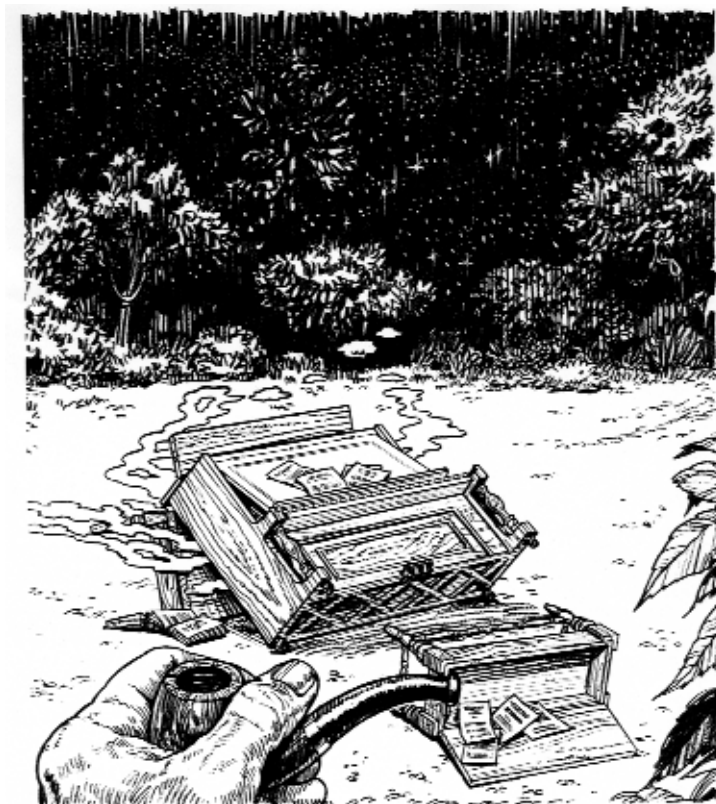


Of Trees, Transgressors, and Odontology



Durito has given Marcos a copy of *The Rituals of Chaos* written by cultural critic Carlos Monsiváis.¹ The gift of the book and the subsequent correspondence with Monsiváis led Durito and El Sup to examine the role of intellectuals in Mexican politics, both those who play the game under the banner of “efficiency” and those who seem to seek alternatives to current one-party rule. Against Machiavellian strategies in which apparent change (of the party in power) hides the essential continuity of Power, Marcos introduces the Zapatista political program, highlighting the necessity of a political space for the construction of entirely new political relationships, including a new political morality as in the Zapatista maxim “*mandar obedeciendo*” (“lead by obeying”).

First published in *La Jornada*, January 14th, 1996. Originally translated by Cecilia Rodríguez.

1 Carlos Monsiváis, *Los rituales del caos* (México: Procuraduría Federal del Consumidor, 1995).

September–November of 1995
To: Carlos Monsiváis,
Mexico, D.F.
From: Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos
Mountains of the Mexican Southeast
Chiapas, Mexico

Maestro:

Sir, I send (you)² a greeting and acknowledge receipt of the book *The Rituals of Chaos*. I read it quickly at one of those impasses that the Supreme Government calls the Dialogues of San Andrés.³

Vale. Salud, and let's see if by following Alice you will manage to find the Red Queen and solve the enigma that the last postscript invites you to do.

From the mountains of the Mexican Southeast,
Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos

P.S. that recalls, a little late, the principal reason behind this chaotic epistle and its first entitled

Rorrim Eht Dna Otirud (Politics, Odontology, and Morality)

In that instant I saw the Apocalypse face to face. And I understood that the holy terror about the Final Judgment lies in the demonic intuition: one will not live to see it. And I looked over my shoulder at the Beast with seven heads and ten horns, and among its horns ten diadems, and on each head a blasphemous name. And the people applauded it and took pictures and videos, and recorded its exclusive declarations, while, with a clarity, which would become a painful burden, I had the belated realization: the most horrible nightmare is the one that excludes us definitively.

