

in full the question of modernity. From the excluded, the silenced, the humiliated minds and lives that constitute the underbelly of westernizing modernity arises a boundless flood of experiences, histories, lineages, and ways of giving determination to identities and of articulating ways of being. These remain to be thought, and those who carry these traditions in North America are the Latino/a/x peoples with their distinctive ways of being. They are the way to a philosophy that is coming, if philosophy will turn to its ownmost activity of giving critical articulation to life from life. Secondly, if this is the case, Latino/a/x philosophy poses a radical challenge to how one thinks philosophical thought and how one engages in it: that is, since the lineages and traditions that become central to this originary and radical modernity will not be found by only reading traditional texts, but in the literature, chronicles, and oral traditions of the Latino/a/x past, as well as in the way their lives in their practices, and projective imagination begin to configure other horizons and hence other possibilities for thought.<sup>20</sup>

To return, in closing, to Siqueiro's mural. In light of our discussion, the figure of the Latino/a/x in North America appears not only as the site of oppression and suffering, but as a reminder and exhortation to engage a past and present that, along with that history of violence, brings forth what has remained for so long the blind spot of westernizing rationalist modernity, that is, the thought and lives of the oppressed, the silenced, excluded, and exploited: lives that bear unimaginable and fecund paths for philosophical thought, and for learning once again, the sense and depth of humanity and its originary expressions and spacings for freedom. Understood in this way, Siqueiro's image does not call for the inclusion of Latino/a/x thought into North America, but for the transformation of the spaces of knowledge in light of Latino/a/x experiences, our histories, and ways of being, a reality from which philosophical thought may occur anew today.

**ENDNOTES**

1. Ironically, "babaloo" is the father of the world in the Afro-Caribbean Lukumi, or Santería, tradition.
2. Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El Primer Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno*, trans. Jorge L. Urioste (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno, 2006).
3. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade / The Souls of Black Folk / Dusk and Dawn / Essays and Articles* (Library of America, 1987).
4. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Press, 1979).
5. "I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psycho-existential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it." Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 12.
6. By "Westernizing," I intend the calculative rationalism wedded to capitalism and its timeline and model of progress that becomes identified with modernity.
7. In *Viaje de la América Meridional*, Félix de Azara writes, "Mixture improves the races and I think that these *mestici* have more ingenuity, sagacity and culture than the children of Spanish mothers and fathers." In Miguel Rojas Mix, *Los Cien Nombres de América* (Barcelona: Lumen, 1991), 302.
8. Leopoldo Zea, "Negritud e Indigenismo," *La Filosofía como Compromiso de Liberación* (Venezuela: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1991), 304-305.

9. On African migrations' impact in Latin America: Dina V. Picotti, *La Presencia Africana en Nuestra Identidad* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Sol, 1998).
10. José Martí, "Our America," *Latin American Philosophy for the 21st Century*, ed. Jorge Gracia and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), 251.
11. Aníbal Quijano "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification," *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 181.
12. *Ibid.*, 182.
13. "... a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others." *Ibid.*, 182.
14. *Ibid.*, 190.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Aníbal Quijano, "Modernity, Identity and Utopia in Latin America," *Boundary* 20, no. 3 (1993).
17. *Ibid.*, 201-16.
18. *Ibid.*, 141.
19. *Ibid.*, 142-43.
20. As José Martí states, "Our Greece must take priority over the Greece which is not ours." Martí, "Our America," 248.

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## *The Marxism of José Revueltas: A Struggle Against Orthodoxy*

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"Bitter is the encounter with evil, with its people,  
with its space.

Evidently one was born for something else,

Something out of time and out of sense.

One would have wanted to love, sob, dance,

In another time and another planet

(even if it had been the same one).

But everything is forbidden, the sky, the earth.

They do not want us to be inhabitants.

We are suspected of being intruders in this planet.

They persecute us for it;

For going, for loving, for moving without being  
told to and without chains.

They want to capture our voices,

To leave nothing left of our hands,

Of our kisses, or anything that our bodies love.

It is forbidden to be seen.

They persecute all joy.

They are dead and they kill us.

We are killed by the dead.

This is why we will live."

—José Revueltas, October 4, 1968

This poem was written just two days after the student massacres of 1968, after the Mexican government ordered to suppress a peaceful demonstration in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* in Tlatelolco (Mexico City). Five thousand soldiers and 200 tankettes surrounded the plaza and opened fire against a gathered crowd killing hundreds of students and civilians, and incarcerating 1,000 others.

