Christ is salvation;[203] that human beings are of God's love; and to accept God's love and give such a love to ourselves and others. For Gutiérrez, to evangelize is to issue a universal call for community and solidarity in a lived and practiced faith. It is a turn toward others and "the denial of the retreat into ourselves."[204] The retreat into ourselves and for ourselves is what Arango condemns as solitude and ego. In his poem "Incommunication," Arango cautions that "In distant parts we are always alone / closed off / awaiting the road that does not come / blocked by the solitude."[205] His emphasis is on the importance of not only communication with one another, but more so, the intimacy of communion. At a distance one is not able to view others as neighbors, as worthy of love, and one's own solitude becomes an infertile space for fellowship to grow.

However, I hesitate to call Arango's post-*Nadaísmo* writings, his theological turn, works of liberation theology. He is a poet and a philosopher, whose entire body of work reveals a

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[200] Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 19.

[201] Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content," 32.

[202] Ibid. 32.

[203] Ibid. 29-30.

[204] Ibid. 33.

[205] Arango, "Incomunicación," *Todo es mio*, 30. Translated as "Incommunication."

lifelong commitment to the process of liberation and the practice of freedom. Arango's has always been a liberation philosophy, whose final commitments included theistic and spiritual beliefs. He does not evangelize for the Church or Christianity, but for the people's salvation through God's love and Christ's *hodos*. Arango retained his aversion and mistrust of the Church, of organized religion, and religious officials. His post-*Nadaísmo* writings reflect and advocate this abiding rejection of the Church. For Arango, the institution of religion, its structures and methods of dissemination, are only misguided and oppressive attempts to create control, order, and obedience among the people. In "Liberate Yourself," he advocates "Get out of Christian concepts.../ leap toward your only God: / the Light."[206] In "Communication with God," readers are told "to communicate with heaven / you need not go to churches.../ Communication with God is a flower / the transitory star / the earthworm / the look of love of a man / and of his woman."[207] Although Arango admits of metaphysical substance such as soul, spirit, and God, any notion of an afterlife or existence beyond the physical world and universe, is anathema to him. And although Arango does admit of certain terminology found in Christianity, he uses terms like God, Holy Spirit, and heaven, it solely within the context of his own purposes and beliefs. It is within the context of liberation (including liberation from the Church) and with the belief that the physical universe is our only place of dwelling. In other words, while Arango makes use of Christian terminology, he does in fact "get out of Christian concepts," in the sense of rejecting Christian conceptions of God, heaven, and the Holy Spirit. He seeks to empty these concepts of their established doctrinal meaning and re-purpose them in his philosophy. Much like Arango's early writings, the exact nature of his beliefs can be difficult to discern. He makes

[206] Ibid. 20. "Libérate," translated as "Liberate Yourself."

[207] Ibid. 54. "Comunicación con Dios," translated as "Communication with God."

little and ambiguous use of labels and categories, without fitting neatly into any of them. Fellow *nadaísta*, Jotamario Arbeláez, comments on the journey Arango took from the early days of his "impious anarchism" to his "lashing mysticism."[208] Armando Romero discusses the Arango of the 1970s as tending towards a kind of "mysticism, packed with political messianism and spiritual salvationism."[209] Whether we talk of Arango's work in terms of spiritualism, mysticism, theism, or even pantheism or panentheism, it is clear that for Arango, the established institutions and structures (e.g. doctrine and churches), figures (e.g. priest, nuns), rituals and practices (e.g. baptism, the Eucharist, praying in church), and artifacts (e.g. rosary, religious sculptures) of Christianity are entirely unnecessary for cultivating an intimacy with God and Christ. In fact, what we see in Arango's post-*Nadaísmo* work is a denunciation of such traditions and the emergence of a people's faith-based praxis disengaged from the established order of society and civilization, and the Church.

III. The Return of the Poet and Re-Emergence of Rejection

Language of the Poet

Gonzalo Arango's last three works of poetry, *Providencia*, *Fuego en el Altar*, and *Adangelios*, constitute more than two-hundred pages of poetry. The poet-philosopher returns with a new language in these pages that expresses, or rather preaches, faith, hope, and love for the sake of life and liberation. The issue of language in liberationist discourses, particularly liberation theology, is not a minor one, but instead one of understandable concern and relevance

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[208] Jotamario Arbeláez, "Los milagros del profeta," *El Tiempo*, October 2, 2002, https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-1309040.

[209] Armando Romero, *El Nadaísmo colombiano,* 67.

to the task of liberation. Gutiérrez notes that "the theology of liberation tries—in ecclesial communion—to be a language about God. It is an attempt to make present in this world of oppression, injustice and death, the Word of life."[210] Although Arango attempts this language about God without the ecclesial commitments, one can see that Arango preserves the invisible reality of ecclesial communion in his work, though divested of its doctrinal meaning. That is, "the communion of each human being with the Father through Christ in the holy spirit, and with others who are fellow sharers in the divine nature, in the passion of Christ, in the same faith, in the same spirit."[211] Thus, Arango's utopic vision of a life community is similar to a Kingdom of Heaven in which each individual is gathered together into a spiritual unity with God, through the *hodos* of Christ, and for the purposes of liberation and salvation. The latter must be understood as continual processes advanced only through an acceptance of God's love and the path laid out by Christ. However, finding the language to talk about God and a language that is responsive to the needs of the many who suffer is a challenge for liberationist philosophers. Gutiérrez notes this challenge and proposes the need for two languages, neither being sufficient to the task by itself. In effect, each language is really a half in the total discourse needed on God and God's love, and on human suffering and hope. He writes that "these two languages try to communicate the gift of the Kingdom of God...This is the heart of the message that we go on rediscovering from our own reality...It is this that brings us together as a community."[212] Gutiérrez posits a language of contemplation and a language of prophecy. The language of contemplation

[210] Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content," 37.

[211] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion," The Holy See, last modified May 1992, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communionis-notio_en.html.

[212] Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content," 37.

expresses that everything begins with and from God's love, while the language of prophecy denounces the situation and causes of injustice in all its forms.[213] Let us take a look at passages from Arango's own work to note the presence of both languages.

> We are oppressed without freedom
> we are lost without a way;
> we are alone without friendship
> we are disoriented without a destiny.
> …
> Brothers: look, look,
> there is a light that shines more brightly than gold;
> it is pure love, happiness,
> it is Jesus who guides us toward treasure.[214]

> Christian parties?
> Christ does not need to be adorned with banners,
> politicized, converted into a powerful
> conqueror of empires…
> Christ is truth, freedom, and
> justice…
> Live Christ with humility and
> sacrifice: fertilizing sources
> of God in man.[215]

> We become ill from ambitions,
> from obsessions: utility and
> dogmatism, tyranny and morality,
> religion and crime. They tear everything apart.
> Capitalism, communism: slavery
> entitled to the exploitation of man.[216]

> You descend to the Christ of the old
> idolatrous altars to the living tabernacle

[213] Ibid. 36.

[214] Arango, "Fuego en el altar," in *Todo es mio*, 73. Translated as "Fire on the Altar."

[215] Arango, "Ni Secta ni bandera," in *Todo es mio*, 98. Translated as "Neither Sect nor Banner."

[216] Arango, "Los ángeles del infierno," in *Todo es mio*, 108-09. Translated as "The Angels of Hell."

> of the Holy Spirit which is the soul
> of man.
> You light the lamp of pure inner fire.
> Christ does not demand golden luxuries,
> foolish rites, or tinseled ceremonies.
> Communication with Christ is in
> love, awareness of being in God.
> The shortest way to reach
> Christ, hear it well, is to be Christ
> in oneself. Because man is who he adores,
> according to his faith.[217]

In his post-*Nadaísmo* work, one sees the focus on being in communion with God through living as Christ had lived, for example, with love, humility, sacrifice, the overcoming of temptations, and faith. In this way, one invokes the Christ and God within their own being. Communication with God and Christ must begin with and in love. If Christ adores all human beings, and if one is to be as Christ, then one must also adore all fellow human beings. That there is no other way, but this path of love is a recurring theme in Arango's post-*Nadaísmo* poetry. However, his philosophy would not be complete without the critiques that have come to characterize his body of work. He points to the misguided attempts at wrapping Christ in the banner of a particular denomination, political ideology, or socio-economic conquest. Arango emphasizes the problem of integrating consumer materialism into one's faith and conflating the visible reality of communion (baptism, the Eucharist, and other rituals and practices) with authentic expressions of faith. His point here is that money, gold, ornamentation, rites, are unnecessary (even misplaced) expressions of faith and unnecessary (even self-defeating) means of gaining intimacy with God. Arango critiques the old idolatrous ways of conceiving faith: that which is properly done in a 'house' of God and at the feet of a sculpture of Christ. Instead, he proposes a faith that celebrates the Holy Spirit as that which is suffused in human life and being. Religion is put on a

[217] Arango, Descended al Cristo," in *Todo es mio*, 113. Translated as "Descend to Christ."

par with criminality, and thus, identified as an injustice. Similarly, and echoing his *nadaísta* days, Arango puts morality on a par with tyranny, and thus, with oppression. Communism and capitalism are used as examples of exploitative enterprises, and as economic and ideological mechanisms of oppression that merely keep people in their existing conditions and exploit their desire for relief and freedom. As in Arango's early *nadaísta* writings, he calls attention to situations of injustice and instruments of oppression. Yet, his philosophy is one of hope as well. Though his early message was one of destruction (of the Established Order) and recreation of a new order, his final message is one of constructing an intimacy with God, Christ, and all God's creatures as what is and should be the natural order. If as Gutiérrez writes, "a prophetic and mystical language about God is being born in these lands of exploitation and hope," then perhaps the words of a poet-philosopher can be counted among this.[218]

The philosopher and theologian, Rubem A. Alves, has pointed to a similar difficulty in trying to find the appropriate language for a discourse on God and liberation. He writes, "Christians committed to the historical liberation of man have, for a long time, been aware of the conflict between their ultimate concern and the language which they used to speak."[219] In other words, Alves highlights the incompatibility between a Christian's concern for human liberation and the old doctrinal language Christians are taught to speak. For Alves, the language of faith, as it has existed, has remained static and unchanging in comparison to the living and dynamic condition of the historical creatures with whom the language engages.[220] This results in a language incapable of remaining open and responsive to the changes and developments of

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[218] Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content," 36.

[219] Rubem A. Alves, *A Theology of Human Hope* (St. Meinrad: Abbey Press, 1972), 68-69.

[220] Ibid. 71.

history and people. Consequently, this language is unable to question its own place in the struggle and change and develop according to the needs of the time. In effect, it seeks to freeze history with itself and to represent history in its own image, the image of the old language. Instead, Alves opines, the language of faith must match the spirit of faith in it openness to history, its acceptance of life, death, and resurrection.[221] "The life of the language of faith, therefore, depends on its ability to negate itself, to change, to die in order to gain a new life."[222] Alves's points bring to mind the concerns of liberation philosopher, Cerutti-Guldberg. As discussed in chapter two, Cerutti-Guldberg emphasizes the need for a discourse on liberation that remains critical of its own language and formulations, and thus, is able to constantly renew itself and its "ethical engagement with the oppressed.[223] The implication of Cerutti-Guldberg's point is that it is not a matter of a new philosophy, but rather continuous reformulations and improvements upon existing discourses.

Alves is clear in positing the need for a new language and necessary death of old languages. When languages "remain frozen as the world moves ahead...they cease to be instruments of liberation and become structures of repression," and hence, recognizing the need for a new language and creating that new language become exercises of freedom.[224] More importantly, from this new language, a new community can arise.[225] This new language must be expressive of the spirit of the people. That is, a spirit which is committed to both God and to those in a situation of injustice. Therefore, the conflict between a language of faith and a concern

[221] Ibid. 71.

[222] Ibid. 71.

[223] Cerutti-Guldberg, "Actual Situation and Perspectives," 54, 56.

[224] Alves, *A Theology*, 72.

[225] Ibid. 70.

for human liberation must be resolved in a new language responsive to both. This conflict is represented by Alves as a conflict between the language of faith and the language of political humanism. Political humanism is an inherent critique of the language of faith to the extent that political humanism is necessarily grounded in the reality of 'man's historical situation. The language of faith fails to see human transcendence as a process that can occur in the here and now, on this earth and within history. Instead, this language sees transcendence (the realization of a different and better future, one grounded in the progressive movement toward freedom and liberation) as "beyond history," an end to be achieved in a metaphysical and ahistorical plane, an afterlife.[226] However, the language of political humanism recognizes that transcendence is "a reality in the midst of life" and it is a language "dominated by the passion and vision of human liberation."[227] The language of faith and the language of political humanism enter into a dialectical confrontation that "provides the occasion for the death and resurrection of both," or rather provides the occasion for their synthesis.[228]

The result of this synthesis, for Alves, is a language of the community of faith. A language whose nouns "do not refer to meta-historical objects… [but rather] they have the solidity, colors, smells, and shapes of earthly things...They speak about the sufferings, joys, and hopes of man. It is therefore a human language which rejects everything that does not refer to...man's world and hope of liberation."[229] Although it is not explicitly referenced, one can read in Alves's words a clear concern for aesthetic experience. This new language, the language of a community of faith, should be oriented and informed by sensory and affective experience. This is

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[226] Ibid. 29.

[227] Ibid. 29, 33-34.

[228] Ibid. 159.

[229] Ibid. 159-60.

because the project of liberation must unfold firmly within history, within this world, on this physical earth. It cannot be a meta-historical liberation that occurs beyond history and time, beyond the earth, beyond the human. For this implies that the human being, "an historical being," could not overcome suffering and injustice, could not contribute to the arrival of a new and better future, one in which the project of liberation takes shape in history and human action shapes that history anew. Instead, the human being becomes "the object of history," rather than the subject and creator of it, and thus, loses the power to transcend one's circumstances. She is "submerged into the world and therefore loses… [her] power to criticize and re-create it."[230] Thus, the language of the community of faith must grow from *lo cotidiano*, from the everyday sufferings and joys of people and from the sense experiences we have through our everyday engagement with the world around us.[231] Both the verbs and nouns of this language continuously emerge within "historical and earthly context and content" to speak about the "reality and possibility of human liberation, about the reality and possibility of freedom for life."[232] Freedom, life, liberation, the socio-historical condition of human beings, and the physical and earthly content and context of human existence is precisely the matter of Arango's post-*Nadaísmo* work.

