

## ‘FOUR PATHS FIVE DESTINATIONS’: CONSTRUCTING IMAGINARIES OF ALTER- GLOBALIZATION THROUGH LITERARY TEXTS

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**ABSTRACT:** This article contests the popular assumption that literature is ever less politically relevant. Quite the contrary is the case: literature and literary language becomes increasingly important for the alter-globalization movement and for the notion that ‘another world is possible.’ The work of four authors—Manu Chao, Eduardo Galeano, Subcomandante Marcos, and José Saramago—are comparatively analysed in light of their contribution to an alternative globalism and to an alternative practice of politics. All four authors contribute from different perspectives to the literary articulation of a political project. Their work shares characteristics such as the permeability of genres, the emphasis on the poetical over the narrative, a meandering structure that expresses the search for and step-by-step construction of a cultural and political alternative, and an emphasis on translation and encounter as principles of interaction with difference.

**KEYWORDS:** alter-globalization, political literature, Quixotic, poetics, literary genres

In a 2001 article, Nicholas Brown ends his analysis of the global relevance of literature as carrier of an ‘eidaesthetic’ project, as defined by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe with reference to Schlegel, on a skeptical note. Brown traces the ‘striving’ of this project—which transforms from the notion of the aesthetic sublime to a utopian one and which provides an intellectual framework for the notion of world literature—from Romanticism, through European Modernism, to the literature of decolonization. Its ‘utopian impulse’ disappears in postcolonial writing but ‘reappears precisely in the emergence of theory in the 1960s.’<sup>1</sup> With reference to Jameson, Brown raises the question of whether ‘the emergence of Theory signal[s]... the end of Literature’ (EI 847). While he does not want to reply to this question with an unequivocal ‘Yes’, he does suggest that

It seems reasonable to be agnostic about the future of literature, which is threatened not only by a kind of technical obsolescence and by an entirely complementary tendency to sink back into the merely decorative, but also, and perhaps more

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1. Nicholas Brown, ‘The Eidaesthetic Itinerary: Notes on the Geopolitical Movement of the Literary Absolute’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 3, 2001, p. 846.

consequently, by the rise of other cultural forms that seem better able to carry literature's eidaesthetic project into a fully globalized world. ... Could it be that music has somehow been able to take over the objectives of the two-hundred-year-old project of literature? (EI 847)

Throughout the article, Brown holds to a rather narrow definition of what 'literature' is; most of his examples come from the novel. His final suggestion that literature might be replaced by theory or music is, as we will see, at least partially a result of his focus on this one genre. In this article, I wish to revisit Brown's conclusion in the light of a corpus of literary texts that participate in the utopian project summarized in the slogan 'another world is possible', evoked by the broad array of forces that are summarized under labels such as 'Global Justice Movement' or 'Alter-globalization Movement'. My analysis will focus on texts by the Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, the Portuguese writer José Saramago, and the Franco-Spanish musician Manu Chao. I have chosen works from these four writers out of a much larger corpus because they can be considered representative articulations of the project. They also acknowledge their debt to each other through a tacit and flexible enmeshing of intertextual references.<sup>2</sup> Whether their project is related to, or can replace, the 'eidaesthetic project' evoked by Brown is one of the questions that will be explored in this article.

My analysis will focus on two issues in particular. The first concerns literary genres; the second concerns the relationship between literature and politics. As for the first point, I will argue that the permeability of genres is an important characteristic of 'alter-globalization literature' because it aesthetically expresses a dialogue between actors who insist on their 'difference'. Poetry and narrative interpenetrate in Saramago's work; Subcomandante Marcos combines poetry, storytelling and the epistolary; Galeano draws on narrative, history and journalism; in Chao's work, storytelling, poetry and music inform each other.<sup>3</sup>

As for the second issue, my argument contests the perception of literary and cultural works and institutions as reactions and responses to globalization. As a result of this perception, literary works, their authors and their readers are posited as reactive or passive participants of a situation that is already made; they do not seek to intervene in the political and economic project of globalization or in the societies that result from it. This is a symptom of the notion that there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization and that neoliberal capitalism absorbs all cultural work. The acceptance of this premise leaves writers with two options: they can pursue a utopian project, or they can make the most of the structures provided by the cultural economy under neoliberal capitalism. In the first case, their work withdraws from reality. In the second case, it becomes complicit

2. Marcos has acknowledged his debt to Saramago and Galeano in letters addressed to each of them, and in interviews. Saramago has written a preface for the volume *Our Word is Our Weapon*, a collection of texts by Marcos. Chao makes frequent references to the EZLN throughout his work. Galeano features in the acknowledgements of Chao's album *Clandestino*.

3. For an analysis of the significance of stories and storytelling in relation to projects of resistance see Eric Selbin, *Revolution, Rebellion, Resistance: The Power of Story*, London and New York, Zed Books, 2010.

with an economic and political system that these same writers critique. In both cases their work 'sink[s] back into the merely decorative'. The authors discussed in this article do not accept the premise that there is no alternative. For them, the question is how they can participate in the construction of an alternative, both as an imaginary and a utopia, *and* as a political reality.

The notion of 'alter-globalization' draws on and interacts with numerous, diverse traditions of thought and writing. The structure of my analysis seeks to incorporate this diversity by taking the reader into a metaphorical megacity. The attempt to recover the megacity—ie., the dystopic contemporary anti-*polis*—as locus of the civic imaginary encapsulates one of the projects of alter-globalization literature: the redefinition of concepts such as democracy and citizenship in a seemingly adverse context.

#### GLOBAL CITY OR MEGACITY?

The megacity is not an evident choice as setting and metaphor for an analysis of texts on globalization and literature. The 'global city' seems to lend itself more obviously to this purpose. In *Globalization and Literature* Suman Gupta, for one, argues that the representation of 'global cities' or 'world cities' is one important way in which literature—especially novels—engage with globalization:<sup>4</sup>

They [cities] are understood and presented in media, political, sociological, and also literary narratives as microcosms of the world at large, as 'world cities' or 'global cities'. There are several ways in which such a super-signification of these locations seems plausible: as noted already, the centres of regulation and finance and enterprise with a global reach have a larger concentration here than elsewhere; there is greater availability of non-place-like corporate capitalist neuterness in the everyday of such cities; these are hubs of international media and communications conglomerates and agencies which collect global information, and consequently likely to be attuned to what may be regarded as a global consciousness. But perhaps most importantly, these cities are simply enormously cosmopolitan.