As in Paris, and Prague in former Czechoslovakia, and the United States, there was a big social movement in Mexico during 1968. If one observes only its immediate causes, one could say that it grew out of something quite unpolitical, a brawl between students from the National Polytechnic Institute and students from a private school; though it quickly became radically political. But in a larger sense, the 1968 movement was the result of the accumulation of social unrest over the past decades, having to do with the government's repressive policies against labor unions, such as the repression against the rail workers and teachers (both in 1958).

The events leading up to the massacre in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* were part of the student movement, in which members of the whole university community took part. José Revueltas was one of the main intellectual figures associated with this event.

### LIFE AND CONTEXT

José Revueltas was born in 1914 in Durango, Mexico, which is a state in the northern part of the country. It is not a border state, but lies just beneath Sonora, Chihuahua, and Coahuila, which share the largest portion of the border with the United States. He was born in a middle-class family of prominent artists: Silvestre Revueltas, his eldest brother, was a famous classical music composer; Fermín Revueltas was a painter, part of one of Mexico's avant-garde movements, Stridentism; and Rosaura Revueltas, his sister, was an actress, who had a role in Herbert Biberman's 1954 film "The Salt of the Earth."

The Revueltas family moved to Mexico City in 1920, where José Revueltas started going to a private school, *El colegio alemán*. After his father's death, he transferred to a public school. And then by 1925 he quit school and for the next four years taught himself at the National Library.

José Revueltas, his family, and his social and political environment are constituted greatly by the post-revolutionary context in Mexico. The alleged "Revolutionary Party" was in power, and would be for over seventy years, and though it upheld the pretention of being a *revolutionary* party, it had rather nationalist tendencies. The Revueltas family was very left wing in its political views, which was

not a rare thing at the time. But José was a radical, in the best possible way. He was a radical critic, not only of capitalism but also a radical critic of dogmatism and of the bureaucratic and totalitarian deformation of socialism.

He is better known for his extended literary production. He has several novels and short stories, and even cinematic scripts. His literary work is of late appreciation, but there is a growing agreement among scholars today that he is on par with Juan Rulfo as one of the greatest Mexican novelists.

He is also known for his political activism, which lasted throughout his whole life. He was first incarcerated at the age of fifteen for attending a rally at the Zócalo. That incarceration lasted six months. A few years later, in 1932, he was incarcerated again and was sent to a maximum-security prison at the Islas Marías, where he spent three months (It was after this experience that he wrote his first published novel, *Los muros de agua* [Water Walls], and then again in 1934 for organizing a strike of peasant workers in Nuevo Leon, another northern state. Finally, he was incarcerated in 1968 for his participation in the student movement; this time he was sent to "El palacio de Lecumberri," a prison in downtown Mexico City.

His theoretical and political production has had less attention, although recently there has been a renewed interest in exploring this area of his thought. He was a self-taught Marxist philosopher, and an extremely original one at that. The fact that his political thought has survived throughout decades but has not been prone to study has to do with the fact that he was permanently critical not just of capitalism and state policy, but of the communist party politics as well, which made him, and his theoretical production, a bit of an outcast. He was expelled from the Communist Party in Mexico, but made the effort to be reaccepted. His expulsion was related to the publication of a novel which deviated aesthetically from the accepted "socialist realism." One of the main characteristics of this artistic movement was the idea that the purpose of art was to promote socialist ideas, and that the party, and the proletariat, had to be portrayed, always, as highly positive characters or forces in society. Nonetheless, in his 1949 novel *Los días terrenales* (*The Earthly Days*), Revueltas explores the hypocritical contradiction in the morals of some party policies and militants who were willing to instrumentalize the life of even their own family, in order to fulfill their "historical duty." As an example of this, there is a pathetic scene where a militant of a socialist party is writing a report of a meeting while his baby daughter is dying in the next room. He decides not only not to do anything about it, but to prevent his female comrade and the mother of his child to do anything about it, because, to his eyes, that life is worth nothing compared to the historical mission of the proletariat. Evidently, party leadership did not take Revueltas's novel well and expelled him from the party, arguing that he showed existentialist and anti-Marxist deviations in his aesthetics.<sup>1</sup>

The use of literature to explore some of his existential questions is well known. In one of his later novels, *Los errores* (*The Mistakes*), he deeply criticizes Soviet purges

and persecution of heterodoxy and dissent, and comes up with a very subtle term to name a condition or an emotion only known to those who have militated in an orthodox political organization: "party anguish." This sensation has to do with the anguish generated by the fear towards one's own party and its potential repression over one's own actions. Revueltas explores how different people react towards this condition, and how it is sometimes related to massive delations, ostracism, rebellion, and resistance, and inserts one of the main themes throughout Revueltas's thought: the struggle for autonomous consciousness.