—Carlos Monsiváis, *The Rituals of Chaos*, p. 250.⁴

The period is the hinge that binds two mirrors that, face to face, spread out to the sides like wings to fly over an era of chaos. A hinge; that is the point.

“Look on page 250,” Durito says, as he unpacks his bags.

And I look hurriedly and murmur,

2 Throughout the original text, Marcos plays with the formal “you” (*usted*) and informal “you” (*tú*) with the pronoun in parentheses. This translation uses “sir” and “you” to distinguish between the formal and informal.

3 The Dialogues began in April 1995 in San Andrés Larráinzar, renamed San Andrés Sacamach'en de los Pobres by the Zapatistas. These discussions resulted in a series of agreements between the government and the EZLN known as the San Andrés Accords, which were signed by both parties on February 16, 1996.

4 This reference appears in the original text. See Monsiváis, 1995.

“Page . . . 250 . . . hmmm . . . yes, here it is,” I say with satisfaction.

“Or the one which includes us momentarily,” I think, while Durito insists on hauling his little piano on top of his even smaller desk to show me how the small sustains the large, in history and in nature. The argument collapses with the piano and Durito tumbles down, landing after this spectacular feat with the piano and the desk on top of his shell. I finish reading that part of the book and look for my pipe, my tobacco, and Durito (in that order). Durito has no intention of coming out from under the catastrophe that he has on top of him, and a small column of smoke announces two things: the first is the location of my tobacco, and the second is that Durito is alive.

Lighting a pipe and remembering are the same thing. Something about the book’s passage takes me back many years. It was a sweet and simple time. All we had to worry about was food. The books were few but good, and re-reading them was like finding new books within old ones. And this is relevant because Durito has brought me this book as a gift, and has pointed out a passage on page 250 to tell me something that will have to wait until later because there are more important things to point out now; for example, that books are made of leaves, and leaves, attached to some branches and roots, make trees and shrubbery. Trees, as everyone knows, are for guarding the night that by day is idle. Among branches and leaves, the night shares her fullness the same way in which a woman shares her curves inside moist and breathless embraces. Trees, notwithstanding this sensual mission, make time for other things. For example, they often house the most varied kinds of mammals, birds, insects and other creatures found in nursery rhymes. Sometimes, trees also house masked men. This refers to, so there is no doubt, delinquents and transgressors. Their concealed faces and the fact that they camp in trees leaves no room to doubt their character as persecuted beings. Such men live together with the night, by day, in the trees. That is the reason for their passion and drive to love the branch. It’s also true that beetles often rest in trees like . . .

Durito interrupts me from the depths of—he now makes clear to me—the modern sculpture made by his piano and desk on top of his head.

“Do you have a lighter?”

“That sculpture should be called something like ‘Chaos on a Smoking Beetle,’” I tell him as I throw him the lighter.

“Your gibes don’t offend me. They only prove your ignorance. It’s clear you’ve never read Umberto Eco on artistic work in progress.⁵ This lovely sculpture is the best example of modern and revolutionary art, and it shows how the artist so commits himself to his work that he becomes a part of it.”

“And what’s it called?”

“That’s the tricky part. The audience must title it. That is why it is a work ‘in progress.’ As you know my dear ‘Watson,’ ‘a work in progress’ is not finished but

5 Durito may be referring to Umberto Eco, *Open Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

becomes ‘complete’ within the process of circulation and consumption in the artistic market. Elementary. In this way the spectator ceases to be so and becomes a ‘co-author’ of the work. Zedillo, for example, can title this work something like *My Government Program* and put it in Los Pinos;⁶ Salinas de Gortari could title it *My Economic and Political Legacy* and house it at Almoloya;⁷ and the neoliberals could call it *Our Proposal for a New World Order*. And you . . . what would you call it?” Durito asks me.

I analyze it with a critical eye and answer, “Hmmm . . . something like *Beetle Entombed Beneath a Little Piano and a Desk*.”

“Bah! That’s too descriptive,” Durito reproaches.