Gupta's concept of the global city is predicated upon an ideal version of the globalized economic system which produces a 'global consciousness' that draws on the presence of transnational institutions, spaces defined by corporate capitalism, and the presence of information technology and the sense of global connectedness created by these organizations, companies and institutions. However, this 'global consciousness' does not include many aspects of globalization that are nevertheless acutely felt in many cities: lack of investment in public services and its consequences, growing social inequality, privatization of public spaces, lack of appropriate democratic forms of governance, and the increasing spatial segregation of social groups, for example. Gupta's uncritical endorsement of the concept blinds him to those texts that do not partake in the 'global consciousness' defined by him.<sup>5</sup>

4. Suman Gupta, *Globalization and Literature*, London, Polity, 2009, p. 39.

5. This is not to be taken as a critique of the concept of the 'global city'; for a summary of these critiques see

Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the human consequences of globalization focuses on the dark side of globalized cities. Bauman also conceives of the city in the globalized world as an ordered space, though he interprets the implications of this type of order with reference to Foucault's panopticon and Mathiesen's synopticon. Bauman argues that modernization created cities that were made to fit the 'one and only one, officially approved and state-sponsored map' and that were therefore transparent for power. Globalization has developed this panoptic state even further. Urban space is now organized not as one in which people interact, but as one in which people keep each other at arm's length out of fear of each other, and where space no longer bears a relation to place or to the local:<sup>6</sup>

The Synopticon is in its nature global; the act of watching unties the watchers from their locality—transports them at least spiritually into cyberspace, in which distance no longer matters, even if bodily they remain in place. It does not matter any more if the targets of the Synopticon, transformed now from the *watched* into the *watchers*, move around or stay in place. Whatever they may be and wherever they may go, they may—and they do—link into the extraterritorial web which makes the many watch the few. The Panopticon *forced* people into the position where they could be watched. The Synopticon needs no coercion—it *seduces* people into watching.

Bauman evokes a 'global consciousness' fairly similar to the one evoked by Gupta. However, whereas Gupta assumes that this global consciousness reflects a reality that can be experienced by all dwellers within the global city, Bauman emphasizes that it can only be experienced by very few and that those who cannot experience it, are relegated to the role of spectators of a desirable way of life. Moreover, they are trapped in an increasingly oppressive and dystopic, localized reality which makes escape from it ever more desirable. Bauman suggests that these spectators have no agency whatsoever and have relinquished any claim to it; this is the aim of the organization of space through neoliberal globalization.

Contemporary megacities are often described as localities of such spatial disempowerment on the concrete and imaginary level. Koonings and Kruijt sum up contemporary views on the megacity:<sup>7</sup>

Megacities, then, are large cities [...] in which geographic and demographic size are just one out of many factors that shape a certain kind of urban pathology: a systematic disjuncture between opportunity structures for livelihood, service provision, security and overall urban planning and regulation, on the one hand, and the size and composition of the urban population on the other. Inequality, exclusion, segregation, violence and insecurity are apparently endemic features

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Kruijt and Koonings. My point is rather that Gupta's use of the 'global city' highlights one of the difficulties of interdisciplinary analysis. The concept was developed by Sassen and Castells for a very specific type of analysis in the Social Sciences. Gupta transfers the concept to the Humanities without constructively engaging with the difference in disciplines, and the different purposes of the analysis.

6. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, p. 52.

7. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (eds.), *Megacities: The Politics of Urban Exclusion and Violence in the Global South*, London and New York, Zed Books, 2009, pp. 10-11.

of megacities. The fault lines of urban exclusion are drawn by class, caste, race, ethnicity and religion. To the extent that these fault lines contribute to the disarticulation of urban systems, megacities can be considered 'fragile'. Yet, [...] they are also the stage for important and sometimes innovative spaces for social mobilization, urban politics and policy-making.

This definition of the megacity—which focuses on experience and not on conceptualization—emphasizes its ambivalences. Megacities are accumulations of dysfunctionalities, disorderly and ungovernable aberrations of urban planning, spatial concentrations of everything that has gone wrong in modernization processes. At the same time, megacities are spaces for innovation, self-organization, solidarity and political agency for the population, and they are hotspots for the encounter between different cultures, ways of life, and innovative and experimental forms of cultural production.

This perception of the megacity is analogous to the way in which adherents of the alter-globalization movement see the world at large: ravaged by colonialism, imperialism and neoliberalism; without appropriate forms of democratic governance; without any sort of order that appropriately encompasses and organizes the diversity of cultures, ways of life, and economic systems; characterized by increasing social inequality; on the verge of ecological collapse. Yet, the notions behind 'alter-globalization' are positive and constructive: access to decision making processes should be independent of social status; ecological balance has to be re-established; global solidarity, collaboration, equality, and the right to be different should be guiding principles of policy. The metaphor also highlights the desire to reclaim spaces, agency, to participate not spectate, to rethink the notion of citizenship, and to turn the seemingly chaotic megacity into a site of citizenship.