While I do not understand Arango's late poetry as *the* language of the community of faith, his "theosophical" poetry is certainly a contribution to it. In both Gutiérrez's and Alves's work, language becomes an important issue in the struggle for liberation, particularly in a liberation theology. The language of/for liberation and the language of Christian faith must be

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[230] Ibid. 28. Previous two quotations can be found on same page.

[231] For more on *lo cotidiano*, see the work of María Teresa Dávila, who asserts it is "attention to daily experiences of living in the margins that highlight a people's approach to challenges, oppression, invisibility, and poverty through their cultural and religious strengths" from MT Dávila, "Catholic Hispanic Theology in the U.S.: Dimensiones De La Opción Preferencial Por Los Pobres En El Norte," *The Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings of the Sixty-Third Annual Convention*, (2008): 35.

[232] Alves, *A Theology*, 160.

reconciled and integrated in a new dynamic and open discourse on God and liberation. More importantly, such a language must engage with the realities of a people's everyday life. Gutiérrez proposes the language of contemplation and prophecy that preaches God's love and Christ's life and denounces human suffering and injustice. Alves proposes a language of the community of faith that springs from and speaks about the everyday joys, hope, and sufferings of a people. However, for Alves, this language must also speak about a path for the future; namely, the reality and possibility of liberation and life. This second function of the language Alves refers to as its "radically prophetic import" which expresses the revelation and power of God's love and will "as the presence of the future."[233] In Gutiérrez's work, one can see that the language of prophecy, in denouncing present injustices, points to an opening and the necessity for a different and better future.

The spirit of these languages suffuses Arango's poetry, its engagement with everyday challenges, such as the divisiveness and misguided ornamentation of organized religion. He highlights the challenges of the human condition, such as loneliness and isolation, as well as what he sees as our baser motivations: greed, ambition, and misbegotten ideals. Arango calls attention to situations of oppression and exploitation, as well as what he sees as the mechanisms of such oppression: political ideologies, economic imperialism, and organized religion, for example. Yet, his poetry remains hopeful and oriented toward a liberating project of the present. For Arango, the process of liberation must always be in the now. It must always be a task for the present, but for the sake of new possibilities for the future. He integrates a language of/for liberation with a language of faith that was never "frozen" nor was it ever a reproduction of the language of Christian orthodoxy and doctrine. The Bible, God, Christ—these concepts are not under the ownership of a particular religion in which the concepts become static, their usage

[233] Ibid. 161-62.

fixed by religious institutions. Instead, Arango deliberately takes these concepts from the Church and reclaims and re-purposes them for a people's liberation. Love, Faith, Hope—the provenance of these words are not in the history or structures of the Church but rather ever present gifts continuously open to the people, to those who breathe into them spirit, meaning, reflection and practice. The Bible, God, Christ, Love, Faith, and Hope are words that can only be made relevant and manifest in a people's strivings. Alves's charge that the language of faith is frozen and metahistorical is one that Arango escapes in his own work. Arango's language, the verbs and nouns, remain thoroughly historical and concerned with a transcendence, the human overcoming of one's oppressive circumstances, that takes place amidst everyday living. His work shows a devotion to the earthly, to the aesthetic, to a varied and vital human existence in the fullness of creativity, love, freedom, the colors, shapes, and smells of this world.

Rejection of Sin

In Arango's early work, the process of liberation entailed a rejection of the Established Order and a radical re-evaluation of inherited concepts and beliefs. In the *Primer Manifesto* of the *Nadaísmo* movement, Arango advises that one preserve only that which will be useful to the revolution and the foundations of a new society. In other words, we were to reject all that failed to be useful for these purposes. In Arango's theosophical writings, the project of liberation and salvation is sustained through the preservation and practice of God's love and Christ's teachings. In other words, we are to reject all that which opposes or impedes this process. For this reason, sin features prominently in Arango's theosophical poetry. We can look to one poem in particular, "The Train Toward God," which offers two pages of contemplative and prophetic discourse on God and the path to salvation/liberation. In this poem, the train can be understood represent

human life as Arango confirms in the opening line of the poem, which reads “life is like a train with stations.”[234] The route of the train—the history of its path and its present course—is the interconnected and winding journey our lives take. The ultimate destination is God. However, a reading of this metaphorical poem must not belie the fact that the tracks of the train never veer away from life. Again, Arango’s is not a meta-historical or a meta-worldly project. Any communion with God occurs in life, not beyond it. The route and destination remain within history and world, and within a people.

The dangers to this journey are Sin in its many forms and for which Arango gives a (non-exhaustive) list of names. He writes, “The train *stations* are the *temptations* / and they have the names of sins: / station egoism, power, money, hate, deceit / exploitation, violence, vengeance, lust / greed, luxury, drugs, vanity.”[235] A task of the journey, for all those on the train (for all those in life), is the rejection of these sins. More specifically, the journey is not about an absence of sin in one’s life, but rather the continuous rejection of it. In other words, it is not about the absence of sin, but the presence of this rejection, this constant overcoming of the call of temptation that is inside of us. As the above passage asserts, Sin is a feature of life that we all encounter and which confronts us at each turn. The implicit question of the poem is whether one permanently leaves the train toward God and chooses to languish at one temptation or another. Does one leave the path and turn toward sin instead? It is a choice, since “The train stops at each station so / those passengers who want to / can freely disembark” and those who remain at one station or another “lose the train / they are led astray enraptured by corrupting / delights...to the

[234] Arango, “El tren hacia Dios,” in *Todo es mio*, 101. Translated as “The Train Toward God.”

[235] Ibid. 101. Emphasis in original.

ruin of the soul."[236] The focus of this poem is on personal sin, and like original sin, liberation from personal sin is a "progressive and historical liberation...a liberation of the sinful person as an active being in history," as Ellacuría writes.[237] Taking responsibility for one's life and liberation allows the passengers on the train, those who remain, to increase their own freedom of choice and development. The liberative power of rejecting sin, of overcoming temptation, correspondingly leaves more freedom for life and greater possibilities for the future. Thus, for Arango, liberating oneself from sin "will win the horizons of hope… [will win] the peace, the humbleness / the plenitude of God."[238] As Arango equates sin with "death" and "non-being," so does he equate liberation from sin as freedom for living and being more fully in the plenitude of God, Nature, and the World.

If even the smallest and most individual personal sins can have repercussions on the configuration of history and social structures, as Ellacuría's posits,[239] then we can understand Arango's focus on personal sin as having broader implications for historical (social) sin. The personal sins of Arango's poem—money, power, greed, violence, exploitation, hate, and so on—are both the effects and continued causes of social sin. Historical, or social, sin points to the systemic and structural injustices that conceal God's truth and which attempt to "annul the fullness of life that God wants to communicate to humanity," as Ellacuría writes.[240] Both authors, and as Ellacuría notes of liberation theology, contemplate "God as the God of life...and

[236] Ibid. 101-02.

[237] Ignacio Ellacuría, *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael E. Lee (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 44.

[238] Arango," El tren hacia Dios," 102.

[239] Ellacuría, *Essays on History*, 44.

[240] Ibid. 44.

sin as an agent of death."[241] Thus, Arango notes in his poem that the struggle to overcome temptation, to reject sin, is a triumph over death.[242] However, Arango points to another sin, one referred to in his poem "Sun Planet" as the great sin of human beings. The great sin is not having enough reverence, respect, and care for this beautiful planet on which we live and walk each day. This earth, our earth, is "the stadium of the sun" that "comes to bathe every morning / in the rivers and seas of the / Amazonian and Pacific earth."[243] Compared to Arango's early work, what is more fully developed in his theosophical poetry is an ethic of care for the earth itself and for nature, for all God's creatures, not just the human.

IV. An Aesthetics of Liberation: Creativity and Bodily Living

A concern for nature, for not just human life, but Life in all its forms, while given fuller expression in Arango's late writings, still fails to be developed into a more specific and systematic environmental ethic. Rather than being anthropocentrically validated (a care for the environment helps ensures our own survival), his proposed ethic of care is motivated by a love and respect for all God's creations. This ethic of care receives validation through the Divine. For Arango, a love and care for nature necessarily follows from one's love and awe for God. If one loves God, then one must practice and direct that love for all the forms of life God has created on this planet. This ethic of care for nature can be seen in the work of both past and contemporary liberation theologists as well. Gustavo Gutiérrez writes that perspectives on social solidarity must be enlarged to include "a respectful bond with nature...No one can escape the task of

[241] Ibid. 45.

[242] Arango," El tren hacia Dios," 102.

[243] Arango, "Planeta del Sol," in *Todo es mio*, 22. Translated as "Planet of the Sun."

avoiding the destruction of our environment," but that particular regions must avoid becoming the "rubbish tip" of industrialized countries.[244] In other words, social solidarity includes fostering and practicing a care for nature, but also ensuring that one's own land is not further polluted by the practices and interests of industrialized nations. Daniel Castillo, working within the traditions of liberation theology and environmental ethics, and engaging with the work of Gutiérrez, calls for integral ecology as a concept that should be included in liberationist discourses. That is, in addition to a preferential option for the poor and oppressed, a preferential option for the earth should be included. Like Gutiérrez, Castillo does not see these two options as separate or mutually exclusive projects, but rather as interrelated demands whose account, that of an "eco-social crisis," must be taken up by liberation discourse.[245] Feminist liberation theologist Ivone Gebara posits "God as an ecological problem," meaning the imagery, beliefs, and thoughts attributed to God have become complicit, even culpable, in the violences we perpetrate on each other and the natural world.[246] Therefore, we also see in the work of Gebara a profoundly social dimension integrated into the call for ecological justice.

However, the parallels and differences between Rubem Alves's treatment of a concern for nature and Gonzalo Arango's are most fruitful for our discussion of both a liberationist concern for nature and aesthetic considerations in liberationist discourse. I identify two interrelated ideas in Alves's work that bridge aesthetic experience and human liberation: creativity and bodily existence. For Alves, the paramount human task is that of creating a new world, a new future. The creation of this new future "is thus part of the mutual pact of

[244] Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content," 35.

[245] Daniel P. Castillo, "Integral Ecology as a Liberationist Concept," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2016): 362-63. doi:10.1177/0040563916635781.

[246] Ivone Gebara, "A Reform that Includes Eco-Justice," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 (2016): 118-19. doi:10.1111/dial.12237.

faithfulness to the liberation of man that unites God and man."[247] The progressive use of freedom to ensure human liberation and the progressive humanization of a people fall within a natural and divinely given destiny: freedom used in opposition to oppression for the purpose of liberation, thereby humanizing the world, and creating a better future. One discovers new dimensions of her humanity through her own creative activity in the world, through the responsible use of her freedom aimed at transcending her own situation within history and transforming the world for others. To put this in Arango's terms, the process of humanization is a process of living according to the fullness of one's humanity. Discovering and reaching that fullness is the aim of humanization, and like Alves, Arango privileges the body as the vital medium through which the human being can experience herself, the world, and others. For Arango, "the authentic job is creation, / to create a sense of living... / It is the song of the body, / the action of the soul."[248] Note "living" rather than "to create a sense of life," where the emphasis is on human activity. Living is something we do. Therefore, the authentic human task is creating for ourselves a mode of living that reflects and is informed by our bodily and spiritual engagement with the world.

Alves extends the concept of humanization to physical nature, asserting that through human activity, through a mixing of our freedom, purposes and agency, with the natural world around us, nature can be transformed. In nature we should be able to see our own humanness, our own desires and efforts, reflected back. In this way, the human nature relation is not one of human-vs-nature, but instead, humanity-with-nature. Thus, Alves writes that through creativity, humanity "recreates and recovers nature… [It] is even able to have communion—and not mere contact—with this world… [Nature] becomes, consequently, the mirror in which man can see the

[247] Alves, *A Theology*, 136.

[248] Arango, "Un sentido de vivir," in *Todo es mio*, 41. Translated as "A Sense of Living."

reflections of himself and his neighbor."[249] The emphasis on communion over contact is an important distinction to make. Communion is a sharing, a being with and for another; it is intimacy and commitment. "Mere contact" lacks the connotations of intimacy, shared beliefs, and community. To be in communion with the world, with nature, is to share one's humanity with it. Creative activity in communion with nature can make of the earth "a home and a site of recovery" for humankind.[250] For Arango, communion with nature and with one's neighbors is vital to the project of building a community liberated from sin and injustice. He critiques established notions of progress as merely idolatries of the machine, which only serve to further dehumanize rather than humanize the species.[251] Any and all work must be done out of and for love in order for it to be creative activity that gives meaning to human living.[252] Communion then as the sharing of one's humanity—one's love, hopes, dreams, and desires—is part of the process of such individual and collective liberation, of bringing about a better world.

However, Arango's treatment of nature, of the nature-human relation, is less anthropocentric than Alves's. Arango diverges from Alves in the extent to which nature is subjugated to human concerns and value. In fact, the earth and nature take on a more central role in Arango's theo-philosophy of liberation, since at this point, Arango sees the city, society, and civilization in their established forms as oppressive, dehumanizing, and obstructive to liberation. Europe copulates with the dollar, the hierarchy of the university reproduces the system of domination, the United States' "triumphalism of comfort" has brought death and exploitation, democracy has so far failed to close the gap between the privileged and the oppressed, all

[249] Alves, *A Theology*, 137.

[250] Ibid. 137.

[251] Arango, "Progreso," *Todo es mio*, 123. Translated as "Progress."

[252] Ibid. 123

governments are defenders of the dominant class, society is “a filthy sewer / a prison education” in whose social gatherings one cannot find truth, substance, or the integrity of the self, and civilization “is the bank of spiritual and material penury.”[253] Given Arango’s view on the plentiful failures of civilization in creating a freer and more just world, it is understandable why he advocates for a full break with the Established Order, with the current systems of social organization and value. Pure nature instead becomes the only viable path to liberation. Pure nature can be understood in his work as the pure nature of the self (a purity corrupted by the values, conventions, and conformisms of society and civilization) and the purity of the natural world, where both nature and humanity are seen as being of the same substance. Hence, Arango asserts that “animals are not inferior to man; they are two different manifestations of the same essence: God,” “Return to your womb: pure nature /The path is single and one / all the world united,” and “evacuate the cities in search of flowery solitude and the caress of mother nature...We return the Earth to its Only Dream: God!...Faith will pour manna from heaven over our thirst...Nature will feed us...We celebrate the resurrection of life on this earth.”[254]

For the earth to be a home, for communion with world and nature to be possible, the activity of the senses is needed. For joy to be had in the world, one must be able to feel the sensations of emotion. Love is felt, not merely cogitated. Thus, Alves writes that the language of the community of faith “speaks about love for life, for this world...Its object and occasions are very worldly...the bodily presence of a friend, the pleasure of sex, the relaxation of rest.”[255] There is enjoyment in living on this earth and in this time because it is the world that houses us

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[253] Arango, *Todo es mio*, 80, 118, 210-11, 94, 198, 108, 35, 38-39, 99.