As we talk, the rituals of the night unfold slowly: the sound of the airplane, the pipe smoke, the solitude, the discreet gossiping of crickets, the intermittent and luminous blinking of fireflies, the heaviness of the heart, and above, the stars made dust along the Road to Santiago.⁸

Maybe it’ll rain. The past months have been as inconsistent as the rain; even the calendar seems disoriented and can’t quite find itself amid such unstable events. Durito asks me for the name of the book’s author.

“Monsiváis,” I answer.

“Oh, Carlos!” Durito says with a familiarity that surprises me. I ask if he knows him.

“Of course! The historical essay is a genre we share . . . but it’s better if you keep writing. I have other things to do,” Durito answers.

I pause, because in beginning this letter, I’ve suddenly remembered that I haven’t yet resolved the dilemma of the informal ‘you’ and the formal ‘you,’ that is to say how I should address you (sir). Durito firmly maintains an axiom, a pillar of his conception of the world: there is no problem so big that you can’t ponder it for a while. And so with that philosophic *corpus*, I’ve decided, once again, to leave the solution of this dilemma pending and continue with the gentle pendulum that takes us from *you* to *sir*.

And then I decide. I chew on my pipe with determination. I take on the look of a Southeastern-governor-willing-to-defend-the-popular-will-at-all-costs-who-sees-how-things-are-and-it-just-so-happens-that-I-am-the-popular-will, and undertake the rigorous task of writing to you (sir).

What a sight I must be! Too bad I have no witnesses (Durito is already snoring beneath the ruins of his exhibit), too bad I sent off all the mirrors in that document called something like *Mirrors: Mexico Between the Nights of Day and the Crystal of the Moon*.⁹ What? That wasn’t the title? Oh well, no matter. The thing

6 Los Pinos is the Presidential Palace of Mexico.

7 Almoloya de Juárez is a maximum-security federal prison.

8 For a discussion of the “Road to Santiago,” also known as “St. James Way” or “The Milky Way,” see, “On Bullfighting, Détente and Rock.”

9 This document first appeared as a series in *La Jornada* (June 9, 10, 11, 1995) titled “*México: La Luna entre los espejos de la noche y el cristal del día*.” See also *EZLN Documentos y comunicados 2* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1995), 367-385.

is I need a mirror right now to check if I have that delirious glow of a genius getting ready to abort his best idea. What? A self-defeating goal? Why? Because of the “abort?” But no! You (sir) must agree with me that the best ideas are those that are never expressed. The moment they enter the prison of language, ideas are materialized, they become letters, words, phrases, paragraphs, pages . . . even books if you’re careless and let them loose. And once there, ideas become quantifiable, they can be weighed, measured, compared. Then they become really boring, in addition to turning independent and not following orders of any kind. I understand that to you (sir) it is unbelievable that orders are not carried out, but for military bigwigs like yours truly it is a real toothache. Teeth, as all scientists with PhDs know, are pieces of bone that serve to give jobs to dentists, so that the toothpaste industry flourishes, and so that the profession of shameful torturer exists: odontology. The word “odontology” is an idea made language and become measurable and classifiable: it has ten letters, carries its stress on the third syllable, and is as heavy as the bill that must be paid after you leave the office . . .

“Definitely,” says Durito.

“What?” is the only thing I can think of saying after Durito’s sudden interruption.

“There’s no doubt. This plebiscite excludes beetles,” Durito continues, who apparently was not asleep and continues reviewing papers even under the chaos that overwhelms him.

“This plebiscite excluded us beetles and that is a form of racism and apartheid. I shall take my protests to the appropriate international organizations.”

It’s useless to try to give Durito explanations. He insists that what he calls “the Seventh Question” was missing, the wording of which was more or less: “Are you in agreement that knight-errantry should be added to the National Registry of Professions?”

I explain to him that I sent various postscripts making discreet insinuations to the CND and the Civic Alliance, but no one took the hint.