#### ENTRANCE POINTS.

*This megacity can be entered through any of the following four entrance points. The reader can take any route they choose, but has to finish on the Square of Encounter.*

#### ENTRANCE POINT: URUGUAY

The work of Eduardo Galeano, born in 1940 in Uruguay, engages with a variety of literary genres. *The Open Veins of Latin America* (1971) is an account of the economic and political history of Latin America. Galeano's short autobiographical novel *Days and Nights of Love and War* (1978) recounts his experiences during the early and mid-1970s in Uruguay and in Argentina. The trilogy *Memory of Fire* (1982-1986) is a poetical account of the history of Latin America. In *The Book of Embraces* (1989) he develops the anecdotal, kaleidoscopic style first introduced in *Days and Nights*. *Las palabras andantes* (1993) draws on storytelling and blurs the line between orality and writing. In *Upside Down!* (1998) Galeano articulates a critique of the ideology of neoliberalism and its impact on the human imagination, through a combination of journalism and storytelling.<sup>8</sup>

8. The titles of Galeano's books are given in English for the convenience of the reader. The publication dates refer to the first editions in Spanish. Where books have not been translated, the original Spanish title

Galeano's personal and political trajectory encompasses several important moments in South American history. He worked for the newspapers *Marcha* and *Cr sis* in Uruguay, and took a decidedly left-wing stance throughout the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> After the coups in Argentina and Uruguay he experienced exile in the 1970s and 1980s, and became an outspoken critic of the neoliberal system in the 1990s and 2000s. The ideological and political continuum of his trajectory highlights that the project of alter-globalization has its roots in a long history of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial liberation struggles, which includes the resistance to the military dictatorships of the 1970s.

In his earlier essays Galeano reflects extensively on the resistant function of the writer and of the institution of literature. In 'The Defence of the Word' (1976) he conceptualizes the subjectivity and the role of the writer as follows:<sup>10</sup>

One writes to confuse death and to strangle the ghosts that attack one from the inside; but what one writes can be historically useful only if it coincides in one way or another with the collective need of conquering identity. This, I think, is what one would like: that by saying "This is why I am" and by offering oneself, the writer could help many others to become conscious of who they are. As a means of revealing collective identity, art should be an essential, not a luxury.

The subjectivity of the writer is inextricably linked with collective identity. Yet the individuality of the writer is also the point of departure for the articulation of a collective identification: the writer has to say "This is who I am" before all others can do so. The writer is therefore assigned a vanguard function, even if this vanguard function is embedded within the collective.<sup>11</sup>

For Galeano, the writer's function is not predicated upon the institution of literature. On the contrary: the committed writer questions the institution of literature as well as literary institutions by making genres permeable. In his article 'Ten Frequent Errors and Lies about Latin American Literature and Culture' he contests the erroneous assumption that 'making literature consists of writing books' (TA 15). He criticizes the notion that each genre is clearly delimited, and that literature does not include journalism, song, or script writing. To substantiate his point he gives examples of recognized writers such as Jos  Mart , Julio Cort zar, Chico Buarque and others, whose work spills over into journalism, cartoons, music, or spoken word poetry. Galeano argues that through these strategies literature engages actively with the lived experience of authors and readers, and balances its own assumption regarding its effectiveness, relevance and integrity against a wider context of political struggle.

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is given.

9. See Nathalia Jabur's article in this publication.

10. Eduardo Galeano, *El tigre azul y otros art culos*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2002, p. 6.

11. For literary as one element of the construction of imagined communities and nation building, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991. For a theorization of literature as a revolutionary project see John Beverley & Marc Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

## ENTRANCE POINT: CHIAPAS, MOUNTAINS OF SOUTHERN MEXICO

The Zapatista Uprising on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1994 is often considered the starting point of the alter-globalization movement, and it is often accepted that the ideas and principles articulated by the guerrilla group EZLN give cohesion to the different groups within the movement. Thus, the writings produced by the EZLN and its spokesperson Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos are usually analysed as political discourse. The texts' literary qualities are considered essential to their political efficacy, but Marcos' sophisticated use of political ideas and his transformation of them into literary motives and stylistic devices is not usually considered in terms of an enrichment of literature. My approach focuses on this latter element. One of Marcos' most important contributions to literature concerns his practice of authorship.<sup>12</sup>

'Marcos' exists in four different manifestations, three of them textual. Firstly, the name 'Marcos' protects his identity as a *guerrillero* and military commander of the EZLN. Secondly, 'Marcos' is the spokesman of the group; he voices the demands of the EZLN to the public. Thirdly, 'Marcos' is the author of letters and stories; and finally, 'Marcos' is a character in the stories written by the author Marcos. His multiple identities enable Marcos to function as a translator between different sectors of national and global society, and between multiple political and literary traditions.

'Marcos' translates between Chiapas and the world at large, and between what Guillermo Bonfil Batalla has called 'deep Mexico' and 'imaginary Mexico.'<sup>13</sup> 'Deep Mexico' is indigenous Mexico. Its identity is based on Central American cultures. It has not benefited from modernization; on the contrary, the capitalist and neoliberal ideologies that drive modernization endanger its cultural identity and have led to impoverishment. 'Imaginary Mexico' is the Mexico of the middle and upper classes who believe in capitalist modernization; yet the progress they envision is unsustainable and requires the oppression of 'deep Mexico'. These two Mexicos are separate from each other and do not know how to communicate with each other. Marcos articulates 'deep Mexico' in a language that can be understood by those members of the middle classes who are disenchanted with modernization.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, 'Marcos' university education and his knowledge of Western philosophy and the classics of world literature give him access to a cosmopolitan frame of reference, which allows him to connect to people all over the world who share this framework. The stories featuring the beetle-scholar Don Durito illustrate this point. Marcos' dialogues with the learned beetle draw on their shared interest in philosophy and on their appreciation of literary works such as *Don Quijote* and the poetry of Federico García Lorca. Thus, works of world literature are crucial to 'Marcos' and Durito's rethinking of the eidaesthetic project of

12. For a discussion of EZLN writing as an exploration of the intersection between literature and politics see Jeff Conant, *A Poetics of Resistance*, San Francisco, AK Press, 2010.

13. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, *México profundo: Una civilización negada*, México, Random House, 2008 [1987].

14. Marcos rewrites and diversifies Bonfil Batalla's two Mexicos into four Mexicos. See Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 'The Long Journey from Despair to Hope', in Juana Ponce de León (ed.), *Our Word is Our Weapon*, New York, Seven Stories Press, 2002, pp. 52-61.



literature in a context and for a purpose that Latour and Nancy, let alone Schlegel, would not have imagined.