[254] Ibid. 178-79. “Santo y seña.” Translated as “Saint and Sign.”

[255] Alves, *A Theology*, 146.

and this is the time in which we live and experience. In what other world or time could such joy in both body and spirit be had? An afterlife? An otherworldly existence? Alves, like Arango, rejects such metahistorical and otherworldly commitments. The language of the community of faith is not concerned with joy "beyond life and the world."[256] Similarly, Arango asserts "To live, it is enough for me to live here, between the earth and stars...I do not aspire to other worlds or to other skies. The portion of wonders that Life assigned to me is enough: a bed to dream, a body to love, a heart to believe."[257] Without the body and sense experience, communion with nature would not be possible. The transformation of the world through human hands would not be possible. Body and sense are fundamental constituents of being human. To share that humanity with nature and one's neighbors and to experience full humanity, the body, the senses, and emotion are necessary: an aesthetic mode of living is necessary.

For both authors, human liberation must be a historical project pursued in the here and now for the purposes of expanding the concrete possibilities of a better, more just future. The body, the senses, and aesthetic experience take on central importance in both the project of liberation and in the language of the community of faith. God's gift of this world that is to be transformed by human action can only be experienced through the body. The body mediates between self and world and between self and other. Therefore, it is through the body that humanity discovers the beauty, joy, and pleasure of being with nature and being with others. As Alves affirms "man's body is what establishes his solidarity with the world...Through his bodily senses man is able to have delight in nature...the body is what mediates between man's

[256] Ibid. 146.

[257] Arango, "Aquí es la Tierra," in *Todo es mio*, 238. Translated as "Here is the Earth."

existential dimension, his freedom and love, and the world that invites him."[258] The body allows us to actualize and externalize our freedom, our dreams, our joys and our love. Therefore, it is clear that the body and the senses are vital to the project of liberation. Aesthetic experience—the odor of pollution, the felt pain of others' suffering, the grief of poverty, the revulsion at violence and exploitation, the joy of sleep and relaxation, the sensation of the wind and a lover's touch—informs human thought and action. It informs praxis.

Although in Alves's work, nature serves an important role in liberation and humanization, the value of nature seems to retain its instrumental flavor. Nature's value corresponds to the value it has for human purposes. The earth has been divinely gifted to us to transform into a home and it should be valued as our gift from God. By contrast, in Arango's work, the value of the earth and non-human animals is posited as being of the same value and substance: a life community (without a species hierarchy). Faith will quench our thirst and nature will satiate our hunger. We, in turn, must achieve the dream of the earth and celebrate a new respect for life since "all manifestation of life is a miracle" and "every animal is yourself / in the evolution of being."[259] The actual distinctions among the forms of life being can take do not (and should not) justify formulating a hierarchy of value, in which some species have greater inherent or instrumental value than others. Similarly, one should not view distinctions among forms of life as a difference of kind, but rather a difference of degree. Being is consubstantial with God, and thus, all God's creatures—all manifestations of life—sharing in and being of this fundamental point of origin represent a community of life. However, it is a community of faith

[258] Alves, *A Theology*, 147.

[259] Arango, "Perfección," and "Toda ave es ángel," in *Todo es mio*, 26, 24. Translated as "Perfection" and "Every Bird is an Angel."

who are able to solidify this point through their own acceptance of God and through the practice of this new respect for life.

If nature then is God's gift to human beings, as in Alves's work, does it not also hold that humans are God's gift to nature? For the purposes of an ethic of care for nature, this question is addressed more certainly and satisfyingly in Arango's work. His theo-philosophy maintains an active and loving reciprocity between human and nature, in which we both humanize and spiritualize nature. What can be derived from Arango's work and not Alves's is a more robust reciprocity between nature and humanity, as well as an imperative to liberate the earth from its own oppressions: if we are to commune with nature and unite Being with Being, then we should also liberate the earth from our own inhumanity, from the violence and exploitation we inflict on the natural world. As Arango's asserts: "Life is freedom and communion / the union of being and universe / in love."[260] One reads in Arango's work, a vision of a community of life and faith that arises out of love, a love that animates individual and community action, and a human activity that begins transforming and redeeming the world from its condemned state.

V. Community of Life and Faith: Toward a New Future

Alves's call for a new future, a new world, in which human action takes form "in the context of trust and faith in God's loving, liberating politics"[261] can be paralleled with Arango's call for a *Nueva Era*, a New Era. In *la Nueva Era*, the Providence of God "will be like a prophet of the present" through which a human liberation can progress;[262] for this Divine Providence "is

[260] Ibid. 45. "Razón de ser." Translated as "Reason for Being."

[261] Alves, *A Theology*, 135.

[262] Arango, "La nueva era," *Todo es mio*, 17.

a word that opens what is enclosed / which liberates / It is a shovel that sinks the seed / deep into the earth. / From the depths / will rise the world / that will save the condemned/ of the earth from exile."[263] Note the language in Arango's passage above: it words refer to the earthly context, its language inspires sensuous associations, and it incorporates that which "refers to man's world and hope of liberation."[264] We can understand Arango's theosophical writings as a contribution to, and as one voice in, the language of the community of faith. In the context of liberation, we have seen the renewed importance that language takes on. Beyond merely utilitarian communication, language allows us to express and share faith, to evangelize *a la* Gutiérrez. It allows us to create unity and build community "because this is the purpose of language: we want to move out of the sadness of solitude, we want communion. We speak in order to create community."[265]

This is Arango's project: to use language in order to create a new kind of community based on a non-doctrinal faith. In his later poetic writings, this project of community building takes on a clearer and more perceptible shape than in his earlier work. Thus he writes that "We remove the masks / the social mascara .../ We fly from solitude to the Sun star / We revive hope in the senses / faith in the reality of the soul / and feeling / We discover that men die / because they lost the meaning of living / The spiritual world is the real."[266] For Arango, society has become a site of solitude, mass conformity, and insincerity. It is the world of appearance, not

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[263] Ibid. 17.

[264] Alves, *A Theology*, 159-60.

[265] Rubem Alves, "Theopoetics: Longing and Liberation" in *Struggles for Solidarity: Liberation Theologies in Tension*, edited by Lorine M. Getz and Ruy O. Costa (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 159.

[266] Arango, "El mundo espiritual," *Todo es mio*, 63. Translated as "The Spiritual World."

substance; a world of money and power without redemption.[267] Yet, there is hope in the power of the aesthetic, in the senses and feelings through which human beings cultivate *un sentido de vivir*. There can be a revived faith in that the world of soul and spirit, that God's omnipresence, is the reality. The sun, light, and God, are often used as intercorrelated concepts in Arango's poetry. The sun gives physical light and warmth. It illuminates the material world we live and move through each day. God gives the light of love, which illuminates the world of spirit and thus illuminates the shared nature of spirit. God's light allows each individual to see and accept that one's spirit is in common with the spirit of others. The act of communion is the bodily, spiritual, and ethical event that naturally follows from this realization and is the deepened expression of it.

Being in communion with humanity and nature, *a la* Alves, and being in communion with others and nature, with Being and universe (as the most fundamental and expansive of God's creations), as with Arango, are necessary and continuous experiences that advance and sustain the overall project of transforming/humanizing the world (and self, in the process) and creating a more just and fecund future. Liberation from present injustice and liberation for/toward a New World and Future is achieved through human action, thereby placing the fight firmly within history and making of liberation a historical and thoroughly human task. "The future is not what we wait for, but what we make," as Arango writes.[268] However, for both authors, the project of liberation also occurs with and within the context of God's will and love. Since Providence liberates, according to Arango, and since human freedom and liberation constitute a Divinely given destiny, as according to Alves, a people's liberation and

[267] Ibid. 63.

[268] Arango, *Todo es mio*, 138.

humanization can be understood as the unfolding of God's will and God's dream for humanity.[269] In fact for Alves, "God's presence in the world *is* the presence of the future,"[270] or perhaps more precisely put, God's presence is the presence of a future that is always an open invitation, existing as potential and possibility for human imagination and creative making.

The New Future, or *la Nueva Era,* for Arango, means "exchanging the anonymous society for a world of love, in which we are all stakeholders in the beautiful, free, and shared enterprise of our redemption."[271] The anonymous society is one of conformity wherein "one yields in his soul" and "stops being one / to be like the mass / To yield is to cease being / The most insufferable solitude / is society" and society fosters "non-communication of the souls."[272] The prevailing order of society, in which one ceases being and ceases one's uniqueness to mass conformity, obstructs and discourages the most meaningful kind of communication: authentic self-expression. This self- abdication (cease being one to be the many) in turn makes communion impossible since one is unable to share oneself with others and receive the truth-flesh-word of another's being in return. Similarly, liberation and humanization are precluded by this anonymous society since loss of self and mass conformity yields only an insufferable solitude and oblivion. For Arango, the response to this repressive condition is to break away from society and system in a revolutionary act of negation. Since "the mass is the negation of the soul," since "sin is the negation of the other," and if society itself is a sinful structure, as it seems to be for Arango, then revolution must entail this negation of personal and structural sin in order to

[269] Rubem Alves, "Theopoetics," 167-68.

[270] Alves, *A Theology*, 113. Emphasis added.

[271] Arango, "Manifiesto común y libre," *Todo es mio*, 130-31. Translated as "Free and Common Manifesto."

[272] Arango, "Soledad," 96-97. Translated as "Solitude."

redeem self and other.[273] As Arango affirms, “revolution means to leave behind everything that impedes living, evolving… [It] is to recover the glory of being alive, of rediscovering the identity of being children of God, and living with love and freedom.”[274] Through this negation of sin, liberation and resurrection are made possible. Additionally, through the recognition of injustice and the rejection of sin one is able to become a revolutionary in the process, since according to Arango, “everyone who fights for Justice is a revolutionary.”[275]

La Nueva Era is the resurrection of life on earth and the recovery of the joy of living. This is no less palpable in Alves’s work, which claims for politics a new role: that of bringing the dead back to life.[276] If people are going to fight and return from their death/oblivion with new life, then, for Alves, they must be able to dream about the new world that is possible.[277] That is the task of the theologian, the poet, the theopoet: to provoke dreams, to be a stoker of life.[278] In this sense, the task of politics is to remind others of life and freedom in a world of oppression and death.[279] This is the mission Arango had assigned to the poet in 1966. That the poet must be a stoker of life, “the dreamer, who kicks the gravestone and rises from the dead,” Arango proclaims in 1968.[280] Around 1976, the final year of his life, Arango gives us a definition of revolution that presages Alves’s notion of humanization and Jorge Portilla’s conception of

[273] Ibid. 138, 117.

[274] Ibid. 154, 180.

[275] Arango, “Adiós Colombia,” 236. Translated as “Goodbye Colombia.”

[276] Alves, “Theopoetics,” 169.

[277] Ibid. 170.

[278] Ibid. 170.

[279] Gonzalo Arango, “Poesía y terror,” 52.

[280] Gonzalo Arango, “El poeta es el fogonero de la vida,” 244.

political freedom: “To elevate humanity in every sense, to liberate it, is the mission of true revolution.”[281]

[281] Arango, “Adiós Colombia,” 236.

CHAPTER V

A THEOPOETIC AESTHETICS OF LIBERATION

I. Theopoetics: Toward Criteria of Evaluation

The contemporary theopoet, Matt Guynn, writes that theopoetics is "is a style of writing or a theological stance, an artful way of working with language and worldview."[282] In this sentence, we immediately see the relevance and connections among imagination, language, and creativity. Using language and imagination creatively to the express a worldview through the lens of theology seeks both to discuss the mystery of God and reveal it. Guynn further writes that theopoetics "opens up a space for unanticipated dreaming in which the past, present, and future are re-shaped as we reorganize and even re-create our own stories and our relationships with others, the world, and the Divine."[283] Additionally then, there is the impulse to challenge worldviews, including our own, and to consider this challenge—these newly opened spaces—opportunities to re-imagine the world, ourselves, and our relations with others. Theopoetics also unites human struggles and strivings with God's active presence in the world. God becomes a force acting *with* the human desire for liberation and humanization. For Guynn, theopoetics must represent an invitation to contemplate the mystery of human existence and the Divine. For this reason, the language must be more creative and ambiguous than logical and systematic. The point is not to assert truth or assert a reality rationally arrived at through reasoning and argumentation. In such a case, the objective is to make the world transparent, almost a settled

[282] Matt Guynn, "Theopoetics: that the dead may become gardeners again," *CrossCurrents* 56, no.1 (2006): 99.

[283] Ibid. 99.

issue so one can then move on to other investigations. In contrast, theopoetics seeks to preserve the mystery and merely suggests creative and alternative ways of viewing it. These views are never settled, but are left open to multiple interpretations and deeper engagements in which the reader is more fully invited into the reflective process the theopoetic writings open up.

Guynn also discusses the relationship between theopoetics and social action, effectively asserting that theopoetics can and should be inspire socially conscious action in the world. Drawing on the work of Roberto Goizueta, Guynn notes that for Goizueta's a function of theopoetics is that it "demands participation in the struggles of life and death."[284] In other words, theopoetics is far from mere abstractions and theoretical discourse, but instead is an invitation to action. It should demand of itself a participation in and response to the everyday struggles of life and death. Similarly, it can and should inspire this attitude in others. A theopoetics as praxis encourages social solidarity and hospitality, "operates at the level of paradigm change," and "creates enchantment which ultimately offers life to those dead in soul or spirit, a resurrection of the soul and the body."[285] Guynn conceives of a theopoetics that is thoroughly oriented toward movements of social change and action that transform the world and our relations with it. Theopoetics is able to revivify resigned, and thus, deadened spirits through its use of a language that is vibrant, powerful, creative, and even magical: "theopoetics points toward a magical activism, one which works to change a society's consciousness, not just make prophetic declarations."[286] Theopoetics has a responsibility to move beyond verbalism, beyond mere assertions about the future, and into suggestions for practices and attitudes in the present. The

[284] Ibid. 103.