“It’s infuriating that that question is missing. It’s a matter of aesthetics. Whose idea is it to have a plebiscite with six questions? Even numbers are not aesthetically pleasing. Odd numbers, on the other hand, have the charm of asymmetry. It surprises me that someone as asymmetrical as you, my large-nosed squire, should not have noticed that detail before.”

I pretend to be offended and keep silent. An atrocious noise is heard from the north. Lightning rips the dark curtain that dilutes the distance between mountains and sky.

Durito tries to console me by telling me a story (it’s difficult to understand him beneath the modern sculpture) about how he once had a practice that specialized in the big toe of the left foot. I don’t fail to appreciate the subtle insinuation which Durito offers in order to help me concentrate on the subject of this letter, which was something like “Ethics and Political Parties,” or “Politics and Morality,” or “The New Left, New Morality and New Politics,” or “We are all

Prigione”¹⁰ or . . . A lightning bolt just struck that rivals the apocalypse, and Durito says that it serves me right for picking on the papal nuncio, and I tell him that I’m not picking on the nuncio, I’m just looking for a re-e-e-ally good title for this epistle, so good that even some ambassador will copy it.

“How about this one . . . “The Lovely Lie and the Lost Cause . . . ”

Durito says that what I’ve lost is my mind, that he’d rather go back to sleep, and that I should wake him when civil society arrives to rescue him from the ruins. I realize then that I now have all the necessary elements for the epistle: title, characters (political parties, the ambassador, the papal nuncio, the political spectrum and civil society), a polemic (the one about the relationship between morality and politics) in which to stick my nose, of which I have more than enough. Now I only need a subject to justify the stationery, the stamps, the request to Juan Villoro of the *La Jornada Semanal* to be the host of such a “lovely” story, and the pretext to renew that amiable epistolary exchange which we began on the eve of the Convention a year ago.¹¹ Do you remember (sir)?

My Other Self comes near and says that if I’m going to enter into polemics, I should be serious about it, because one shouldn’t play with nuncios and Machiavellians. “And if you don’t believe me just ask Castillo Peraza, whose political ethics demonstrated his effectiveness in Yucatan,” says My Other Self as he leaves to check on the beans.¹²

Every polemic is a nightmare, not only for the polemicists, but above all for the readers. That’s why it occurs to me that it’s not worth it, especially when I remember that prophecy of a certain Salinista intellectual (who now has amnesia) in December of 1993, who augured great successes for Salinas in 1994, since he had “all the marbles” in the bag.

But it occurs to me that I cannot remain a spectator and that I should take sides. So I take sides, in this case, for those who do not have a side, and with Durito we make a “wave” and don’t think it’s a pitiful “wave”; with all Durito’s pairs of hands and feet it almost looks like a “wave” of Mexican fans during the penalty kicks at the World Cup.

But Durito must be dreaming about Brigitte Bardot because he’s let out a sigh that sounds like his last, so I can’t count on him and it would be better to concentrate on the discussion at hand. And in this discussion, the most important thing is the relationship between morality and politics, or better yet, between morality and political parties, or even better, between politics and power.

10 Archbishop Girolamo Prigione was *papal nuncio*, the diplomatic and ecclesiastical representative of the Pope in Mexico.

11 Juan Villoro has published a number of short story collections, translated such authors as Graham Greene and written for publications such as *Nexos*, *Proceso*, *Uno Más Uno* and *La Jornada*.

12 Carlos Castillo Peraza, president of the PAN, challenged the May 1995 election of PRI candidate Victor Cervera Pacheco over Luis Correa Mena for governor of Yucatan. Earlier in March, the PAN refused to allow the peace talks as part of the Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation and Dignified Peace to be convened in Mexico City. See *La Jornada*, March 3, 1995.

However, there is reasoning that goes beyond this, and the problem of the relationship between morality and politics is hidden (or displaced) by the problem of the relationship between politics and “success,” and between politics and “efficiency.” Machiavelli is revived by the argument that, in politics, the “superior” morality is “efficiency,” and efficiency is measured in shares of power, that is, in the access to power. From here, one leaps over the previous juggling of Machiavellian rhetoric, to define democratic change as if the political opposition were to govern. The National Action Party is the example, they say, of this political “success,” this political morality.