‘Marcos’ also embodies the inseparability of personal and political transformation. The person who became ‘Marcos’ arrived in the mountains of Chiapas as member of a *guerrilla* group that believed in the vanguard function of the *foco*. After a long and difficult period in the mountains and a prolonged encounter with the indigenous people, the surviving members of the group broke with their Marxist-Leninist approach to politics in favour of an assemblarian indigenous tradition of political organization. The result is the—mainly indigenous—EZLN.<sup>15</sup> While the EZLN insist on the necessity of a command structure for military struggle, they adhere to the principle of collective decision-making in all situations that are not a military emergency, and certainly when it comes to the administration of the civilian communities. The stories featuring the Mayan elder Old Antonio and the conceited *guerrillero* ‘Marcos’ express the personal and cultural element of this rupture. The conversations between the protagonists and the educational stories and fables told by the elder, stage the possibility of dialogue between worlds that are radically ‘other’ to each other. The friendship between the two stages the possibility of collaboration between urban and rural, and between the indigenous and the *mestizo*, always on the basis that the dominant renounces his dominant position and enters a territory where he becomes the ‘other’.

In Marcos’ writing the political and the literary are engaged in a self-reflexive and self-conscious dialogue with each other. His author-figure, which becomes the translator between apparently opposed sectors of society and constructs a type of writing that engages their different ways of seeing themselves becomes a symbol of the potentiality that is set free by the respectful encounter of those who are radically ‘other’ to each other.

*Chiapas is connected to all other entrance points. One can also leave it by the Avenue of Words or Quixotic Avenue.*

#### ENTRANCE POINT: REBELLIOUS EUROPE

The term ‘rebellious Europe’ gained currency when the EZLN called for the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Encounter for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, which was celebrated in Spain. One contemporary facet of it is articulated by the Galician-French musician Manu Chao, whose work also emphasizes the connection of contemporary ‘rebellious Europe’ with past struggles. His stylistically hybrid, multi-lingual work emerges from the suburban migratory context of Paris, draws on a historical and political legacy of anti-fascist struggle, and explores peripheral identities both with reference to the periphery of the suburbs of the megacity of Paris, and with reference to his personal connection with Galicia.<sup>16</sup>

15. See LeBot 1997. The issue is addressed repeatedly and in different contexts, throughout the book.

16. Manu Chao’s father, journalist Ramon Chao, is from Galicia. Manu Chao has actively participated in the cultural life of Galicia, most famously in *A feira das mentiras*. For further details see Giadas’ article in



Chao was the singer and guitarist of the band Mano Negra, whose musical style infused punk with African and Latin American influences. Mano Negra took an anti-capitalist and anti-racist stance. Their final tour through war-torn Colombia led to a radicalized encounter with otherness, at the price of rendering the band member's identity and living conditions precarious.<sup>17</sup> Since then, Chao has travelled compulsively through Europe, Africa and Latin America, looking for exposure to situations in which he experienced himself as 'other' to his surroundings. Since the Zapatista Uprising, Chao has supported the EZLN and the autonomous communities. His first solo album *Clandestino* (1998) includes recordings of Marcos reading the fourth declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. He is also an outspoken supporter of the alter-globalization movement in Europe.

Chao's work and his construction of his public figure undermine notions of European identity as stable and unequivocal. At the same time, he problematizes depoliticized notions of European identity as migratory and hybrid. The cultural hybridity of his work is the result of the multicultural context of the Paris suburbs. While this environment positively produces his identity and the aesthetics of his work, his presence in it is the result of coercion and political oppression: his parents left Spain because of the repressive Franco regime. Chao translates his family's anti-fascist political tradition into a politicized embrace of cultural difference and into a clear anti-racist and anti-Capitalist stance. Cultural hybridity and left-wing political commitment are the two principles of the framework within which Chao permanently questions, reinvents and reconstructs his identity, as expressed in songs such as 'Desaparecido'.<sup>18</sup>

The aesthetics of Chao's work are based on *bricolage* and on the engagement of permeable genres with each other. In many of his pieces he layers lyrics, music, and sound recordings over each other. The result are complex pieces such as 'Vacaloca' (MadCow) or 'Infinita Tristeza' (Infinite Sadness) from *Próxima Estación... Esperanza*, and 'La despedida' ('The Goodbye') or 'Mentira' (Lie) and 'Sol y luna' ('Sun and Moon') from *Clandestino*, where the meaning of the song is produced by the interplay of those three elements.<sup>19</sup>

*Rebellious Europe has a direct connection to all other entrance points. One can also enter or leave it by way of the Avenue of Words or Quixotic Avenue.*

this issue.

17. See Ramón Chao, *The Train of Ice and Fire: With Mano Negra Through Colombia*, Sheffield, Routledge, 2009; and Ángela Rivas Gamboa, 'Are you Ready for Pachanka?', *Análisis Político*, no. 48, January-April, 2003, pp. 94-104.

18. For a biographical account of Manu Chao's life and work see Alessandro Robecchi, *Manu Chao: Música y libertad*, trans. Juan Manuel Salmerón, Barcelona, Random House Mondadori, 2002.

For an analysis of Chao's position as a politically committed public figure and artist, see Marcos Giadas Conde, *La place de l'artiste engagé dans l'espace public: l'envolement médiatique de Manu Chao, entre industries culturelles et mobilisation sociale*, Doctoral Dissertation, Université Charles de Gaulle Lille 3, Lille, 2007.

19. For an analysis of Chao's work as a practice of resistance, see Cornelia Gräbner, ' "...where there is a lot of sound...": Resistance, Subjectivity and the Trilanguaging of Media on Manu Chao's *Clandestino* and *Próxima Estación... Esperanza*', *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2007, no page numbers.

### ENTRANCE POINT: PLATO'S CAVE

In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato uses the allegory of the cave to reflect on the role of knowledge and understanding in governance.<sup>20</sup> Human beings are kept in the cave from childhood. They are chained by necks and legs. Behind their backs, there are a fire and a raised walkway and before them, a wall that functions as a screen. Images are moved along the walkways; the human beings can only see the shadows and hear the echoes and, since they know no different, believe the shadows and the echoes to be real. When the human beings move upwards to the Sun which symbolizes knowledge, they are initially blinded by the light; equally, when they go back down into the cave they cannot see as well as those who have never left. Those who have moved upwards, do not want to descend to 'political assemblies and courts of law'. However, the ideal rulers still do it, out of a sense of duty.