[285] Ibid. 103, 107.

[286] Ibid. 105.

theopoetic piece should not only exemplify reflection-action, but create a space for readers to critically reflect on the meaning of a given piece and one's own potential for liberating and humanizing action in the world. Theopoetics, in pointing toward a magical activism, also points toward a consideration of what is possible in addition to engaging with the realities of struggle and oppression. Thus, it also takes up the themes of death and resurrection, concrete actualities and creative possibilities, present sufferings and hopes, and imaginative visions for the future.

The Imagination and the Pre-Reflective

In *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination*, Amos Niven Wilder, one of the early proponents and practitioners of theopoetics, notes that the theopoetic means "doing justice to the role of the symbolic and the prerational in the way we deal with experience."[287] In other words, Wilder's project cautions against demythologizing Christianity (and thus reducing the passion and depth of its message), which is a source of its potency and transmutability. For Wilder, Christianity must be able to respond to the changing spiritual and cultural climate, coming "to terms with the ruling metaphors and idioms of its setting."[288] This setting is simply and properly the socio-cultural climate of its time: the struggles, hopes, dreams, and hungers of a people. Thus, theology must be able to view itself as in-process, as mutable and transmutable, in (constant) relation to the different temporal, cultural, and regional settings in which it finds itself. For this reason, Wilder eschews rote learning and propositional recitation of doctrine among Christians and theologians, which stagnate faith and lacks the "visionary capacity" to awaken "a

[287] Amos Niven Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 2.

[288] Ibid. 26.

deep resonance in the hearts of men."[289] Importantly for Wilder, it is precisely "in this order of imagination and social dream" that he locates the bridge between theology and politics, Christianity and social action.[290] For when "Word is linked with the dynamic mythology of an age the faith is secured against privatism," and instead, faith can serve as a uniting force for communal social-political action.[291] It is clear then why Wilder privileges the imagination as that "necessary component" in all aspects of human experience, without which, hope, faith, realization, joy, remembering; in short, a full engagement with life would not be possible.[292] Imagination makes creative action and futuric vision possible and it is what enables us to (as Wilder demands) recognize and engage the role of the symbolic and the prerational in the way we deal with human experience. Let us take this then as one criterion for the theopoetic: a commitment to the role of the imagination, the symbolic, and the prerational as conditions for a full engagement with life and experience. We can simply restate this as a **commitment to the pre-reflective** quality of human experience, from which the imagination undoubtedly draws.

Language

Signaling the importance of language, Wilder asks "why should a language of faith be so largely confined to the discursive mode or to stereotypes that have forfeited their explosive power?"[293] The implication here is that language should have an explosive power and religious communication "must overcome its addiction to the discursive, the rationalistic, and the

[289] Ibid. 26-27.

[290] Ibid. 27.

[291] Ibid. 27.

[292] Ibid. 2.

[293] Ibid. 7.

prosaic."[294] The charge against religious language echoes that of Alves's as both authors signal a necessary move away from language that is outdated and uninspiring in the current age towards a language that takes account of the deeper dimensions of human need and experience. That, for Wilder, language should be explosive and inspiring we have also seen in the work of Rubem Alves when he calls for a language that frees humanity for life, for future, "free to negate the old and to create the new."[295] Additionally, in "Theopoetics," Alves attributes a magical power to the poetic or theopoetic word, in which the body and soul tremble and reawaken at an encounter with those words that belong to the poem of the soul. As Alves proposes a new language in the *Theology*, Wilder proposes a "creative theopoetic" that is able to respond to new sensibilities and to a people's desire for plenitude and transcendence, spontaneity and ecstasy, and "a thirst for liberation of the self."[296] This creative theopoetic is oriented toward current struggles for liberation and humanization, but also towards the shaping of a new future.[297] Thus a second theopoetic criterion is that the language of liberation should be explosive and thought-provoking. More specifically, it should incite critical reflection, ideally leading to an epistemic break from dehumanizing institutions and to liberatory action aimed at transforming and humanizing the world. It should provoke dreams of change and hope for the future and it must see this transformative potential as arising from a community of concern and inquiry, not from institutional authorities. This criterion can be restated as **making creative use of language** to inspire critical reflection and dreams of change in others. As such, the language should be potent and call attention to a people's power to intervene in the world and shape it anew.

[294] Ibid. 1

[295] Alves, *A Theology*, 167.

[296] Wilder, *Theopoetic*, 7, 9.

[297] Ibid. 27

Life and Suffering

In a *Theology of Human Hope*, language was the fulcrum of the work; however, imagination becomes the focus of Alves's 1972 book, *Tomorrow's Child*. Alves writes that "the body of God, the body of the Liberator, is the body of the oppressed and dispossessed. And it is from this solidarity in suffering that the future is imagined."[298] Pain and suffering, rather than being avoided or neglected, serve as important indicators that something is wrong and that change is needed. Situations of injustice can invite critical awareness and a break with the social order and structures that sustain oppression and violence. Thus, pain and suffering have value to the extent that critical consciousness, solidarity, and imaginative vision can grow and fertilize the present with possibility and hope. Without imagination and its intention toward the future that is possible, the reality of pain and suffering would simply be that inevitability which must be endured. In that case, the future becomes closed and humanity loses its creative dimension, its power to move and shape history. For this reason, Alves contends that imagination is that necessary component which enables a full engagement with life (flourishing) as opposed to the passivity of resignation (simply existing). One's experience with situations of injustice, the feeling of being dehumanized through exclusion or violences, can lead one to "new insight [that] changes one's whole outlook" and gradually "the spell of the existing order of things is broken."[299] Through experiences of injustice, one can envision a future that is open and which can take the shape of one's (or a community's) desires and longings.

[298] Rubem A. Alves, *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 111.

[299] Ibid. 114.

For Alves, this futuric imagining signifies a revolution in one's behavior because "right here freedom is born," at the site of one's love and responsibility for/to the future.[300] As Alves assesses, "the utopian vision liberates man from the determinism of material forces," and in this way, transcendence, plenitude, and liberation cease being impossibilities (as the prevailing logic of Realism deliberately labels them).[301] Luis Villoro makes similar observations in his 1997 work, *El Poder y El Valor*,[302] concerning the function of the imagination and the reality of a world with unjust social orders.[303] He notes that "the experience of suffering in actual society impels us to project into the imagination the ideal order that would alleviate it."[304] According to Villoro, one becomes aware here that there is a fundamental lack in values (e.g. justice, equality, comfort, happiness, etc.) in her present reality. That is, she perceives the difference in her situation between the possible (realizable values) and the actual situation (suffering and lack). The imagining of an ideal society, one in which her values and desires are realizable, at the same time constitutes a rejection of the existing order.[305] Thus, "utopia expresses an attitude of rupture

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[300] Ibid. 114.

[301] Ibid. 115, 103-05.

[302] It is worth noting that Villoro publishes a useful and critical evaluation of utopias and their potential misuse in a 2006 article entitled "The Triple Confusion of Utopia," *Diogenes* 53, no. 1 (2006): 5-10.

[303] Although Luis Villoro is not considered a theopoet, I nevertheless bring in the relevance of his work in the interest of the larger aims of this project: rubbing philosophies against one another, as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. Additionally, this can be seen as cross-pollination among seemingly disparate works in an attempt to enrich and increase the diversity of resources available to any given subfield within philosophy or specific intellectual tradition. What I try to do is highlight the fact that distinctions such as liberation theology, philosophies for liberation, theopoetics, decolonial philosophy, etc. should be kept porous, rather than as solid distinctions, to allow for cross-pollination and "rubbing against." This can serve to expose the productive and bridging similarities among *prima facie* disparate works.

[304] Luis Villoro, *El Poder y El Valor: fundamentos de una ética política* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2012), 32.

[305] Ibid. 32, 209.

from the actual world and an affirmation of the ideal world," as given by and in the imagination.[306] Like Alves, Villoro finds that it is the very situations of suffering and oppression that beckon the imagination forth and project into it the visions and dreams of a better future. For Villoro, the "experience of deprivation," the awareness of the lack of value available to the individual or group, gives rise to the projection of one's desires, which takes progressive shape in the image of the ideal world being generated in the imagination.[307] We find our third criterion for theopoetics: it must confront and respond to the everyday pain and suffering as facts of this world, but not as inevitabilities that do not leave space for transformation and imaginative visions of the future. This can be restated as theopoetics must **engage the everyday realities** of human life and suffering.

In this process of recognizing one's lived situation of injustice, choosing to intervene in that historical reality in the here and now, and imagining a better future for oneself and community, there is a noticeable blending of past, present, and future. In fact, past, present, and future form a dynamic relation. The past continuously informs the present and it can also constitute a situation to be overcome in the present and changed for the future. In the language of process, there are no neat distinctions or events that have a definite beginning and end. Instead, there is a continuous becoming and constant potentiation for change and transformation in which the fundamental elements of this process of liberation and humanization, such as critical awareness and creative imaginings, are also themselves continuous processes that constitute that larger project. Similarly, the authors themselves forge productive relations among pain and suffering, hope and realization, power and agency. In the next section, we will focus on another

[306] Ibid. 210.

[307] Ibid. 52.

relation drawn between death and resurrection as it is made possible and occurs within human life.

Death and Resurrection

In the *Theology*, Alves focuses on the role of language in relation to liberation and humanization. For Alves, a language that is static and does not change with and respond to the spirit of a people, serves only to repress the liberatory potential of the language and the people. He points to the language of faith and the Church as a static language that seeks to freeze history, reify its doctrine, and thus, refuses to die so that a new language can arise which reflects the forward movement of history, the openness of the future, and the ever-changing spirit of a people.[308] Thus, we see the themes of death and resurrection operating within the theme of language. As old forms of expression and naming die, a new language can be born that reflects the new sensibilities and challenges of the time. Guynn seems to echo this point in "Theopoetics and Social Change," where he warns that a flat language, a language that lacks vibrancy and creativity, risks turning theological conversations and religious experience into passionless recitations and routinized performances. He suggests instead that language must be continuously reexamined and refreshed since "the theopoetic activist wants not just words—but enfleshed initiative. The theopoet change-maker seeks new re-engagements of faith stories."[309]

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[308] Alves, *A Theology*, 70-72.

[309] Matt Guynn, "Theopoetics and Social Change," *CrossCurrents* 60, no. 1 (2010): 106. doi:10.1111/j.1939-3881.201000109.x.

The North American theologian Richard Shaull makes explicit connections between theology and biblical allegory, death and resurrection, and liberation.[310] Drawing on the work of other theologians and using the bible as an interpretive framework for human history, he holds that the process of history can be understood as a history of movements of human liberation and revolution.[311] These essential movements which give form to history and keep it moving forward can be understood as "God's redemptive action in the world."[312] In this way, Shaull sees an integral connection between the process of human liberation and God's activity in the world. Shaull makes the further observation that in the Old and New Testament, the "eschatological expectations for the future are mixed up with the apocalyptic."[313] In other words, the expectations of human life and destiny are mixed up with the necessity of death and destruction. Human history moves within this context, which for Shaull, is also revelatory of "the dynamics of God's action in the world."[314] In this light, death and resurrection like revolution and liberation, are possible in the here and now, in our world and in our time: "as individuals, we move toward maturity and fulfillment in life as we allow the old to collapse and the new to arise out of death...the new man who is formed out of daily death and resurrection can be the free agent of social reconstruction."[315] The individual then must accept both life and death,

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[310] Although Shaull is not considered a theopoet, he does take a "theological stance" in his work that he connects to social solidarity and action and transforming the world in conjunction with Divine revelation. Additionally, he suggests creative and symbolic re-imaginings of the world and our relation to it, as well as practices and attitudes for the present.

[311] Richard Shaull, "A Theological Perspective on Human Liberation," *New Blackfriars* 49, no. 578 (1968): 509-11. doi:10.1111/j.1741-2005.1968.tb01195.x.

[312] Ibid. 511.

[313] Ibid. 512.

[314] Ibid. 512.

[315] Ibid. 513-14.

resurrection and destruction, and the task and risks of liberation in this context. Shaull advocates for the need to break down Old Orders that can no longer respond to the needs of a people and which only serve to oppress while positioning the institutions that sustain such oppression above human dignity and liberation. The necessary destruction of this Old Order must give rise to the shared construction of a New Order.[316]

While Shaull does not work within the theopoetic tradition, he does emphasize the importance of creativity and imagination as a means of responding to the challenges of oppression, revolution, and liberation. Originally delivered as an address at the 1966 World Conference on Church and Society, in the "The Revolutionary Challenge to Church and Theology," Shaull declares that "the new revolutionary needs those resources of transcendence and transgression which free him to...dream new dreams about the future of man, and cultivate the creative imagination so as to be capable of thinking about new problems in new ways, and defining new goals and models for a new society."[317] One transgresses in the senses of going beyond the bounds or limitations one places on oneself; going beyond the given limitations of one's society and even religion, should that society or religion fail to respond actively and creatively to the need for human liberation and the calls for radical social change (revolution). Inherent to the concept of transcendence is the space it creates for humanity to dream and imagine a better future for itself that must be striven for in the present. As discussed in chapter four, dreams play a significant role in Alves's theopoetic turn. The task he assigns to the theopoet is not to interpret dreams, but rather to provoke dreams in others and in oneself "because we are entities made out of dreams...and if people are going to struggle and to fight it is

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[316] Ibid. 512, 515.

[317] Richard Shaull, "The Revolutionary Challenge to Church and Theology," *Theology Today* 23, no. 4 (1967): 476-77. doi:10.1177/004057366702300403.

necessary for them to be rocked back to life from their oblivion, and this happens when they are able to dream again."[318] Thus, here we have further ruminations on the theme of death and resurrection as events that can be realized within the project of human history.

Therefore, the fourth criterion for theopoetics is an **embrace of death and resurrection** in the here and now. As we have seen above, death and resurrection can be understood in different ways. Beyond bodily death and resurrection, to Shaull and Alves, it symbolizes the death of the old order and the death of an old language for the resurrection of new, more powerful and socially beneficial manifestations of human life and activity. Similarly, one must be willing to accept the death of old beliefs and ways of being for new revitalized thought and action, and thus, perhaps new dreams and visions for the future. In this way, the human being is resurrected as well and undergoes a spiritual revivification. As Roberto Goizueta notes, the death and resurrection of Christ "is not simply the victory of life over death but the victory of justice over injustice."[319] We should understand then the themes of death and resurrection in the context of a new, imaginative (and more just) order succeeding over the injustice of old oppressive structures and beliefs. I would also like add a criterion drawn from Arango's own pronouncement as a *nadaísta*: **to ensure the relevance of life and freedom** in a world of oppression and death. Taken from his 1966 essay "Poetry and Terror," this is an early, timely, and fundamental principle that continued to operate in his writings, regardless of their intellectual and ideological shifts throughout his career. Importantly, this pronouncement is the mission Arango assigns to poets and one that demonstrates a community sensibility and social commitment that burgeoned in the theological stage of his writing.