In 1960, he renounced the party altogether, due to differences with the leadership, and founded an organization called the "Liga Leninista Espartaco" (E Spartacus-Leninist League). Towards 1963, he was expelled from this organization for being *too critical*. The members of the league argued that Revueltas's public opinions about the discrepancies between Marxist-Leninist parties around the world contravened the organization's interests. They thought that a member of a political organization did not have the individual right to think publicly regarding political issues.

Reflecting over public opinion regarding his own person, Revueltas said:

They have me for a heterodox Marxist, but in reality, they do not understand what I am: a product of Mexico, a monstrous country which we could symbolically represent as a being with the simultaneous shape of a horse, an eagle, a snake. Everything is contradiction amongst us.<sup>2</sup>

The fact remains that his thought is difficult to categorize because it changes through time and never settles with accepted forms. But this is difficult to grasp.

Often, from an external point of view, that is to say a point of view which is not formed or informed on Marx's take on society, one would think that Marxism is something quite homogenous. Therefore, there would be such a thing as a single theory or a unified body of theoretical theses common to all Marxian thought. But that is simply not true. There are multiple theories, sometimes even hostile amongst each other, which strangely fit the mega-general description of "Marxist theory": such is the case of Althusser and Luckács, or Sartre and Plejanov, or Mariátegui and Che Guevara, or Mao and the Soviets, or Luxemburg and Lenin. There is no such thing as "Marxism," in singular. Instead, we could speak, as it has been done, of a thousand Marxisms. Even so, it would be not very serious not to acknowledge the fact that there was the ideological and political pretension to homogenize and hegemonize Marxism as a single, unified theory. That pretension was held by the totalitarian and repressive Soviet State and its international organization, the Comintern.

One of the tasks of all philosophers who think that Marx's thought is still alive and profoundly relevant for our present day society is to criticize the official Soviet version of Marxism (and the official social-democratic version of Marxism), to denounce them as dogmatic doctrines rather

than critical deconstructive theories, and to show the possibilities of a Marxian thought not constrained by the ideological and political straitjacket of any orthodoxy.

Thus was the work of the best critical theory; that was the way Benjamin or Sartre approached Marxism. The intention of this text is to show, if only just a glimpse of it, in which sense José Revueltas did the same for Marxian thought in Mexico.

We must insist that José Revueltas is not an anomaly in this sense. There is not so much of a tradition of critical Marxism in Mexico, but there is a constellation of relevant critical Marxism produced in Mexico, which converges around the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The constellation is formed by several philosophers such as Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolívar Echeverría, both critics of official versions of Marxism.

There is one last thing I would like to mention regarding Revueltas's life. There were two major political processes which marked breaking points in José Revueltas's thought. I've already mentioned the second one, the 1968 student movement, in which Revueltas took an active part and from which he developed the notion of "autogestion" to which I will come back later. But there was another one before that: the struggle of the railroad workers during 1958 and 1959. This was ten years before the 1968 movement. José Revueltas reflected profoundly on its outcome, and it enabled him to break away theoretically from the party, through the publication of a political work entitled "Ensayo de un proletariado sin cabeza" ("Essay of a Headless Proletariat") in 1962.

Through a superficial reading of this text, Revueltas may come off as an über-Leninist, criticizing all communist or socialist parties in Mexico for adhering to true Leninism, which is partly right. But there are, as well, different sorts of Leninisms. This has to do with the Stalin regime. After Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin took control over the party and the Soviet State. During this period, the name of the orthodox Marxist doctrine conducting the Third International Workers Association changed to "Marxist-Leninist." So there was a time during which if someone stated that he was a Marxist-Leninist, he meant that he adhered to the Third International, and probably militated in a "communist" party, and was in favor of Stalin's national and international policies. So, in some circles, stating that someone is a Leninist might imply that someone is in fact a Stalinist—which is not Revueltas's case.

During the Stalin era, Marxism was adopted as a positive scientific doctrine, which revealed alleged eternal positive truths. During this period, there were some parts of Marx's theoretical production that were not seen with good eyes and were not published by the Stalinist International press. In Mexico, this press was called "Editorial Progreso" ("Progress Press") and it published the standard canon for Marxist-Leninist thought. A text which was not published as part of the canon in this press was the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," discovered in 1932. There, Marx writes prominently about alienated work.

Through the “Essay of a Headless Proletariat,” Revueltas tries to fuse together Lenin’s party theory to Marx’s theory of alienation contained in the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts.” He is, to my knowledge, one of the few Marxian theorists to have done so. This opens the arena of the philosophical problem engaged by Revueltas’s take on Marxism.