The late José Saramago explores the symbolism of the cave and its components—deception, blindness, seeing—in the novels *Blindness* (1995), *Seeing* (2004), and *The Cave* (2000).<sup>21</sup> Saramago was a long-standing member of the Communist Party and outspoken critic of the economic policies pursued by the International Monetary Fund and by the European Union. In this sense, his vision of Europe is in many ways complementary to Chao's. Yet, where Chao recovers and highlights a submerged tradition of left-wing militancy, Saramago sceptically interrogates the narratives and metaphors that constitute all models of 'European identity', including those proposed by left-wing movements. In *Blindness* and *Seeing* he interrogates the notion of democracy; in *The Cave*, progress and modernization; in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (1991), the 'Christian' value system; and so on. The ways in which those in power employ strategies of deception and disempowerment is a crucial theme of these novels, and so is the compliance and the complicity of citizens with their governments and with social conventions. A revolutionary overthrow of 'the oppressors' is not a solution to any of the scenarios explored by Saramago because a change of rulers alone would not fundamentally change the relationship between the rulers and the ruled; it would not break through the deception. His novels almost never satisfy a wish for narrative closure. Instead, they leave the reader with the choice to either remain in an unsatisfying situation or think about possible solutions.<sup>22</sup>

*One can leave Plato's Cave by way of The Avenue of Words, Quixotic Avenue, the metro station Four Paths Five Destinations, or one can step directly onto the Square of Deception.*

### THE AVENUE OF WORDS

All four writers share a particular approach to writing that is expressed in the concept of 'the word', and that explores the tension between literature as an institution, writing as a

20. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008 [1994].

21. The dates refer to the first publication of the original text, in Portuguese.

22. For an analysis of the analogies between *The Cave* and *The Republic* see Andrew Laird, 'Death, Politics, Vision and Fiction in Plato's Cave (After Saramago)', *Arion*, Third Series, vol. 10, no. 3, Winter 2003, pp. 1-30.

practice, and political language. In the article 'In Defence of the Word' (1976) Eduardo Galeano discusses the function of literature in Latin America against the background of poverty, exploitation, repression, and resistance struggles. The word itself becomes subsumed to the desire to change 'literature' from an institutionalization of privilege, to a dialogical practice of popular liberation. Only much later, in *The Book of Embraces* of 1987, does Galeano reflect on the power of the word as such. In 'The House of Words', dreamt by Galeano's partner Helena Villagra, words are preserved in glass containers. The words plead with the poets to choose them and to feel them. The poets look for those words they once knew but have lost, and for new words. The house also holds a table full of colours, and each poet chooses the colour they need. This is where Helena's dream ends. In this vignette Galeano's focus shifts from the writer and the institution of literature, to words. Yet even in 'The House of Words' it is the poets and writers who choose the words and the colours.

For the Zapatistas, words cannot be 'kept' and they are not chosen by poets and writers; for them, words are world-making. According to the General Command of the EZLN, 'the world began to run when the word appeared'. The first word was constructed through a process of reflection. It met with another word, and 'the world began to be birthed when that one word and that other word met each other and did not quarrel but rather met and reached accord because they respected the other and they spoke and they listened.'<sup>23</sup> Once the word has made the world, it becomes the means by which human beings relate to one another. Word and silence, and their correlative actions speaking and listening, constitute the existence of the human being in the world:<sup>24</sup>

What matters is our eldest elders who received the word and the silence as a gift in order to know themselves and to touch the heart of the other. Speaking and listening is how true men and women learn to walk. It is the word that gives form to that walk that goes on inside us. It is the word that is the bridge to cross to the other side.

Here, the Zapatistas emphasize that self-knowledge and relationality lie at the heart of the practice of the word, and that this practice comes before knowledge or ideology. The consequences of this conception of the word for political language is most clearly articulated in the 4<sup>th</sup> Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. This Declaration places the 'true word' of the EZLN against the government's deceptive use of words. It ends with a statement about the word as constitutive of a new practice of relationality and politics:<sup>25</sup>

We want a world in which many worlds fit. The nation that we construct is one where all communities and languages fit, where all steps may walk, where all may

23. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 'When the Word Appeared', in Canek Peña-Vargas and Greg Ruggiero (eds.), *The Speed of Dreams: Selected Writings 2001-2007*, pp. 297-299.

24. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 'The Word and the Silence', in Juana Ponce de León (ed.), *Our Word is Our Weapon*, p. 76.

25. Subcomandante Marcos (CCRI-CG), 'Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle', *The Speed of Dreams*, p. 80.

have laughter, where all may live the dawn. We speak of unity even when we are silent. Softly and gently we speak the words that find the unity that embraces us in history and which will discard the abandonment that confronts and destroys us.

Words have to be ‘true’ or ‘spoken from the heart’ to be politically relevant within the framework proposed by the Zapatistas. Since the language of politics does not comply with this most basic of their rules, political language has to be remade. This reconstruction cannot come from the area of politics because it is morally discredited. The task, then, falls to literary writing.<sup>26</sup>

The Zapatistas and Galeano use ‘the word’ to break through what Galeano described as ‘spectacle’ and ‘deception’. Writers like Galeano—and, of course, Saramago—upheld this practice throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In so doing, they rescued the institution of literature from complete co-optation and complicity by the culture industries, and upheld its moral and political integrity. Galeano’s conceptualization of ‘literature’ (see Entrance Point Uruguay) shares with the Zapatista practice of the word an emphasis on dialogue, the blurring of the line between author and reader, and the inclusive approach to different genres. The Zapatistas then emphasize some elements of Galeano’s conceptualization of ‘literature’ and discard others, such as the relative protagonism of the author-figure.