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[318] Alves, "Theopoetics," 170.

[319] Roberto S. Goizueta, "Theo-Drama as Liberative Praxis," *CrossCurrents* 63, no. 1 (2013): 72. doi:10.1111/cros.12013.

II. A Theopoetic 5-Part Model: An Evaluation of Arango's Philosophical Poetry

In a theopoetic style or practice, it is important for the theological aspect of that discourse not to remain "formulaic, systematic, or closed," but rather as discussed above, it must manifest an elicitive character and invite readers into conversation with the text.[320] The text, in turn, leaves itself open to multiple meanings that can be invoked by the readers' engagement with it. Theopoetics preserves a dimension of co-intentional praxis, but more importantly, it encourages much wider conversation and knowledge construction beyond the boundaries of academia.[321] Meaning-making as a co-creative process of reflection and action with and inspired by the text, whose creative use of language inspires this deeper and more intimate engagement, also nurtures rather than inhibits the creative and transformative power of others. That is, it affirms the power that each person has to intervene in their reality, critically reflect on it, engage in social action, and to generate and work towards their own imaginative visions for the future. In this way, as L.B.C. Keefe-Perry writes, theopoetics can be a space for everyone, particularly those outside the specializations of academia, "to voice their sense of the divine."[322] Therefore, the theopoetic text is always "in poetic process...It can be returned to again and again with different readings at different depths."[323] In the co-intentional praxis of reader and theopoetic text, one finds a

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[320] L.B.C. Keefe-Perry, "Theopoetics: Process and Perspective," *Christianity and Literature* 58, no. 4 (2009): 589. doi:10.1177/014833310905800404.

[321] I am borrowing this terminology from Freire's work to emphasize the dynamic relation between theopoetic writings and its community of readers. The elicitive nature of a theopoetic text invites readers into the process of meaning-making with the text, which does not profess a finality of conclusions or rigidity of arguments, but rather seeks to converse and deepen our understandings of the mystery of God and human existence. In the Freirean sense, and incorporating the ethos of theopoetics, this co-intentional praxis occurs because both reader and text are intent upon the world in an effort to reveal and transform it.

[322] Keefe-Perry, "Process and Perspective," 591.

[323] Ibid. 593.

profound fertility for thought and action: the potential to think about the world differently and to live in the world differently.[324]

When engaging with Arango's poetry, one observes the elicitive nature of the texts: the creative use of symbol, lyricism, and metaphor to suggest a theological worldview in which humanity can rediscover itself through love and engagement with God's creations. Similarly, the process of human liberation and redemption can be reignite by one's rejection of worldly sin and commitment to life itself (which is the manifestation of God on earth). In the poem "Invent Life Once Again," Arango writes, "to possess supreme clarity / is the dream of the flesh that realizes us."[325] This is one example of the productively ambiguous and creative language that suffuses his late poetry. These lines also recall Alves's own words when he writes, "my body is a story...the secret of my flesh is a hidden, forgotten text, which is written in it...When the body trembles as it hears a word, one may be sure that that word belongs to its soul, it is part of its poem. That tremble is life being resurrected from its slumber."[326] Alves's deeper point here is that words can have a liberative effect on body, mind, and spirit. Certain words connect with the root dimensions of our being in such a way that one can be resurrected from a living death, a resignation that he or she had been submerged in. Through this resurrection, one can begin life again with a renewed sense of agency, commitment, and creative impulse. Alves's quoted passage above expresses the same impetus and framework for action as Arango's poem. However, for Arango the words that resurrect us find their referents in the natural world, such as "the green of the leaf," "the hop of the toad," and "the air path of the bee," as he proposes in

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[324] Ibid. 594.

[325] Arango, "Inventar otra vez la vida," *Todo es mio*, 20. Translated as "Invent Life Once Again."

[326] Alves, "Longing and Liberation," 161-62.

"Invent Life Once Again."[327] This is to possess supreme clarity. It is not merely cognitive, but rather an embodied and aesthetic existence. For this reason, he invites us to "open the windows of the senses" and "glorify the body" in the "innocent joy of being."[328] Life in all its divinely inspired plenitude can only be appreciated through our bodies and our senses turned toward the joy of being and toward the diverse forms this can life and being can take (beyond human form).

Returning to Arango's poem we can give it "different readings at different depths," as Keefe-Perry recommends, in order to deepen and extend the meaning drawn from Arango's own worldview. The flesh that realizes us is our own flesh quietly unfolding its story and trembling at the words made flesh (frog, leaf, bee) that resurrect the life in us that had been, according to Arango, deadened by the artificial world of cities, money, television, commodification, and an egoistic existence encouraged by social conformity. The dream of this flesh, one of its secrets, is to realize itself with supreme clarity. This supreme clarity is not the clarity of the scientific method or the clarity of academic analysis. It is the supreme clarity of communion, those sparks of inner illumination that communicate at the level of the pre-reflective. It is the understanding and perception of a sharedness; that this self which I am, made of spirit and flesh, word and action, shares its being with other beings and the Being of the universe. It is the clarity that finds unity below the surface and into the secretive recesses of self and world. It is the supreme clarity that can see beyond the written word, beyond ideas, and into the flesh and spirit of the person who authors them. Therefore, to read beyond the words is also to read into the author's spirit and the exigencies of the time.

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[327] Arango, "Inventar otra vez la vida," 20.

[328] Ibid. 20.

Another sense we can draw from Arango's words is that the flesh that realizes us is the word of God, incarnated in its creatures. Dreams occupy an important place in Arango's late poetry, for "Life is the dream of God / God is the dream of life."[329] God dreamed us into existence, and in so doing, inscribed many secrets and stories onto our flesh. We are dream the dream and Life and God realized into flesh. A secret dream inscribed onto this flesh, and which reverberates through it, is the desire for self and world understanding, but also a desire to contemplate and understand the Divine. To know oneself in flesh and spirit is to begin to understand the world of one's experience, but the holistic sense of experience to necessarily include the pre-reflective. This, I believe, is what Alves means when he writes "I try to say the words which make up the essence of my being" and "to know the wind is to know what it does to my body."[330] This struggle to possess an inner clarity is matched by the difficulty that then arises from trying to put that essence back into words: from word to flesh and from flesh to word—at the same time, transmutation and transcendence. When Alves proclaims "the body trembles as it hears a word...that that word belongs to its soul, it is part of its poem," I read into it that one should tremble at liberation and one should tremble at humanization and Life and Freedom. These are words that must belong to each soul. These are words concealed within the poem that is each body. As Keefe-Perry writes, this is the "liberating, catalytic potential of a poeticized perspective."[331]

As Alves affirms, poetry in not meant to be understood in any final, objective, or scientific way. Poetry is not meant to be analyzed so the truth and meaning of it can be closed

[329] Arango, "Esperanza," *Todo es mio*, 240. Translated as "Hope."

[330] Alves, "Longing and Liberation," 160-61.

[331] Keefe-Perry, "Process and Perspective," 586.

and decided upon. The words of a poem are meant to be eaten just as the secret of communion is that the body is meant to become word and given to another to be eaten.[332] In this Alvesian sense, in reading poetry, in reading the words of the author, we also eat and digest these words taking them into our being as we at the same time, digest the spirit of the author. Moreover, in an Alvesian, the lines of a poem when spoken, and the spaces created between these lines, create silences that invite deeper revelation. The secrets of one's flesh can disclose themselves in these silences that poetry invokes so that one can connect to the pre-reflective responses, such as the trembling of one's flesh, from which to construct new forms of knowledge and meaning. Explicitly drawing from the work of Alves, Keefe-Perry affirms the "active, embodied perspective" of theopoetics." Though theopoetics is generative of multiple meanings, through both contemplation and pre-reflective awareness, it is also meant to unify experience. That is, it is an opportunity to recognize the imbricating nature of human experience, not only the experience of the world that surrounds us, but also the inner world of one's self. The corporeal and spiritual are no longer separate or opposed, but instead are interpenetrating qualities of experience. Word is no longer just word, but also flesh and spirit. Similarly, the rational and pre-rational, cognitive and embodied living, are interpenetrating qualities that when brought together more accurately reflect the total dynamic and complexities of experience that constitute human existence.

The criteria of theopoetics: a commitment to the pre-reflective, making creative use of language, and an embrace of the symbolism of death and resurrection, which is also a commitment to Life and Justice, clearly operate in Arango's late poetry as we've seen from chapters four and five. This can be further evidenced by looking at Arango's "poeticized

[332] Alves, "Longing and Liberation," 159.

perspective" on what he sees as the harmful artificiality of human existence, understood through two primary superstructures: the society and civilization. Additionally, this will allow us to see his adherence to the last two criteria: engaging everyday realities and ensuring the relevance of life and freedom in a world of oppression and death. For Arango, Life can no longer be found in society and civilization, which only succeeds in developing a consumptive attitude rather than a biophilous one, in which one learns to love all that is alive. In contrast, society and civilization encourage a love of things, of inanimate objects, and this only serves to alienate us from life and encourages the fetishization of things at the cost of our own *sentido de vivir*, the development of our sense or meaning of living. In stark contrast to the lyrical venerations of the city we read in his early work,[333] his late poetry condemns the city as "the capital of nothing / the cemetery of God."[334] The city becomes a symbol of the dregs of the human constructive impulse: "those garbage dump buses / those gloomy suburb bars… / those sad and chimerical neighborhoods / of misery's mud… / The city is the brothel of the capital!"[335] However, for Arango, these artificial constructions have become the prisons and tombs in which human beings stagnate. Spiritual and moral growth, and our potential to transcend, become obscured and submerged in situations of misery and injustice. Thus he writes that society is "prison and solitude" and "civilization is insanity / progressive madness."[336] He warns that "progress is not the power of production / of dominating or consuming / Progress is being / developing the ME."[337] Humanity fills itself with

[333] See, for example, "La ciudad y el poeta," (The City and the Poet) in *Última página* (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2000), 24-28 and "Cartagena Pirata," (Cartagena Pirate) in *Reportajes*, Volumen 1 (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 1993), 299-308.

[334] Arango, "Capital de la nada," *Todo es mio*, 28. Translated as "Capital of Nothing."

[335] Arango, "La Ciudad," *Todo es mio*, 44. Translated as "The City."

[336] Arango, "Locura progresiva," *Todo es mio*, 40-41. Translated as "Progressive Madness."

[337] Ibid. 41.

distractions, like the void of television, the abstraction of the theatre,[338] and the impure interests of money and social reputation,[339] which move one farther from the path of revelation, redemption, and liberation.

While Arango sees the built world as tombs and prisons for a human existence that has become a living death, a condition that society and civilization are complicit in, the natural world symbolizes the potential for human resurrection—a rebirth—and the only way humanity can find its way back to God. In the natural world, in God's creations, Arango maintains humanity will encounter itself and it will dream again since "the dream of childhood is the Earth.../ The dream of the Earth is Eternity"[340] and "man is what he dreams."[341] Just as Alves calls for a liberating and theological language that uses embodied and sensuous terminology—that is, words which stem from our interactions with the natural world—Arango's poetry expresses this commitment *par excellence*. His poetry invokes strong imagery of the natural world, such as the sun, fire, mud, dirt, oceans, rivers, wind, leaves, trees, butterflies, bees, and ants, as well as suggesting their shared nature and interconnection with the being and living quality of humanity. For Arango, the earth and entire universe also share this vitalistic being since it all issued from God's dynamic love and thus harbors the divine. Arango poetry engages with the everyday realities of a world of oppression and death, and humanity's own living death. Murder, prostitution, working conditions, the products of manufacturing and entertainment, politics, education, universities, sex, drugs—all become matters for his poetry. The importance and relevance of life and freedom in this kind of world, those two words that tremble in the flesh and in the soul, remain the

[338] Arango, "Visión inmunda," *Todo es mio*, 60. Translated as "Vile Vision."

[339] Arango, "Sexo, sexo, sexo," *Todo es mio*, 29. Translated as "Sex, Sex, Sex."

[340] Arango, "Hacia la eternidad," *Todo es mio*, 23. Translated as "Toward Eternity."

[341] Arango, *Todo es mio*, 135.

orienting principles of Arango's liberation philosophy. Life and freedom continue to be, as they were for his early work, the focal points of his philosophy, and as he tries to remind us, what should be the focal points of human existence.

III. Liberation in Contemporary Perspective: Drawing on the Aesthetic

The commitment and attention to the pre-reflective we see in Arango's work and in the work of Rubem Alves, Amos Niven Wilder, and the contemporary theopoets. Additionally, we have seen this aesthetic commitment in the work of liberation theologists, such as Roberto Goizueta and Gustavo Gutiérrez. In chapter three, I introduced the project of Alejandro Vallega, his search for the aesthetic dimension in in liberatory and decolonial thought. Although he explores the work of several authors, Vallega's book, *From Identity to Radical Exteriority*, primarily focuses on the work of Enrique Dussel. Remaining largely within the tradition of Latin American thought, Vallega surveys a brief history of liberatory thought in order to draw out and "propose an aesthetics of liberation."[342] For Vallega, this aesthetic dimension seems to serve as a necessary counterbalance to and even an "undoing" of the hegemonic influence "Western modernity has had over the development of the Americas."[343] Vallega goes so far as to highlight what he calls an "ambiguity" in Dussel's thought since he grounds his philosophy in the lives and experiences of the periphery over and against the center (primarily Europe and North America), yet his thought also "takes the form of traditional rational arguments, seeking to speak theoretically and in the language of the center."[344] In sharper terms, Dussel uses the language of

[342] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 3-4.

[343] Ibid. 3-4.