### MARX’S THEORY OF ALIENATION

To understand Revueltas’s contribution to a theory regarding the philosophical problem of organization, one must have a basic comprehension of Marx’s theory of alienation. As I have said before, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* deal with this issue explicitly, though some specialists would argue that all of Marx’s theory has to do with this problem. Throughout this paper, I subscribe to this position, in contradiction to positions like those sustained by Althusser, which hold that Marx’s later work got rid of his early philosophical influences. To my eyes, Marx’s greatest work, *Capital*, is a book regarding alienation. The problem regarding alienation may be synthesized this way: relations of production developed in the capitalist society alienate people. This means, in its stronger sense, that people are no longer the active producers of their social environment, but rather passive reproducers of a social form which is being subjectively designed elsewhere. In its root, the problem of alienation describes a loss of subjectivity on behalf of human beings. They are no longer the subjects of history, but rather its objects, and sociality is being modeled by a logic or rationality that is alien to all human purposes, which is the value rationality of capital. A new pseudo subjectivity is born, which is called capital, or, in other words, value which has the ability to valorize itself, to make itself bigger. In one of the most telling bits of *Capital*, Marx puts it like this:

[T]he circulation of capital, suddenly presents itself as an independent substance, endowed with a motion of its own, passing through a life-process of its own, in which money and commodities are mere forms which it assumes and casts off in turn. Nay, more: instead of simply representing the relations of commodities, it enters now, so to say, into private relations with itself.<sup>3</sup>

Capital starts behaving as the new social subject. It is in its name that decisions are being taken in all aspects of human life: from the simple things such as where do we work or what do we do for a living; what do we study (this applies in some cases, in other not some much; for instance, studying philosophy is quite an anti-capitalist gesture in itself); what commodities are produced and where; but also the complex macro-economic problems: international policies, immigration policies, economic policies, etc.

Lukács wrote a groundbreaking book in 1923 called *History and Class Consciousness*. There he explained the narrow relationship between his take of Marx’s theory of alienation and the problem of political organization. From his point of view, the problem regarding organization is not merely a technicality, but a true philosophical problem. And it is from this point of view that I want to approach Revueltas’s comment and critique towards Lenin’s work regarding organization.

Lenin’s party theory tries to respond to the problem of alienation in its most basic form. For him, alienation implies a political problem specific to the working classes. As the proletariat is subject to alienating working conditions, their consciousness is limited. On its own, the proletariat can only reach what he calls a “trade-unionist” consciousness, which means that the proletariat will not struggle on its own for the radical transformation of society, but will struggle for better conditions of exploitation, such as a better salary, a shorter workday, more civil rights, etc. This being the situation, Lenin designs a party theory which, to his eyes, shortcuts the alienation problem in its political consequences. Revolutionary consciousness will come to the proletariat from outside the working class; it will come from the most radical intellectual sectors of the bourgeoisie, which will struggle alongside the proletariat for the emancipation of society. This thesis, by the way, was shared with Karl Kautsky, leader of the German social-democrats. So the party is formed by a compact cell of intellectuals who decide the party’s actions and politics, and a broad specter of militants and sympathizers who must execute the leadership’s commands. So, in Lenin’s party theory, there is a clear monopolization of the subjective activities regarding party life and organization.<sup>4</sup>

Lenin’s party theory is pretty standard for his time—it had conspiratorial and revolutionary objectives—but in its general form it was not unlike Max Weber’s depiction of modern parties throughout modern democracies:

The following is common to all parties: a nucleus of people have in their hands the active leadership, that is to say the formulation of slogans and the choosing of candidates; a group of people is adhered to them which fulfill a much more passive role and finally the rest of the members of the political association just play a role of objects . . . choosing one of the candidates and programs that the party presents to them.<sup>5</sup>

Weber theorizes over the consequences of this kind of political organization in much the same way as Marx had done. The outcome is a reification and bureaucratization of politics, where the ends are substituted by the means. Weber calls this problem the “iron cage.”

### REVUELTAS’S CRITIQUE OF PARTY POLITICS, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE THEORY OF “AUTOGESTION”

[A]utogestion means that a determined *something*, is managed and directed by its own decision towards the point where it has set itself to arrive.<sup>6</sup>

The main thing to understand is that for José Revueltas, party organization is a philosophical problem which has to do, mainly, with a cognitive problem. For him a Marxist organization deals with the issue of organizing class consciousness. It answers the question, “How do alienated people radically change the world?” So, for Revueltas, the question regarding organization is not a mere technical question, but rather an epistemological problem. It was always so, but by 1968–1971 his version of a Marxist

organization developed into its final form, which greatly deviates from the Leninist perspective.