But then it is adjusted and given color: the accumulation of power, they say, serves to contain the antagonism that pluralistic societies keep within themselves. Power is exerted to defend society from itself!

Fine, let’s leave this new referent for measuring political efficiency for later, and return to the original. Not to argue with those who measure “success” and political “efficiency” by the number of governorships, mayor’s offices, and congressional seats, but rather, to reclaim that sign of “success” that has so many followers on the current government team, that is, on Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s team.

Is political “success” defined in terms of efficiency? Is a politics more successful the more efficient it appears? In such a case, Carlos Salinas de Gortari deserves a monument and not a police investigation for his alleged complicity in the magnicides of J. F. Ruiz Massieu and Luis D. Colosio.¹³ His politics were “efficient” to the point that he kept the entire country living in a virtual reality that was, of course, shattered by real reality. Knowledge of reality was acquired through the media. A great “success,” to be sure. The political and economic “efficiency” of Carlos Salinas de Gortari won him the applause of National Action and of intellectuals now orphaned; and not just from them; powerful businessmen and high-ranking clergymen now complain of having been deceived. Together they delighted in having “all the marbles.” The consequences of the Salinista “success” are suffered today by all Mexicans, and not just the poorest ones.

After all, isn’t “political efficiency” as perennial in Mexico as a presidential term? Sometimes it doesn’t last as long. The government of Ernesto Zedillo is an excellent example of “successes” as durable as the pages of a calendar without photos.

The other stated problem, the one of sharing power, was to point out that the efficiency of democratic change lies in the alternation of power. The alternation of power is not synonymous with democratic change, or its “efficiency,” but

13 José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, former PRI party leader, was murdered on September 28, 1994. On February 28, 1995, Attorney General Antonio Lozano García arrested Raúl Salinas de Gortari on charges of ordering the murder of the PRI official. Luis Donald Colosio, anointed as President Salinas’ successor, was assassinated on March 24, 1994, while campaigning for the presidency in Tijuana, Mexico.

with bribes and divorces in the planning stages. The politics followed by National Action in Baja California, Jalisco, and Chihuahua, are far from being “another” way of practical politics, and they are sufficiently authoritarian so as to try to regulate the length of skirts (Guadalajara) and the uncovering of the human body (Monterrey).

The alternation of power is a separate problem and is perhaps on the rebound from the polemics of the maestro Tomás Segovia with one Matías Vegoso: “Well, the bipartisan government ideal is tied to this position, perhaps not just because bipartisanship is its only essential manifestation, but because at least until now it is the clearest concrete manifestation of not an ‘ideological’ but a ‘technical’ government.¹⁴ The first thing I have to say (and perhaps it’s not the most important) is that this position confirms most clearly the continuation of ideologies and surely not their end. The conviction that a ‘technical government’ is better than an ‘ideological’ one is in itself an ideology, or a belief that conditions and distorts the image of reality, in exactly the same way that the conviction that ‘positive’ truth is better than ‘metaphysical’ truth, is in itself a metaphysical conviction.”

(Certainly, I interject, now there is talk of “tripartisanship” but the problem remains.) Tomás Segovia continues:

“In the same way, I give you this friendly advice in order to defend neoliberalism: don’t forget that it is an ideology and nothing more than an ideology. Don’t you understand that this is the most astute trap of ideology? There is nothing more ideological than to say: ‘Everyone else is ideological; I am lucid.’”

Here I could cite in my favor those arguments of the maestro Tomás Segovia opposing Matías Vegoso, but in addition to not having Tomás Segovia’s authorization to do so, that argument leads me to another problem: the morality of immorality (or should I say “amorality?”). *Mutatis Mutandis*: the ideology of no ideology. And from here we can jump to the problem of knowledge, and intellectuals who produce and distribute that knowledge.

The process followed by some intellectuals is typical: from the critique of power to critique from a position of power.