*Walking on the Avenue of Words is pleasant but can easily lead to self-absorption or prolonged daydreaming. Travellers tire and may construct a talkshop by the roadside. Therefore, one has to make as many stops as possible and test one’s words against the circumstances one encounters, and against the experiences of fellow-travellers.*

## THE SQUARE OF DECEPTION

If ‘the word’ in the Zapatista sense makes the world, locates the human being within the world and allows for relationality between human beings, *mentira* (‘lie’) unmakes the world, dislocates human beings and isolates them from each other. ‘*Mentira*’ does not have to come in the form of an outright lie; it is just as powerful in the form of deception which is created through cultural and political spectacle, through the illusion of reality in Plato’s cave, or by reinterpreting concepts such as democracy or freedom. In the article ‘Another Geography’ Marcos writes:<sup>27</sup>

Without caring whether or not we are aware of it, the Power is constructing and imposing a new geography of words. The names are the same, but what is being named has changed. And so mistakes are political doctrine, and what is true is heresy. The different is now the opponent, the ‘other’ is the enemy. Democracy is unanimity in obedience. Liberty is only the liberty to choose the manner in

26. For an analysis of another important Zapatista piece on language, ‘The Story of the Words’, see Jeff Conant, *A Poetics of Resistance: The Revolutionary Public Relations of the Zapatista Insurgency*, San Francisco, AK Press, 2010, pp. 177-191.

27. S.I. Marcos, ‘Another Geography’, *Revista Rebeldia*, no. 5, March 2003, web edition in English, <[www.revistarebeldia.org.mx](http://www.revistarebeldia.org.mx)>

which we conceal our difference. Peace is passive submission. And war is now a pedagogical method for teaching geography.

Chao takes up the motif in his album *Clandestino*, in the songs ‘Mentira’ and ‘Sol y luna’, and explores the consequences of ‘mentira’ for the human being. In ‘Mentira’ he sketches a world in which nothing is what it is said to be: “What is said is a lie / What is given is a lie / What goes is a lie a lie is a lie / What cooks below the darkness is a lie / love is a lie / flavour is a lie / lie rules / lie commands / sadness is a lie / once the lie begins it never leaves”. The speaking subject of these lines is dislocated and unable to establish a connection with others. In ‘Sol y luna’ (‘Sun and Moon’) which on the album *Clandestino* comes after ‘Mentira’, Chao quotes the last lines of ‘Mentira’ but ends on a different, more hopeful note: “Looking for an ideal / When will it be? / Where will the sun come through?” These lines are followed by a recording of the 4<sup>th</sup> Declaration of the Lancandon jungle, read by the Subcomandante Marcos.

If one chooses to remain on the Square of Deception, it will turn into the Square of Complicity, explored meticulously in Saramago’s novels. After blindness strikes the characters in Saramago’s novel of that title, most of them follow government orders and move to an abandoned psychiatric hospital; in the hospital, the majority of them fend for themselves, and some of them form a mafia to abuse and oppress everyone else. In *The Cave* the potter Cipriano Algor complains about the whims of the commercial centre that buys his pottery but goes along with them until they cut him off as their supplier. Moreover, he places six clay figurines in a cave; later on in the novel, this cave turns out to be Plato’s cave. Saramago’s reflections on complicity points out that the desire to leave behind deception and Plato’s Cave does not only require the desire and the decision to do so; one can only leave behind the cave by thinking through the investment that one has into the system that apparently holds one hostage but also, bestows social meaning on each person.

*The Square of Deception has a direct connection to Plato’s Cave. One can also leave it by way of The Avenue of Words.*

## QUIXOTIC AVENUE

The Quixotic is expressed through two main motifs: the friction between what seems possible and what seems impossible, and the notion of travel. The former motif recurs throughout Saramago’s work, for example in *The Cave*, when the potter Cipriano Algor leaves the supposed comfort of the centre, and sets out on a journey into the unknown; or in the figure of Death in *Death at Intervals*, who first does not let people die, then changes her mind, then falls in love with a mortal human being and refuses to bring death to this person. Arbitrary rebellion turns into a conscious decision, and the novel ends, when Death decides to let herself be guided by her own love and desire, instead of dutifully obeying the anonymous power that gives her social relevance. The refusal to accept the apparently inevitable—expressed once through market forces and once through nature—drives the actions of both characters.

Marcos reflects on the Quixotic through the theories articulated by the beetle Don Durito. Durito is a scholar, a poet and a knight-errant in the tradition of Don Quixote. Forced into the footsteps of Sancho Panza, Durito's squire Subcomandante Marcos becomes the voice of reason to the beetle and attempts to dissuade Durito from carrying out projects that seem impossible. The beetle's mount Pegasus symbolizes the knight-errant's and his squire's different conceptions of the possible and the impossible. Where Durito sees a magic creature and the possibility for political intervention by participating in the yearly May Day parade in the capital, his squire sees a slow, bizarrely equipped turtle and an impossible journey:<sup>28</sup>

At a pace that Durito insists on called an “elegant trot” and which to me appears more prudent and slow, he approaches me. [...] I gaze at this knight-errant, who for some unknown reason has been brought to the solitude of the Lacandon Jungle, and keep a respectful silence. [...] Durito has baptized his turtle—excuse me, his horse—with a name that seems pure madness: *Pegasus*. [...] I can hardly resist the temptation of making a comparison with the economic recuperation program, when Durito turns his mount so I can see the other side. Even though Durito has announced a “vertiginous turn of his horse,” Pegasus takes his time, making a slow turn. The turtle does it so carefully one might think he fears dizziness.

Durito's belief in the impossible and the unknown vis-à-vis Marcos' attempt to reason within the realms of the possible and the known is symbolized in their divergent perceptions of Pegasus. These perceptions encapsulate an apparent contradiction. However, Marcos-as-author renders the contradictions un-divisive by accommodating both approaches within the same story, and by connecting both characters through friendship and respect.