[344] Ibid. 7.

the oppressors to speak for the rights and value of the oppressed. While Vallega sees this as an ambiguity in Dussel's work, I view this as a clear tension in his work, a work whose chosen language is ultimately philosophically dense and conceptually complex to the point of risking inaccessibility to those he claims to speak for.[345] The Sartrean level of abstraction and conceptual density of Dussel's language risks inaccessibility among philosophers and other academics as well.[346] My intention here is to iterate two main points. The first is that Vallega's project is motivated by a commitment to an aesthetic current in thought and ways of being because he views the aesthetic as a resource of resistance to the dominating cultural monologics of the West.

The second point refers to Vallega's claim that an aesthetic sensibility (which he champions primarily through Dussel's notion of proximate exteriority) has yet to be engaged by philosophies of liberation, but "must be an essential, active part" of it.[347] He echoes this point, though adopting a more measured claim, three years later in a 2017 article. Vallega writes, "as for 'aesthetics of liberation' *as a term*: no one has written an aesthetics of liberation."[348] Therefore, the second point I wish to highlight is that whether speaking of works that express an aesthetics of liberation or works that explicitly use the term "aesthetics of liberation," Vallega's

[345] More specific critiques of Dussel's philosophy through Ofelia Schutte's critical work in the 1990s will be taken up in chapter 6.

[346] While a fuller argument problematizing the language of Dussel's liberation philosophy is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is the author's intention to emphasize the importance of language and accessibility. I maintain that a liberation philosophy seeking to engage with the realities of oppression and with those in situations of oppression and injustice, should consider more de-specialized language in order to pursue a more communal (a community that extends beyond academia) and concrete language closer to what Alves proposes or closer to the language seen in liberation theologies and theopoetics. The language of liberation theology and theopoetics avoids a reliance on philosophical neologisms and jargon that might only serve to alienate and prohibit a dialogue with, and being informed by, those outside academia, particularly with the people for which the philosophies claims to speak with, for, or about.

[347] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 73.

[348] Alejandro Vallega, "Towards a Situated Liberatory Aesthetic Thought," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 9, no. 2 (2017): 191. Doi:10.1080/17570638.2017.1332841. Emphasis added.

claims are incorrect. I have demonstrated that Gonzalo Arango's *nadaísta* writings and his late theopoetic work maintain a robust commitment to an aesthetics of liberation. Additionally, although Vallega mentions liberation theology in his 2014 book, he fails to explore it as the rich resource it is for aesthetic and liberatory thought. For example, Roberto Goizueta writes about a "theological aesthetics of liberation" that resists reducing liberation to either an atheological "sociopolitical praxis" or an apolitical focus on "merely affective experience of the Beautiful."[349] In another example, Gustavo Gutiérrez explicitly advocates for "the aesthetic dimensions of a process of liberation which seeks to take into account all aspects of what it is to be human."[350] Gutiérrez's quote expresses the same impulse as Vallega's entire project, which is to recover those philosophies (specifically those outside anglo-Western traditions) that seek "liberation and the articulation of distinct ways of being" and think in terms of a "global *pluri*-versal (not *uni*-versal) world...of the appearing of ways of articulating humanity...and sensibilities previously obscured, ignored, and sequestered."[351] Liberation theologists, who do attend to the aesthetic, rather than ignore it, unfortunately remain largely ignored by Vallega's project. However, Vallega's work has undoubted merit and his commitment to recover the aesthetic dimension of experience in liberatory and decolonial thought attests to its importance as a resource of human experience and for cultivating multiple senses of living and being that can inform movements of resistance and theories that focus on liberation, justice, and oppression.

This impetus to recover and explore the aesthetic, particularly in Latin American thought, continues to thrive in contemporary works in theology, decolonial and liberation philosophies.

[349] Goizueta, "Theo-Drama," 62.

[350] Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Task and Content," 36.

[351] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 217, 4.

Christopher Tirres' recent publication, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith* (2015), he brings North American pragmatism and Latino/a religious experience into conversation in order to problematize the separation between the aesthetic and the ethical. His work argues that these two dimensions are in a constant and productive interaction, concerning faith specifically, but also in everyday experience beyond faith and into the "religious" as the potential for a heightened aesthetic experience. For Tirres, the religious, the sense of which he borrows from John Dewey, "may be seen as an intensification of the aesthetic and which may apply to experiences that are not formally connected with institutional religion."[352] This allows for both a more inclusive sense of faith and a spiritually informed sense of praxis that need not rely on the authority or doctrines of institutional religion. This is precisely the sense of faith, as religious living, that Arango calls for in his late work. That is, he advocates for a grassroots movement of faith issuing from the people's commitment to life and not what he saw as institutional religion's commitment to maintaining an authoritarian grip on power and epistemic access to God. Contrary to that, Arango believed access to God can be found by anyone willing to engage with the natural world at sensuous, affective, and ethical levels. At these depths, one can encounter God as the underlying being and grace common to all Its creations, and one can encounter the unique self that had been submerged under and contorted by hegemonic institutions and decadent ideologies.

The chief premise underlying the work of Tirres, Vallega, and Arango is that the aesthetic has the potential to generate important insights in the struggle and process of liberation. Additionally, the aesthetic, when attended to and explored, can reveal and give birth to more diverse forms of thought, expression, and being beyond what can be arrived at or expressed through rationalistic argumentation and systematic deduction. In other words, the aesthetic can

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[352] Christopher Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith: A Dialogue Between Liberationist and Pragmatic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 58.

serve as a site from which multiple forms of creative resistance can be thought and imagined. The aesthetic provides the focal point from which to recover what Arango called "the subconscious world that is like the general repository of a warehouse of the spirit, which provides the demands of the reflective consciousness."[353] Compare Vallega's claim that the aesthetic means affirming the (particularly Latin American) "experiences, dispositions, and senses of being in the affective and physically embodied dimensions...from which and in terms of which conceptual knowledge, ideas, and discourses of freedom take form."[354] Additionally, Tirres maintains that the aesthetic—what he also refers to as the pre-reflective or immediate—and which he understands as our deeper and embodied engagements with reality prior to submitting that engagement to reflective consciousness can "serve as the raw fodder for knowledge."[355] Therefore, as we see in these three projects alone, there is a shared vision for the aesthetic as a dynamic dimension of human experience that connects to ethical and epistemological determinations, and as such, has the potential to not only reshape (or decolonize) philosophy but also to recover and revolutionize ways of thought and being that resist domination by a particular cultural ideology.

That, for Tirres, the aesthetic is an important source of experiential information that the "medium of intelligence" can turn into "more reflective and ethically significant forms of experience"[356] and knowledge, a claim that holds for Arango and Vallega's projects as well, is also a point that Amos Niven Wilder seems to presage when he asserts that effective social action must operate at a deeper level, the pre-reflective, in order to more effectively engage with

[353] Arango, *Primer manifiesto*, 26.

[354] Vallega, *Identity to Radical Exteriority*, 4.

[355] Tirres, *The Aesthetics and Ethics of Faith*, 91.

[356] Ibid. 196.

and challenge the "loyalties, banners, and spells that rule a way of life and its institutions."[357] There are three core elements to draw from the quoted passages in the previous paragraph that are worth highlighting in the interests of any philosophy concerned with the process of liberation. The first is that taking into consideration the raw data of aesthetic experience as the object of a praxis of liberation is indispensable to gaining a critical awareness of one's situation and the situation of others. The second element is that this data is indispensable to an engagement with the empirical realities of oppression and to theorizing creative forms of resistance. To dichotomize mind and body or reason and affect is to fall into the same trap that Freire warns of in *Pedagogy* and Vallega critiques in *From Identity to Radical Exteriority*. To accept and internalize these dichotomies is to deprive each one of a constitutive dimension since these are mere conceptual distinctions that obfuscate the complex, interdynamic, and plenitudinous character of reality and experience. In other words, to take these dichotomies as representative of or as mapping onto reality is to mythologize reality, and therefore, fail to take full account of not only reality, but one's perception of reality. Both must be made an object of a liberating praxis in order to deepen the critical awareness that continually orients that same praxis. Instead, in mythologizing, one merely skims the surface of reality and subjects their perceptions to the governing ideologies that keep one submerged in a situation of oppression. Creativity and imagination, thought and reason, do not proceed from nothing nor do they subsist on concepts alone. Instead, as the thinkers above suggest, that deeper sensory, affective, and bodily content that is constantly interacting with the world and amassing new data, provides the raw fodder for the reflective consciousness and knowledge construction. The third element I suggest is that serious attention to the aesthetic, or pre-reflective, helps to guard the language and

[357] Amos Niven Wilder, *Theology and the Religious Imagination*, 27.

content of the philosophy against over-abstraction that fails to connect with the concrete and lived experience of those in situations of oppression and flat expressions that fail to inspire and mobilize ethical and imaginative action.

IV. Cultivating *Un Sentido de Vivir*

At the start of my project, I wondered how Arango's turn toward a faith-based philosophy, which is a sharp departure from his earlier irreverent and nihilistic writings, would retain its sharp dimension of socio-political critique and its liberatory potential through this new theological and poetic framework. However, as I noted above in Goizueta's work, he cautions any theological aesthetics of liberation on resisting a reduction of liberation to either purely socio-political terms, at the cost of its theological perspective, or to merely affective and embodied experience at the cost of its socio-political import. Furthermore, theopoetics presents an effective model for merging theological investigation with poetry and creative uses of language for the purposes of generating discourses about God, liberation, and concrete forms of social action that look beyond the boundaries of academia. We can consider Arango's poetry to be works in the tradition of a theopoetics or "poeticized perspective," as Keefe-Perry describes it above. Arango's late poetry is a theopoetic aesthetics of liberation, which inspires rather than pacifies and which playfully invokes the mystery and ambiguity of Self, Reality, and God.

Throughout Arango's early period and his late work, one can identify a central objective to his humanistic project: that of cultivating *un sentido de vivir*. This can be translated in two main ways. We can understand this phrase to mean cultivating a "sense of life/living" or developing a "meaning of life/living. While "meaning" and "sense" are interchangeable within this context, the gerund form "living" expresses and retains the dimension of action or activity

that “life” does not. Life and a commitment to life is an important aspect to Arango’s work; however, human beings are creatures of activity, of constantly deciding what we are going to do and who we are going to be. Given Arango’s emphasis on action, creativity, and self-determination, a more faithful translation is one that preserves the dimension of human *being*. That is, the impetus to continually intervene in history and ascribe meaning to human history through our cultivation of what it means to live as human beings. To continue to cultivate meaning to human living, and to history, is to continue humanizing ourselves and our world. To cease cultivating this sense of what it means to live can have two consequences Arango has pointed out in his early and late philosophy. The first is consequence is our accepting what it means to live from external sources, such as institutional religion, education, or family. However, this is to abdicate responsibility for one’s life and to resign ourselves to convictions that are not our own, but were simply internalized from the “social fabric,” as Ortega y Gasset would say.[358] One must make the meaning of living a question for him or herself first and to answer this in the context of one’s own life, rather than through the beliefs of others. Arango’s entire project has highlighted these two ideas of responsibility and resignation. To take responsibility for one’s life is to begin that process of cultivating one’s own sense of living. It is a movement of commitment. To abdicate responsibility leads to resignation and the condition of a living death or stagnation.

The second consequence is twofold as both periods in Arango’s *obra* had slightly different frameworks. Arango’s early period was more existentialist while his later period took on a more theologically informed teleology. One main focus of his early period was the renewal of Colombian culture through the creative and spontaneous contributions of free spirits. As such,

[358] José Ortega y Gasset, *Some Lessons in Metaphysics*, trans. Mildred Adams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 33-34.

one consequence of refusing his project (that of cultivating *un sentido de vivir*) is the continued ossification of Colombian culture, but also human culture and history. It is a return to accepting the old and rigid dogmas of institutions as what determine one's sense of living. In his later period, the consequence is violating or turning away from God's gifts to us: life and freedom. Life and freedom in his late work take on theological import as both must be used to reject sin, and thus avoid a spiritual death, and live on the path laid out by Jesus Christ. Cultivating *un sentido de vivir* involves then, and is informed by, one's loving participating in the life community and being in communion with all God's creations.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I. Critical Confrontations *con la Obra de Gonzalo Arango*

In chapter two, I demonstrated that the intellectual history of the Philosophy of Liberation (PoL) movement, as elaborated most recently by Eduardo Mendieta, temporally and geographically de-situates Gonzalo Arango (and other liberation thinkers outside of the prevailing geography of the movement) from the movement's canon. Thus, contemporary treatments of the movement, while acknowledging the movement's divergent outgrowths and internal heterogeneity, fail to intervene in or challenge the PoL's accepted history. In this way, unrecognized currents (and thinkers) of the movement, such as the aesthetic current I propose is represented by Arango's work, remain unnoticed and unrecovered within the history of ideas (within Latin American especially). This project of recovery within the history of ideas occupies much of Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg's *obra* (work). Cerutti-Guldberg, on whose history of the Argentine PoL subsequent histories and discussions of the movement are based, perhaps understandably focused on the liberation movement of which he is a part. It is that Argentine liberation movement that won the moniker of "The Philosophy of Liberation Movement." However, that this is a liberation movement first recognized as a philosophy of liberation movement should not have continued to close that history in such a way that its origins are singularly identified with its expression in Argentina.

Cerutti-Guldberg advocates for the continuous revision, openness, and integratedness (recovery and integration of unrecognized or as yet unconnected ideas) of liberation

philosophies.[359] In this way, the tradition of liberation philosophy remains dynamic and can constantly renew itself as earlier liberation theories are revised or give way in light of subsequent theories that are better able to respond to the demands of the time and a people. Cerutti-Guldberg remarks that with such productive interventions in the history of ideas, his own work included, today one can no longer speak of the philosophy of liberation, but rather of philosophies for liberation; that is those "thoughts (*pensamientos*) which are produced explicitly for a social change or transformation aiming at greater degrees of solidarity, reduction of injustices… structural transformations."[360] Although Cerutti-Guldberg focuses on the PoL movement in its Argentinian iteration, this broader definition seems to leave open and invite a more inclusive and revisionist intervention into the curated intellectual history of the movement and into its narrative of a single (temporal and geographic) origin point. It is also worth noting that in a more recent paper focusing on the recovery of aesthetic contributions in *nuestra América*, Cerutti-Guldberg asserts that we must "(re)work, therefore, with enthusiasm, in the history of *nuestroAmerican* aesthetic ideas… I reiterate my conviction that the desirable goal is to reach an aesthetic self-awareness from the reconstruction of our aesthetic cultures… and our own aesthetic production."[361] Thus, in presenting the liberatory and aesthetic philosophy of Gonzalo Arango, my project (among others) serves as a positive response to Cerutti-Guldberg's call to reconstruct these important contributions for the history of ideas.