With Salinas they showed that knowledge is ready to serve power. Then they collaborated to give him theoretical substance. Their logic, no matter how you looked at it, arrived at the same result: power is not mistaken in analyzing reality, and if it is mistaken then it is a problem with reality and not power.

It is a painful truth, it’s true, but inevitable; power has not only managed to surround itself with a group of “brilliant” intellectuals; it has also produced a corps of analysts capable of theorizing, from now on, the future solidification of power (be they images of the PRI or the PAN reflected in the mirror of power).

14 Celebrated for his poetry, Tomás Segovia is known for his work as a literary editor, translator, professor and columnist for *La Jornada*.

Machiavelli is now the head of a group of intellectuals who seek to give theoretical-ideological support to the repression to come (Porfirio Díaz's grandson and *Rebellion of the Pipeline* have enlisted in their cause).¹⁵ This is the fundamental contribution of its elite; it has succeeded in evolving from the justification of a stupid system to the theorization of the imbecility yet to come. Not to mention that they are the new kind of organic intellectuals in power. They are capable of seeing beyond power. They represent the image of what the organic intellectual of neoliberalism aspires to be. They will drop out of school . . .

I stop here in order to reload my pipe and rest my back. Now a gray haze adds a new curtain to the heavy backdrop of night. There are noises from beneath Durito's "work in progress," evidence that he is not asleep and is still working. A small column of smoke rises from between the drawers of the desk and the piano keys. Somewhere beneath that jumble that aspires to be a sculpture, Durito is reading or writing.

In the fire, the dance of colors goes out and little by little turns black. On the mountain, sounds and colors continually change. And what to say about the inevitable turning of day into afternoon, of afternoon into night, of night into day . . .

I've got to get back to writing and that's what I do. Machiavelli is revisited and converted not into a guide but into an elegant garment that disguises cynicism as intellectualism. Now there is an ethic of "political efficiency" that justifies whatever means are necessary to obtain "results" (that is, shares of power). This political ethic should distance itself from "personal ethics" whose "efficiency" is zero since it is measured by loyalty to principles.

Once again, efficiency and its "results," in addition to the subject of political morality, are restricted to "personal ethics," to the ideology of the "salvation of the soul." In opposition to the "moralists," Machiavelli and his contemporary equivalent propose their "science," their "technique": efficacy. One must abide by efficiency.

This "non-ideological" doctrine has followers and "practitioners." I mean, besides the Salinista and neopanista intellectuals. Before the applause of the intellectuals who have no memory, the ambassador unfurls with all its details, the doctrine of cynicism and efficiency:

If I strike him, he speaks;
if I speak to him, he strikes me.

The ambassador does not represent himself, I mean, not only himself. He represents a political position, a way of doing politics that already characterizes this undefined path that is the first eleven months of the Salinas administration without Salinas. The ambassador is part of the neocorpus of presidential "advi-

15 Carlos Tello Díaz, *La rebelión de las cañadas* (México, D.F.: Cal y Arena, 1995). Marcos has changed the title from *cañadas* to *cañerías* or pipeline.

sors” who recommend to Zedillo to strike in order to speak. The price he pays, they say, can be covered up with an adequate manipulation of the media.

I don’t remember the name of the movie (maybe the maestro Barbachano remembers it), but I do remember that one of the main actors was Peter Fonda.¹⁶ I do remember the plot clearly. It was, more or less, about a group of brilliant Harvard students who raped a girl. She accused them in court and they countered that she was a prostitute. Their lawyer defends them by citing their brilliant grades and good families. They are acquitted. The girl commits suicide. As adults, the “juniors” look for “stronger emotions” and they dedicate themselves to “hunting” couples on weekend vacations. The “hunt” is not figurative; after the obligatory rape, the “juniors” set the couple free in the country, and then hunt them down with shotguns.¹⁷

I don’t remember the ending, but it’s one of those where justice is done, where Hollywood tries to resolve onscreen what goes unpunished in reality.