Marcos' stories follow a meandering structure without clear beginnings or endings. His use of the epistolary genre and his preference to structure his stories around dialogues emphasize the need for a response from the reader, beyond the acceptance or refusal of a prefabricated political utopia or of universally endorsed cultural values. Furthermore, he adapts the genre of the travelogue and takes his readers on metaphorical journeys with himself as their guide.<sup>29</sup>

Galeano's earlier works narrate journeys through Latin America that have a purpose and a fixed destination. From the mid-1970s onwards, exile becomes the main reason for his wanderings across Europe and Latin America, and his journeys are increasingly driven by a desire for encounter, rather than by the desire to arrive at a destination. The structure of some of his books draws the reader into his meandering. The vignettes in *The Book of Embraces*, for example, are organized according to headings such as 'Celebration of the Human Voice', 'Hunger', 'The Walls Speak'. Some of the vignettes with the same heading follow upon each other but others are spread out through the book, and the

<sup>28</sup> Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, 'Durito and Pegasus', Canek Peña-Vargas and Greg Ruggiero (eds.), *The Speed of Dreams*, pp. 303-304.

<sup>29</sup> See 'Chiapas: A Storm and a Prophecy', in Juana Ponce de León (ed.), *Our Word is Our Weapon*, pp. 22-37; and 'The Long Journey from Despair to Hope', Juana Ponce de León (ed.), *Our Word is Our Weapon*, pp. 52-61, for example.



reader can choose to read the book in its linear sequence or to read all vignettes that follow a thematic line.

Chao's use of the concept and the practice of 'travel' is a case in point for the reclaiming of a central concept and practice of globalism on behalf of alternative globalization. Chao embraces the practice of travel as constitutive to his subjectivity and his art and, at the same time, critically interrogates and highlights that travel can be the result of oppression and coercion. The first two songs on *Clandestino* encapsulate this contrast. 'Clandestino' thematizes the hardships of illegal immigration through a first-person perspective, and highlights the loss of identity that is the result of enforced clandestinity: 'I left my life / between Ceuta and Gibraltar'.<sup>30</sup> The following song 'Desaparecido' cheerfully articulates—also through a first-person perspective—the subjectivity of a person who is driven to the permanent exploration of new horizons through travel: 'I carry a path in my soul / which leads to the destination of non-arrival'.<sup>31</sup> Metaphors that express pain and joy maintain an equal balance throughout the song, thus making it impossible to reduce the experience to negative or positive terms. Chao's subjectivity needs travel; yet, he highlights that travel as a need is particular to him, and that while he asks for this need to be respected, the hardships of the enforced travel of the illegal immigrant are equally important for an understanding of mobility in the globalized world. In a move similar to Marcos' accommodation of apparent contradictions in a tale of friendship, Chao encompasses radically different experiences of mobility in a seemingly culturally splintered but effectively coherent lyrical I, and by organizing the articulation of these experiences in shared sounds and tunes.<sup>32</sup>

As political practice, the Quixotic is a method of searching for the unknown, the yet-unthought, the to-be-constructed. As literary practice, the Quixotic is a way to assemble an array of seemingly different, even contradictory ways of thinking within one coherent text. The differences are held together by the search for what is metaphorized as the path to the fifth destination.<sup>33</sup>

*Journeys on Quixotic Avenue become aimless unless they are punctuated by stops. They must not turn into an excuse to bypass uncomfortable locations such as the Square of Deception, and they will remain an exercise in imagination if the travellers do not, at some point, stop at the metro station Four Paths Five Destinations.*

30. Manu Chao, 'Clandestino', *Clandestino: Esperando la última ola*, Virgin France, 1998.

31. Manu Chao, 'Desaparecido', *Clandestino: Esperando la última ola*, Virgin France, 1998.

32. On a conceptual and theoretical level, Chao's notion of travel nuances the black-or-white evaluation of this practice that is inherent to globalization for theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman. These nuances permit him to reclaim 'travel' for an alternative type of 'globalization'. His notion of travel and identity is possibly conceptually closest to Walter Mignolo's concept of 'border thinking'.

33. Quixotic writing is related to what Alexis Grohmann conceptualizes as 'errant text.' However, Grohmann, approaches errant texts predominantly as an aesthetic phenomenon. While he mentions that digressive writing displays a desire for a closer engagement with reality, he does not conceptualize this—and the texts he discusses might not lend themselves to this argument—as part of an explicitly political and utopian project, as I do here. See Alexis Grohmann, 'Errant Text: *Sefarad*, by Antonio Muñoz Molina, *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, vol. 12, nos. 2-3, August/December 2006, pp. 233-246.



## METRO STATION: FOUR PATHS FIVE DESTINATIONS

In his song 'Otro mundo' ('Another world') Manu Chao uses the line 'cuatro caminos cinco destinos', 'four paths five destinations': 'I dreamt another world / so far away and so close / I dreamt another journey / four paths five destinations.' 'Cuatro Caminos' can be taken to refer to the final destination of metro line 2 in Mexico City, and to the metro station of the same name in Madrid. The evocation of metro lines cross-references Chao's previous album *Próxima Estación...Esperanza*. Title and *Leitmotiv* of this album are provided by a sound recording of the metro in Madrid. The line therefore establishes a connection between Mexico City and one of the cities of rebellious Europe. In a less obvious manner, the line cross-references works by Subcomandante Marcos, Eduardo Galeano, and the Spanish poet Antonio Machado.

The metaphor of four paths and five destinations draws on a poem by the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: 'caminante, no hay camino/ se hace camino al andar' —"wanderer, there is no path/ the path is made by walking".<sup>34</sup> Machado, a member of the Generation of 1898 who reformulated Spanish identity after the end of the Empire, supported the 2<sup>nd</sup> Spanish Republic and had to go into exile after 1939. This particular line has been re-appropriated by many left-wing movements as a metaphor for the search of an unknown destination but also, as a reflection on the practice of looking for this destination. It is also a mural in the Zapatista town of Oventic.

In the 'Story about False Options' Durito re-interprets the metaphor of the path in light of the struggle against neoliberal power:<sup>35</sup>

Durito says that all the multiple options being offered by the Powers conceal a trap.

'Where there are many paths, and we're presented with the chance to choose, something fundamental is forgotten: all those paths lead to the same place. And so, liberty consists not in choosing the destination, the pace, the speed and the company, but in merely choosing the path. The liberty which the Powerful are offering is, in fact, merely the liberty to choose who will walk representing us,' Durito says. [...]