[359] Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, *Filosofía de la liberación*, 468-71. Iván Márquez makes a similar point when he summarizes Cerutti-Guldberg's position in *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, eds. Susana Nuccetelli et al. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 302.

[360] Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, "Actual Situation and Perspectives, 57.

[361] Horacio Cerutti-Guldberg, "Elementos y sugerencias para una historia de las ideas estéticas en nuestra América," *Anuario del Colegio de Estudios Latinoamericanos* 1 (2006): 312.

II. Schutte's 5-Part Model: An Explanation of the Criteria

Ofelia Schutte seizes on some of the key theses of Cerutti-Guldberg's problematizing current and renews a task he began in the 1970s and 1980s: that of critically evaluating the philosophy of liberation movement, particularly the populist sector. Schutte further builds upon Cerutti-Gulderg's early work, critiquing the populist sector from multiple points that can be rebuilt into a robust framework with which to analyze and construct a genuine philosophy of/for liberation. For Ofelia Schutte, the more critical and empirically oriented approach of Cerutti-Guldberg possesses distinct advantages over the populist subsectors he challenges in his own work. Pointing to both a gap and limitation in the Argentine movement, Schutte highlights the absence of a substantive engagement with feminist perspectives and the dearth of attention given to issues that affect women, such as sexual violence and reproductive rights. Although Schutte does begin with the historical origins of the PoL, based on Cerutti-Guldberg's work, Schutte's methodology is not a geographically specific historiography. Instead, she provides a thematic and critical inquiry into specific liberation philosophies.[362] It is in Schutte's critical inquiry and evaluation of the PoL that a space opens for Arango as a philosopher of liberation. More specifically, I draw out of her 1993 work explicit evaluative criteria for philosophies of liberation that focuses not on, but on the character and liberatory potential of philosophies that, as Cerutti-

[362] Cerutti-Guldberg's early equation of the philosophy of liberation movement with its expression in late 1960s Argentina almost force one to conclude that the origins and initial practice of the philosophy of liberation is only to be found in that region. That is one historiographical representation of a movement that is, in reality, diffuse and arises within the spirit of a people. What began as a specific account of the movement in Argentina has since been taken as the whole of the movement. Thus, earlier and contemporaneous Latin American liberation discourses taking place in other regions have been left out of early histories. I do not contend, of course, that this was Cerutti-Guldberg's intention since his projects aim to recover and integrate *nuestra* American ideas. However Mendieta (and others) seem to have uncritically accepted and reproduced this initial and partial history of the PoL movement as the canonical representation of it, at least in its initial constitution and maturation stage despite his familiarity with La Violencia, a violent period in Colombian history that influenced the ethos of *Nadaísmo* (See Mendieta, "Medellín and Bogotá: The global cities of the other globalization" *City* 15, no. 2 (2011). What I demonstrate in my dissertation is that an explicit philosophy of liberation was taking place in Colombia in the writings of Gonzalo Arango.

Guldberg had put it, have social and structural transformations as their aim. Turning to her 1993 text, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*, I will highlight five criteria of a liberation theory drawn out of her discussion of the PoL "in critical perspective."[363] Schutte's criteria can be taken both as evaluative criteria and as *sugerencias* (suggestions) for what should be constitutive of a genuine liberation philosophy. Consequently, Schutte's philosophy also has the potential to, at the least, call attention to those self-claimed liberatory philosophies that in reality utilize oppressive tactics, and at the most, "defrock" those same philosophies of their liberatory status; for example, such as the philosophy of Enrique Dussel, whose work is often taken as the representative *par excellence* of the PoL movement.

Let us then take a closer look at the 5-part criteria I reconstructed from her 1993 project. The first criterion is **the absence of absolutist conceptions.** For example, using absolutist categories of good and evil and variations on that (alterity/el pueblo/moral and totality/European/imperialism), which do not take into account empirical realities, such as concrete differences that challenge such homogenized and abstract categories. In such instances of reasoning, "place and position are overdetermined with ethical and political value."[364] For example, Dusselian philosophy casting Europe as the totalizing (evil) center that annihilates the periphery (a geo- and socio-political category) and throws itself upon the "wives of other men, on their children, and on their gods."[365] Consequently, Dussel's ethics of the periphery doctrine ignores empirical nuances, such as the regional and intranational oppressions and injustices that take place, such as violences against women and indigenous groups, as well as political

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[363] Ofelia Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 175.

[364] Ibid. 190.

[365] Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Markovski (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), 52.

repressions. A PoL "needs to begin with an acceptance of life" as an acceptance of empirically constituted differences.[366]

The second criterion is **the absence of paternalism**. Cerutti-Guldberg warns against this tactic in which the philosophy or philosopher knows (or dictates) what is best for a people. He contends that there will need to be a redefinition of the role of the philosopher and philosophy to avoid perpetuating one's/its complicity in imperialism and dominating ideology.[367] Similarly, Schutte writes that paternalism is operating "when philosophers or other intellectuals decide they will be the official cultural interpreters of the people's beliefs."[368] Schutte is critical of a liberation philosophy that conceives of its subject, such as *el pueblo* (the people), as poor, oppressed, weak, and in need of saving by the learned and articulate philosopher. For example, Schutte points out that "Dussel's theory is built around a subject who must show his or her pain, who must say 'help me,' in order to compel ethical attention."[369] Her concern is the placement of individuals/groups in a subordinate and helpless position, which reproduces the same oppressive conditions for which a liberation philosophy should be critical. The second and related concern is the superior and exalted position of the philosopher-as-savior, which is counterproductive to a philosophy that should have as its aim the people dictating their own destiny. In other words, a liberation philosophy must recognize that a *gente* (people) are capable of liberating themselves.

I would add to this that although Alejandro Vallega seizes on Dussel's category of Life as evidence of his philosophy's commitment to life, Dussel also asserts that "authentic liberative

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[366] Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 205.

[367] Cerutti-Guldberg," Actual Situation and Perspectives," 55.

[368] Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 193.

[369] Ofelia Schutte, "Origins and Tendencies of the Philosophy of Liberation in Latin American Thought: A Critique of Dussel's Ethics," *The Philosophical Forum* 22, no. 3 (1991): 282-83.

politics *advises* liberative heroes and the people even to lay down their lives for the new order."[370] Here we must take note of Freire's work on oppressor tactics in order to more fully problematize Dussel's above assertion. Freire writes that "one of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*."[371] In other words, the oppressor designates a course of action for the oppressed, transforming their consciousness into one that conforms with the oppressors' consciousness, rather than recognizing them as subjects of their own strength of mind, body, and purpose, who can and must determine their own actions in the struggle.[372] How then can we read Dussel's use of "advises?" It is not within the scope of this chapter to make a determination on whether Dussel's assertion is prescriptive, or whether the liberative politics he cites has a prescriptive (oppressor) dimension. However, I do contend that this question must be asked and that Dussel's philosophy (and any philosophy of/for liberation) must be problematized in this way or one risks taking an inattentive and uncritical position toward the project of liberation and its purported theoretical expressions. I do make the claim that there is at least a very fine line (and perhaps no line) between "prescribes" and Dussel's use of "advises." We cannot ignore the gravity of the subject matter either, which is that of advising others to their death and the greater exigency this should place on the author's attentiveness when formulating a philosophy of/for liberation and the readers' evaluation of the liberatory character of the text.

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[370] Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 65. Emphasis added.

[371] Freire, *Pedagogy*, 46-47. Emphasis in original.

[372] Ibid. 47-48.

The third criterion is **the permanent and active presence of a self-critical capacity** to "avoid the self-assuring role of negative ideology."[373] This is a central thesis in Cerutti-Guldberg's own work, which affirms the functions of a permanent self-critical capacity as permitting the "radicalization of the process of liberation toward the integral freedom that it desires and needs" and as what will guard against a philosophy adopting an imperialistic and dominating attitude toward its role in liberation movements.[374] In short, philosophy should not overestimate its role in the process of liberation, its discourses, nor cease problematizing its own formulations for a liberation philosophy. In a more recent publication, Schutte iterates this same point noting that "historically we see that sectors of liberation movements may turn into self-righteous moral and political forces," who, for example, "employ the ideology of good versus evil to consolidate their power and manipulate the masses."[375] Such oppressor tactics as the illusion of inherent morality (and thus incorruptibility), establishing a prescriptive relation to the oppressed, and manipulation through the ideological function of language are the common toxifiers of a liberation movement and philosophy. This critical point highlighting the susceptibility of liberatory movements and theories to dogmatism, counterproductive binaries,[376] exclusionary ideologies, and paternalism can also be found in the work of Luis Villoro,[377] and

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[373] Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 195.

[374] Cerutti-Guldberg, "Actual Situation and Perspectives," 56.

[375] Ofelia Schutte, "Response to Alcoff, Ferguson, and Bergoffen," *Hypatia* 19, no. 3 (2004): 183, 185.

[376] See "Response to Alcoff, Ferguson, and Bergoffen" for the helpful and productive distinctions Schutte makes between dualities, dualisms, and binaries, 184-87.

[377] See Villoro's book *El Proceso Ideológico de la Revolución de Independencia* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1977), originally published in 1953, his 1978 address to El Colegio Nacional entitled "Filosofía y dominacón," and his 1997 book *El poder y el valor: Fundamentos de una ética política* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica), for example. Respectively, *The Ideological Process of the Independence Revolution*, "Philosophy and Domination," and *Power and Value: Foundations of a Political Ethic*. Villoro, who was a member of El grupo Hiperión and wrote extensively on

more recently, in the work of Dr. Gregory Pappas who calls attention to and builds upon the work of Villoro.[378]

Here, again, it is worthwhile to note the work of Paulo Freire whose desideratum of humanization demands the recognition (and self-recognition) of the oppressed as liberators, as subjects of their own liberation, not objects of liberatory thought and action. Thus, Freire writes that any attempts to "liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved...it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated."[379] The dichotomy of oppressed-liberators must be resolved then in the overcoming of this dynamic—of this separation—in the realization and affirmation of the oppressed not as merely oppressed and in need of liberation, but as at the same time their own liberators in the struggle. Thus, we can clearly see the deeper connections and affinity of purpose bridging these decolonial, feminist, critical, and liberatory projects.

Lastly, the fourth and fifth criteria are that a genuine philosophy of/for liberation must **be empirically informed** and take an **Explicit stance on specific social issues**. These two criteria follow easily from the first three and cohere with the overall argument Schutte makes; mainly, that a genuine liberation philosophy should be anchored by an orientation similar to the social sciences to avoid falling into overabstractions and reductionisms that inhibit its potential as a liberatory work, as well as its ability to remain attuned to the complexities and dynamics of the

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such themes as liberation, ideology, freedom, oppression, and domination, is surprisingly absent from Eduardo Mendieta's article, "Philosophy of Liberation."

[378] See Pappas' articles "Zapatismo, Luis Villoro, and American Pragmatism on Democracy, Power, and Injustice," *Pluralist* 12, no. 1 (2017) and "The Limitations and Dangers of Decolonial Philosophies: Lessons from Zapatista Luis Villoro," *Radical Philosophy Review* 20, no. 2 (2017).

[379] Freire, *Pedagogy*, 65.

particular socio-historical condition or situation that requires transformation. A theory of liberation must be empirically informed and oriented by the methods found in the social sciences in order to more precisely examine "the causes of domination and exploitation" affecting human relations, and consequently, the theory should "be explicit about where it stands on specific social issues."[380] Failing to examine the complexities and nuances of concrete situations of oppression risks confusing the part with the whole; for example, confusing "the greater part of North American and European culture with imperialism," an un-empirically informed and ahistorical position she attributes to Enrique Dussel.[381] For Schutte then, in casting the whole of Europe and North American culture in the role of the villain inhibits the explanatory power of the liberation theory and fails to identify the specific causes and mechanisms of oppression that must be addressed (made an object of dialogic reflection) and transformed through action.[382] Additionally, being explicit about the specific social issues one is fighting for or against serves multiple functions. It ensures that the liberation philosophy is attentive to concrete (not abstract) situations of injustice. It is responding directly to the needs and concerns of the time and of a people, and therefore, it remains rooted in and informed by specific socio-historical conditions. Finally, the explicit stance criterion also retains the merit of sincerity, or rather reveals a sincere commitment to a liberatory project, since in taking a stance on LGBTQ rights or against the particular policies of a government, the liberation philosophy is effectively taking a risk. For

[380] Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 197, 202.

[381] Ibid. 200.

[382] Again, I am drawing on the enduring work of Paulo Freire here. For Freire, liberation as praxis must involve reflection (on one's own, but necessarily also in dialogue with others in the cause) and action aimed at transforming the world. Reflection and action are both needed, and sacrificing one for the other, cannot lead to liberation, but rather devolves into either activism (action for the sake of action) or verbalism (rendered effectively impotent without action). See *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, chapter 3.

example, the philosophy risks making itself a clearer target for some and an alienating project for others who espouse liberation, but take more socially conservative positions.

III. Schutte's 5-Part Model: An Evaluation of Arango's *Nadaísmo* Philosophy

Let us begin with the first criterion: the absence of absolutist conceptions. Arango explicitly warns against *Nadaísmo* devolving into dogmatism. In fact, this is one of the reasons he advocates individuals determine their own values and create their own truths. *Nadaísmo* calls for a multitude of diverse expressions in thought and being that emanate only from those who have taken up the struggle for their liberation and are initiating their epistemic break and engaging in a reexamination and revaluation (and rejection as needed) of the Established Order's prevailing values and beliefs. These are the free spirits Arango seeks to awaken to his *Nadaísmo* philosophy, the hidden god inside of each person—that is, the ability to self-determine and engage in radical creativity—a philosophy of life in which "everything is possible, since for us no truth exists, nor the beautiful, as absolute categories."[383] Absolutist categories and conceptions are fundamentally at odds with the principles of *Nadaísmo*, which are a passion for life and living, especially on one's own terms, to give our lives and the world in which we live our own sense of meaning, and the free (and anti-status quo) development and expression of one's own creative impulses. Arango encourages revolutionary changes in the use of language, in meaning, in concepts and categories, in culture and society, in spirit and our relations with the world. In short, it is a reconstructive revolution in every facet of human living from root to sky. Although Arango critiqued the privileging of reason and rationality at the expense of other forms of knowing, he did not set up oppositional absolutes or identify certain problems with whole

[383] Arango, "La rebelión estética," 24.

cultures and countries. Arango was critical of *any* theory or system of thought and practice that functioned as an oppressive structure and hindered the freedom and agency of human beings.