Now, the modern “juniors” have found that they have a country with which to play. One of them is at Los Pinos and the other was in Bucareli.¹⁸ They get bored with Nintendo so they try hunting down “the bad guys” in a game of real war. They give their prey time to escape, and move their “pieces” to pen them in and make the game more interesting. But it turns out that the country is not ready for games and mobilizes in protest. The “juniors” find themselves in a quandary because the game grows longer and they can’t catch the “bad guy.” Then the ambassador appears to get them out of (?) their predicament: “It was all planned,” he tells us, “the dead are not dead, the war is not war, the displaced are not displaced, we always tried to talk and we only sent tens of thousands of soldiers so that we could tell the ‘bad guy’ that we wanted to talk.” A pathetic argument for the aforementioned government.

Meanwhile, reality looms . . . and the media tries to dominate reality. Lapses of memory begin to multiply within government discourse; the stock market crash is forgotten, the devaluation, the “negotiations” of San Andrés as a showcase to flaunt the true indigenous politics of neoliberalism, instability, mistrust and suspicion, ungovernability and uncertainty. They forget what is primary, according to Machiavelli; they’ve had no results, they haven’t been “efficient.”

They forget that they defend a lost cause, and the ambassador knows that but he forgets it when it’s time for exclusive interviews. The latest declarations of the government are clear; they forget reality, that is, they forget that each time there are fewer who believe in lovely lies and who are ready to bet on lost causes . . .

16 Miguel Barbachano Ponce has published numerous essays, plays, and novels. He has also contributed as drama and film critic to a number of journals including *La Jornada*.

17 The film referred to here is *Los Cazadores* also known as *Open Season* (1974), directed by Peter Collinson.

18 Bucareli is the location of the Palacio de Cobian, the residence of the Secretaría de Gobernación or Interior Ministry.

Meanwhile, the modern Machiavellians complain about our little morality and they prescribe that in politics there are no good or bad guys, and, therefore, the issue cannot be settled with the classification of factions.

And here they hit the mark, but only in reference to the relationship between ethics and politics, that it is not an issue easy to resolve with the definition of factions: bad guys vs. good guys. That is, “if the Machiavelli of Salinista intellectual nostalgia is bad, then we, who do not agree with him, are good.” It remains tempting to take the polemic in that direction, but I think that when you (sir) pointed out that “if efficiency in the neoliberal manner has brought us to the present tragic situations, the cult of doctrinaire purity, without such costly results, has not taken us very far either” (Carlos Monsiváis, *Proceso*, number 966).¹⁹ You (sir) pointed out a new problem that is worth pursuing.

From the Left, the alternative to Machiavelli is not very attractive, that’s true. But that’s not the problem; it’s not “doctrinaire purity,” or not only that. It’s also something else: the complicity of a mirror that is offered as an alternative and simplifies all its political relationships (and human ones as well, but that’s another matter) into an inversion. This is the ethical foundation of “revolutionary” science: “scientific” knowledge produces a morality inverse to capitalism. It proposes impartiality against egoism; collectivity against privatization; the social being against individualism.

But this mirrored knowledge, like moral fundamentalism, doesn’t contribute anything new. The inversion of the image is not a new image, but an inverted image. The alternative political (and moral) proposal is a mirrored reflection: where the right is dominant, now the left will be; where it’s white, black; where the one from above, the one from below; where the bourgeoisie, the proletariat; and so on. The same, only inverted. And this ethic was (or is) the one that was engraved (or is engraved) in the full spectrum of the left.

I agree. The modern Machiavellians say, and say well, that we offer nothing better than they do: cynicism and effectiveness. That we criticize them with a new “morality” that is as criminal as theirs (well, they don’t say that theirs is a criminal morality, they only say that ours is) and that we try to reduce politics to a struggle between black and white, forgetting that there are many shades of gray. It’s true, but our critique is not only that the morality of the resurrected Machiavelli is cynical and criminal, we also point out that it is not efficient . . .

Durito interrupts again to recommend prudence to me when discussing morality.