'And so, when the rebel faces the option of choosing between various paths, he looks further ahead and he looks twice: he sees that those routes lead to the same place, and he sees that there is no path to the place where he wishes to go. Then the rebel [...] begins building a new path,' says Durito.

Durito applies the metaphor of paths and the lack of choice to a critique of contemporary practices of democracy. In *Seeing*, Saramago explores the potential consequences for those who make the one real choice of not choosing within the parameters of the existing political system: a large percentage of the population vote blank in the

34. Antonio Machado, *Poesías completas*, Madrid: Colección Austral, 2001, p. 239.

35. S. I. Marcos, 'Durito and One About False Options', In Marcos, *The Speed of Dreams*, pp. 197-198

elections.<sup>36</sup> All three main political parties are shocked and worried by what they perceive as a concerted attack on the political system that bestows legitimacy on them. They conclude that they are faced with a conspiracy and eventually declare those who voted in blank, terrorists. The opposition parties collude with the government in the imposition of a state of exception on the capital. The parties' overwhelming sense of threat by a conspiracy contrasts with the naiveté of the characters who voted blank. Even when interrogated under pressure, they maintain that they had no other motive for their decision than the wish to express that none of the parties offered a suitable option. They do not grasp that to not vote undermines the legitimacy of the political system and consequently, constitutes a transgression and will therefore almost inevitably lead to repression. In contradistinction to Durito's rebel, the (non-) voters do not look for the fifth path, even though they refuse to choose any of the four paths. Also, they do not speak to each other, do not know one another, and do not trust each other. Their fragmentation and their inability to imagine an alternative to the system that offers them no valid options, makes them easy targets for government repression and finally, leads to their destruction. Durito's rebel, on the other hand, renounces complicity as expressed in naiveté and innocence and, together with others, conspires against the system of false options.

*Readers can leave the metro station Four Path Five Destinations through the exit that leads to the Square of Deception; or they can look for the fifth path and take the exit to the Avenue of Words.*

#### THE SQUARE OF ENCOUNTER: A WORLD IN WHICH MANY WORLDS FIT

The Square of Encounter is the central square of a megacity without centre or periphery. It can be spontaneously and performatively constructed anywhere in the megacity, as long as enough people come together. An 'encounter' is a temporally limited practice which involves different actors. It is the beginning of a dialogue which, in itself, characterizes a political practice. The centrality of the notion of encounter identifies the respect for otherness as one non-negotiable principle of alter-globalization. The notion 'encounter' also highlights the difference to cosmopolitanism and internationalism: both -isms indicate that literary practice draws on a coherent body of theory and on pre-existing ideologies, whereas alter-globalization in literature draws on practice and reflection.

Literature as conceptualized by Galeano in the 1970s—inclusive of different genres, as a medium that carries out a permanent exploration of the relationship between subjectivity and collectivity, between the writer and his community, as a means of knowing the world and of knowing oneself in the world, as a practice of liberation—is one of the very few institutions of global relevance that neoliberalism did not manage to compromise entirely. Therefore, it falls to literature to explore the link between the imagination and political action, and to develop a language that is also a practice of change.

36. The expression 'to vote blank' is taken from the English translation of *Seeing*.

Writers meet this challenge by exploring the permeability of genres and by establishing a shared frame of reference through motives and concepts, such as ‘democracy’, ‘deception’, ‘encounter’, and ‘the word’. Their use of genres and their use of poetic language to interrogate concepts that are relevant for both politics and culture, reinvents the relationship between literature and politics. The short and kaleidoscopic nature of the texts discussed here might account for some of the reasons for Brown’s scepticism regarding literature’s aptness to replace the eidaesthetic project of the past. Brown looks to literature for the creation of new narratives that can motivate a political project. Yet, the texts discussed here are concerned with the meaning of words just as much as with narratives and bear a stronger relationship to poetry and to storytelling than to the novel; even the novelist Saramago does not construct new narratives to replace the ones he undermines.

The structuring of texts not as narratives but as language that accommodates difference, emphasizes the development of a new project, not the implementation of one—not even of a utopian one. If literature provided a narrative that presented readers with a ‘solution’, it would absolve them from defining their own, subjective commitment to the overall political project. This subjective commitment, however, is crucial to the human being’s ability to resist as Marcos defines it:<sup>37</sup>

A fundamental factor is the capacity for resistance of the aggrieved, the intelligence to combine ways of resistance and, something which might sound “subjective,” the decision-making capacities of the aggrieved human beings. The territory to be conquered ... will then have to turn itself into a territory in resistance. And I am not referring to the number of trenches, weapons, traps and security systems (which are, however, also necessary), but to the willingness (the “Morality/Morale” some might say) of those human beings to resist.

In this article, I metaphorically conceptualize ‘territory’ as the megacity of alter-globalization. In contrast to Gupta’s transnationally ordered global city, this megacity has no plan and no map to make it transparent from the outside. In contrast to Bauman’s synoptic city, the megacity of alter-globalization cannot be experienced as a spectacle. One can only get to know it by entering it and by exposing oneself to the risks and uncertainties involved in exploring and constructing it. By extension, this suggests that another world is only possible if each and everyone who subscribes to the project of constructing this other world, takes responsibility for it.

Given this emphasis on subjectivity and agency, it is only consequent that the writers discussed here undermine the authority of the author. Eduardo Galeano the author is powerless without his interlocutor the reader. Marcos’ multiple identities intentionally fuse ‘author’ and ‘protagonist’ and in so doing, make him unavailable as a leader. Manu Chao cannot be tracked down because he is always on the move. Saramago sardonically deconstructs his authorial authority through his reflections on the correct use of words and metaphors. At the same time, all four authors make clear that they are available

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<sup>37</sup>. Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, ‘El mundo; siete pensamientos en mayo’, *Revista Rebelión*, 5, May 2003.

as interlocutors and as politically committed fellow travellers. Importantly, readers will have to rely for guidance on themselves and on their ability to engage with those they encounter along the way.

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