There are several theoretical texts written either during the 1968 movement or during his imprisonment at Palacio de Lecumberri that deal with this subject. In a text edited with the title "Notas sobre la organización" ("Notes on Organization"), Revueltas reflects on the notion that a party has to deal with two main issues: on the abstract and theoretical level, it has to deal with something he calls "cognitive democracy," and on a more practical and concrete level, the party needs to deal with the organization of consciousness.

On the concrete, practical level, a party must act as one; there must be a unity in its action. But on the abstract, theoretical level, a party must allow for the free concurrence of opinions and tendencies, whether they be different or even in conflict with one another. Revueltas imagines a party where theoretical discussions are held unrestrictedly and in absolute freedom with the participation of every member of the party, where there is no subject which is considered taboo. This way, the subjective moments of party life are not monopolized by a single instance or committee. When the theoretical issue is resolved, then praxis overcomes the abstract level in a unified political action.<sup>7</sup>

His conceptions regarding organization are a result of his participation in the 1968 Movement where he built the notion of "academic autogestion." During the student strike, the university was alive with political, cultural, and theoretical activities. Revueltas saw in that experience the deepest emancipatory potentialities. He thought that in that experience you could see the most radical expression of academic freedom. He saw a critical and dialogical exercise of student activism: all students and solidary teachers building knowledge subjectively and democratically.

What is academic autogestion? It is to proceed with academic courses inside and outside curricula with the help of solidary teachers and students. It is to debate, to question, to refute, on round tables, seminars, assemblies, the issues and ideas of our time and our society [ . . . ] We need to create the most diverse forms of democratic organization for action, for dialogue, for controversy, ample, constant, tireless: committees, councils, symposia, encounters, dialogues with writers and intellectuals of all tendencies.<sup>8</sup>

Revueltas understood academic autogestion as the interruption of a university practice which only ratifies the *status quo*. Academic autogestion is student action that takes on the critical practice of producing knowledge, goes beyond curricula, and makes the totality of political and social problems an object for reflection and consciousness.

What is autogestion? A University and a superior education which are free, active, open to every national or international problem and willing to take action with them and regarding them, through study and analysis that flow into militant political activity.<sup>9</sup>

Revueltas understood that the core problem with alienation is the split dichotomy between subject and object. When that happens, subjectivity tends to be reified. That happens both in party life where the subjective leadership is monopolized by a single group, and in processes of traditional education, where all subjectivity relies on the teacher, and passive objectivity on the student. Revueltas saw in the 1968 student movement a subversion of this relationship, a conquest of subjectivity by students, an exercise of free criticism and unrestricted plurality, and he used that experience to theorize party life and to subvert traditional party theory.

This posits a problem for traditional Marxist organizations. The perspective of self-organization, or "autogestion" has been a subject of discussion between left-wing currents for a long time. Historically, it has been associated with political anarchism. More and more recent critical political movements around the world have tested more horizontal ways of organization: this has to do with the fact that traditional Marxist-Leninist organizations have been proved dangerous, alienating, and false.

What I think is extremely worthy of Revueltas's thought is that his theoretical commitment was never towards an author or towards a doctrine, but rather towards social reality and towards social movements, and I think it is reality that should confront our ideas and conceptions, and not the other way around. The willingness to transform one's ideas and to reassess our own conceptions is the basis of critical thinking, and I think Revueltas is a good teacher for that.

**ENDNOTES**

1. Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, "La estética terrenal de José Revueltas," in *IncurSIONES literarias* (México: UNAM / FFyL, 2009).
2. José Revueltas, *Cuestionamientos e intenciones, Obras completas 18* (México, Era, 1978), 26. Arturo Anguiano Orozco, *José Revueltas, un rebelde melancólico* (México, Pensamiento Crítico, 2017), 25.
3. Marx, *Capital*, Chapter V. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch04.htm>. Consulted April 24, 2019.
4. There are two texts in which Lenin expounds his party theory: *What Is to Be Done?* and *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back*. See Lenin, *Obras escogidas en tres tomos* (Progreso, Moscú, 1955).
5. Max Weber, *Economía y sociedad* (México, FCE, 2005), 231.
6. Revueltas, "Consideraciones sobre la autogestión académica," in *México 68: Juventud y revolución* (Mexico City: Era, 2016), 110.
7. See Revueltas, "Notas sobre la organización," in *Escritos Políticos*, Tomo III (México, Era, 1984).
8. Revueltas, "Nuestra revolución de mayo en México," en *México 68*, 38-39.
9. Revueltas, "Llamamiento a la toma de la universidad," en *México 68*, 60.