The second criterion: **the absence of paternalism**. Arango's writings are passionate appeals and *avisos* (reminders) that each person can "*rebel against the oppressive dogmas of reason*," renounce the "*banners of stupid political parties*," refuse to "recognize the power of the powerful," that you can "*Rise up!*" and "*practice as universal truth the truth of your life*" since there "*is an oppressed god inside of you. Free your god...Your powers are infinite...Liberate your energy*" for "it is in your hands to choose your destiny and the destiny of your country."[384] These *avisos* mark a significant difference from philosophers of liberation, at least those for whom Schutte's critique would apply. Arango did not speak *for* anyone, such as *el pueblo*, but rather sought to wake people up to their inherent power and to point to the mechanisms he believed suppressed that power and cultivated a resignation to institutional dictums, external authorities, and alleged saviors.[385] Importantly, Arango *spoke to* his readers, not as helpless or incapable masses, but as free spirits and revolutionaries in the making, as sovereigns of their own destiny. He had repeatedly advised his readers to follow their own paths, their own voices. Arango's words are only meant to be the alarm clock: "do not follow me, take your path and leave me," "Your actions are sovereign and they have the infinite power to choose fate," and "Each one of

[384] Arango, "El sermón atómico," 42-45. Emphasis in original.

[385] Arango adopted a zealous style, particularly in his early writings. One of the reasons for this tactic was to shock the people and offend certain institutional authorities. Therefore, I contend that even when Arango described himself and the *nadaístas* as "prophets" and "priests," for example, it is in the most minimal and irreverent sense. The apparent lofty epithets of "priest" and "prophet" that he uses in "The Atomic Sermon," should be understood as someone bringing important news who shouts it from corners among passersby, but the priest or prophet itself should not be followed or worshipped and should have no devotees. As should be clear, Arango is a staunch advocate of self-determination, and freedom from free-spirit effacing influences. In this same piece, he urges "you have no greater boss than your conscience...agree to be the boss...who embodies the spiritual revolution of which I speak...decide with your will...choose with your freedom," 44.

your actions makes you responsible for the earth and the sky."[386] These pronouncements from his 1965 article, "The Rebel and Nothingness," typify his *nadaísta* writings. Arango had no desire for followers, but for rebels, for poets, for individuals who take claim of their own freedom and destiny.

During his break from *Nadaísmo* and his fellow *nadaístas*, Arango seems to criticize the movement as having become too ideologically oriented—he never intended for *Nadaísmo* to solidify into an ideology—at the expense of its original inclusivity and openness. In 1969, Arango writes directly to the *nadaístas*, who "in the name of revolutionary purity had me expelled for 'indignity' and 'treason.'[387] After Arango showed his support for the liberal presidential candidate, Carlos Lleras Restrepo, his longest-standing friends in the movement reacted with vitriol and accusations. In this same article Arango warns them against falling into the "capital sin" of "intellectual dogmatism" and into the "revolutionary idealism" it was already falling into.[388] *Nadaísmo* was losing its rebellious character to paternalistic idealizations of "knowing best" and "speaking for;" that is, knowing best and speaking for the movement, for its members, and for the people. For Arango, *Nadaísmo* was making itself a governing myth, entertaining "the contemplation of egoistic dreams" rather the "more honorable activity of solidarity."[389] In other words, much like Freire, Arango believed the revolution in practice should be a *with*, never a *for*.

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[386] Arango, "El rebelde y la nada," Última página (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2000), 77, 79.

[387] Arango, "Entre 'nadaísmo-sí' y 'nadaísmo-no,'" 294.

[388] Ibid. 295.

[389] Ibid. 296.

The third criterion: a permanently active self-critical capacity. A cursory glance at Arango's *nadaísta* work, perhaps even a first reading of it, would seem to invite an interpretation of it as bombastic and self-laudatory. However, Arango's fervent style and apparent pretensions were deliberate tactics meant to shock and terrify his readers into a sudden cognizance, acting as a *filosofía de despertador* (alarm clock philosophy). Arango sought to incite a reaction that would cause others to stop, question, and challenge. Even a challenge to his work and words he would see as a win, as evidence of the *nadaísta* spirit, which is simply the spirit of human independence, life, and creativity. He even congratulated the who expelled him, trying to reawaken in them the attitude of respect for dissent and the genuine rebel spirit. He writes to them "your protests against me do not offend me. On the contrary: if you had not protested, *nadaísmo* would be dead."[390] And in a 1973 article "Goodbye to *Nadaísmo*," he reiterates that he never aspired to power and "I never said the last word; I always had my doubts surfacing in silence."[391] This seems to suggest that a constant presence of doubt, like the need to give "ourselves a healthy knockdown in the mud of our contradictions" affirms the necessity of self- and peer-critique.[392] In this way, through doubt or the permanence of a self-critical capacity, a movement can resist the common toxifiers of its liberatory potential; toxifiers that can cause it to freeze into an ideology or governing myth, and thus, create a separation between the human condition and history.[393] Arango's *nadaísta* philosophy never settled itself into place, never froze into doctrine or illusions of knowing the way, but instead strangely and deliberately maintained a confounding quality. Arango alternated among language and an emotional tonality that was

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[390] Ibid. 296.

[391] Arango, "Adiós al Nadaísmo," *Obra Negra* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Carlos Lohlé, 1974), 298.

[392] Arango, "Entre 'nadaísmo-sí' y 'nadaísmo-no,'" 295.

[393] Ibid. 295.

bombastic, humble, and self-deprecatory; hopeful, apocalyptic, and uncertain. These deliberate inconsistencies and confusions, I posit, are so readers similarly do not settle into the philosophy, make a home of it as their way and their truth, but instead find in his philosophy a catalyst that precipitates their own doubt and epistemic break from the Established Order. In short, it is a catalyst for their own revolution and quest for liberation.

The fourth and fifth criteria: being empirically informed and taking a stance on social issues. Taking an explicit stance on specific social issues and constructing one's liberation philosophy around an empirically informed sense of the socio-historical conditions of a people or region are clearly interrelated criteria. Sound empirical reasoning is needed to build a genuine and well-informed view of the mechanisms of oppression and of the political and social opposition to change. It is in these two criteria that I believe Arango's *nadaísta* philosophy fails. Arango does not take an explicit stance on specific social issues, such as LGBTQ rights, even though some of the *nadaístas* were homosexual.[394] I find two pieces in his *nadaísta* oeuvre in which he attempts to address social issues, "Black Freedom" (1967) and "Confessions of a Seducer" (1965), but both pieces are deeply flawed attempts. Both texts reveal an author who lacks a strong empirically informed sense of the issues and cultural differences within the Afro-Colombian population in the country and the issues facing women. In "Black Freedom," Arango seems to exoticize and eroticize black bodies, for example, when he writes "precisely in the

[394] However, his stance on certain social issues and his response to local problems can be read in his post-*nadaísta* writings; for example, in the 1969 article "¿Libertad?" Arango addresses and condemns the actions of the Colegio Mayor de Nuestra Señora del Rosario in Bogotá, Colombia. Medical students at the Colegio Mayor had created and put on a play whose, in Arango's words, purpose was to "raise concerns about problems related to their profession, contemporary man, society in general." However, others, including then rector of the Colegio, Dr. Antonio Rocha, whom Arango directly names in the article, believed the play to be irreverent and immoral. As it quickly became a scandal, Arango explicitly and publically sides with the students, writing of Rocha that he put the "the dogmatic triumph of tradition before the rational triumph of truth. For if a spiritual order was true and just in the past, but it is unjust and does not correspond to imperious urgencies of the present life, that order no longer constitutes an ethical and human purpose, but rather its negation, and therefore, an abject lie." See "¿Libertad?" in Última página, pp. 321, 323 for the direct quotes in this footnote.

dance, these oppressed bodies shake miseries and chains" and "the dance has purified and excited them. A trail of rum and fornication will rise to the sky from the beach."[395] While Arango does not cast Afro-Colombians in the role of victims to be saved or helped, it is presumptuous and assumes a knowledge of Afro-Colombian cultures that the piece itself reveals is either completely absent or sorely lacking.

While Arango seems to use this article to highlight the undaunted strength and active struggle of a people against the violence of "white reasons" and "white superiority" whose supremacist logic "has denied his participation in the creation of values,"[396] this notion of the "black man's plight" seems to be based on a view from a great distance. "Black Freedom" is the product of Arango's time spent at a bar, specifically one on pacific coast of Colombia in Buenaventura. Here he is watching the dance floor, noting: "this is the spectacle that happens in front of me: black people who 'fly' like angels… Blacks rationally ignore that in their dance they celebrate their emancipation. But they 'know' by instinct, and by dancing they glorify themselves."[397] The terminology of "watching" and "spectacle" confirm him as the distant observer studying, generalizing, and categorizing a people according to his own terms and schema. Ultimately, what this piece demonstrates is an author reconstituting the subject-object dichotomy, in which the men and women on the dance floor are turned into transparent objects of Arango's gaze and reflection. While his piece is an attempt at humanization, it fails in that task. Instead, this piece serves an example of insular reasoning, rather than the "empirical

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[395] Arango, "Libertad negra," Última página (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2000), 181, 184.

[396] Ibid. 181.

[397] Ibid. 182.

reasoning" Schutte suggests as what can point to the damage that results from an uncritical conflation between one's own view of reality and the reality as it actually is.[398]

Arango commits similar missteps in "Confessions of a Seducer," which reveal an insulated male perspective on women and love. Arango claims that "mystery is the essence of love" and that is why a "woman who hides her identity in a mask… stimulates our passion for possession, our creative passion. Her concealment opens up as a challenge to our thirst for conquest."[399] Although Arango emphasizes the harm a desire to possess can cause and that women's liberation will happen "when the woman decides to break the old structures that allow her no more alternative than a procreative fate," he also, in that same breath, attributes to women the imbecility of a "coquettish narcissism of the eternal feminine."[400] Arango attempts to address the injustice of male domination and the sexualization of women, but at the same time he presumes a knowledge of women's external conditions of oppression and her inner life that only serve to subject them once again to the analysis of a male gaze. In attempting to discuss women's liberation, Arango subsumes the issue under a one-man symposium on love and a male-conceived adumbration of woman's inner psychological and emotional life. Arango comes uncomfortably close to paternalism and essentialism in this article. Given the seriousness of the topic, like "Black Freedom," Arango failed to bridge the gap between the complex empirical realities of specific forms of oppression and the perspective on them he espouses in the article. While the title of the article could be seen as an immediate admission of his culpable position in the objectification of women, it is also possible the title is merely meant as a humorous evocation

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[398] Schutte, *Cultural Identity*, 200.

[399] Arango, "Confesiones de un seductor," Última página (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2000), 1.

[400] Ibid. 2.

of Don Juan. These two articles are not representative of Arango's body of work; nevertheless, they are two examples of an absence of that self-critical capacity, one aspect of which is the demand placed on an author to critically reflect on the precision, empirical gaps, and limitations of his or her own work.

IV. Conclusion

What I demonstrate in this dissertation is Gonzalo Arango's unique, but neglected contributions to not only the philosophies of liberation tradition, but also to Latin American philosophy and philosophy in general. In these instances, the project of recovering philosophies is vital to the continued enrichment of the discourses within the discipline and a matter of ensuring that multiple voices, particularly from those geographies that are historically marginalized or inferiorized by the academic institution in favor of the continued privileging of an anglo-centered canon, intervene in the coloniality of knowledge and power that still exerts its influence on course syllabi and academic curricula. A review of courses in continental philosophy, aesthetics, existential philosophy, and epistemology, for example, reveal a lack of world philosophies (as Vallega's project seeks to recover) and instead show an institution that still reproduces the privileging of anglo-Western thought.

My project is one modest contribution to a much larger and robust contemporary movement to problematize philosophy itself (as Cerutti-Guldberg suggests) and re-situate marginalized philosophies within the rich and diverse discourses to which they can speak. I (re)situate Arango primarily within the philosophies of liberation movement. I have argued that the philosophy of liberation movement, considered synonymous with its Argentinian iteration and which Arango's work predates by more than a decade, is in need of revision and re-

examination. Arango's early and late writings demonstrate that the intellectual history of the movement draws too narrow a boundary around its early formulation that occludes other contributions to a liberation discourse taking place outside Argentina.

Drawing from Schutte's critical analysis of the movement, I evaluate Arango's own contributions to liberation theory. While his work ultimately withstands some of Schutte's most poignant critiques of the movement and the criteria I educe from *Cultural Identity*, there are also failings and limitations in his *nadaísta* philosophy that merit a fuller examination and critique. However, his philosophy also possesses clear advantages in its commitment to a) creative and everyday language that merges with the more abstract and philosophical terminology to produce works that are challenging, yet accessible; b) beginning philosophical discourse from the position of one's own circumstances thereby preserving a dimension of *autochthonicity*, in which the philosophy is a product of the specific regional and empirical realities in need of creative responses and transformation; c) passionate and intimate writing in which his own life becomes a subject for philosophical reflection rather than adopting an attitude of rational distance and objective thought for the sake of preserving the illusion of impartial or universalist thinking; and d) speaking *with* the subjects of his philosophy, rather than *for* and assigning the liberating power to every human being rather than to theorists, specialists, intellectuals, etc. Arango does not place the subjects of his liberation philosophy in a permanently weak and oppressed state in which they must be saved or redeemed by an "intellectual" savior. Instead, Arango advocates each individual's capacity for self-determination, radical creativity, and the ability to free oneself from structures of oppression (whether philosophical, religious, political, and economic). Though the sharp, self-critical quality to which Schutte points might not be sharp enough in his work, his philosophy nevertheless stands out from the philosophies of liberation (Kusch, Dussel,

Scannone, for example) that Schutte critiques and his work is situated closer to, if not within, her criteria for a philosophy of liberation that is genuinely and productively liberatory. Turning away from a multidisciplinary history of exalting reason and logic, Arango privileges a creative, sensuous, and bodily engagement with the world. Arango's aesthetic approach to liberation represents a vital and understudied current within the philosophies of liberation tradition. Though it is beyond the scope of this article, the liberation philosophies emerging in the literatures of 20th century Colombia, and taking place outside of Argentina, undoubtedly merit further study and excavation for their contributions to liberation theory.

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