“Your immorality is common knowledge,” Durito says, trying to justify his indescribable failure in bringing me some videos that I asked him to bring, ones with a lot of X’s, from the capital.

“We’re not talking about ‘that’ kind of morality. And stop preaching to me as if you were a Panista mayor,” I defend myself.

¹⁹ Carlos Monsiváis, “*Sobre la cacería de lectores indeseables . . .*” *Proceso*, 966 (May 8, 1995), 48.

“I’d never. But it’s my duty to reproach you for your warped cinematic preferences. Instead of those immoral videos, here, I brought you something more edifying. They’re pictures of my trip to the D.F.”

This said, Durito tosses me an envelope. In it there are pictures of different sizes and subjects. One of them is of Durito at Chapultepec Park.²⁰

“You don’t look too happy in this picture at the zoo,” I tell him.

Durito answers from under the desk and he tells me that the picture was taken after he was detained by a zoo guard. It turns out that the man mistook Durito for a miniature rhinoceros and was determined to take him back to a cage. Durito tried diverse and varied defenses dealing with botany, zoology, mammals, insects, knight-errantry, and I don’t know what else, but he ended up in the rhino pit. He escaped somehow, the moment the guard took his break.

He was so happy to be free he decided to take this picture where he looks like a white rhinoceros. He was that pale. From fear, he says.

And then there were several pictures with Durito in various poses and in typical urban settings.

For example, there was a picture of Durito among many feet. He made me take note that none of the feet wore boots, and that’s something that Durito applauded. I told him not to be so enthusiastic, that back then, Espinosa had not yet shown his hooves.

After that one, there was a picture with a lot of people. Durito explains to me that he took that one just so I wouldn’t feel so lonely.

The next one was of Durito and another beetle. In the background you could see what looked like the “islands” of the Ciudad Universitaria.²¹ I asked him who the other guy was.

“It’s not a he, it’s a she,” he answered with a drawn-out sigh.

There were no more photos. Durito was silent and all you could hear were sighs emanating from the sculpture. I return to Machiavelli’s indignation at our critique of his efficiency.

Does this critique mean, in light of that morality, that we offer an alternative? Is this the blasphemy that terrifies the adopted and adapted Machiavellians? A new morality? A better morality? More successful? More efficient? Is that what we offer? Negative. At least not to what refers to us Zapatistas. We believe that it is necessary to construct a new political relationship, that the new relationship will not only have one source (neozapatismo, in this case), and that the new relationship will produce effects in and of itself. So new that it will not only define a new politics, but new politicians as well. A new way to define the political arena and those who do well in it.

I won’t insist much on why the new political morality cannot be born from neozapatismo; suffice it to say that our reason is also the old one. We have resort-

20 Chapultepec Park is a four square-kilometer open-air park, containing the National Museum of History, the Museum of Anthropology, and Chapultepec Castle.

21 Ciudad Universitaria (University City) is the UNAM campus and surrounding area.

ed to the argument of weapons (no matter how much J. Castañeda, for the sake of rescuing his book from a publishing disaster, denies them and claims that we are an army in name only), and with them, the argument of force.²² The fact that the weapons are few or old or that they've hardly been used changes the situation only a little if at all. The fact is that we were, and are, willing to use them. We are willing to die for our ideas, it's true. But we are also willing to kill. That is why a new political morality, or better yet, a political morality superior to the one that weighs us down today and the better part of tonight, can not emerge from a "maimed" army, no matter how revolutionary, heroic, etc. it may be. She, the night, still holds some surprises, and I'm sure that many more brains will be racked trying to understand that . . .

"Things are not that simple," Durito says. "It may be that I didn't bring you the videos you wanted and that's why you want to lay on my noble shoulders the weight of a blame much heavier than this piano and desk. But I should say in my own defense that instead I brought some things for the Zapatistas: bracelets, headbands, earrings, barrettes . . . I worked ten nights straight to get all of that . . ."

Speaking of nights, this night displays the sharp horns of a moon-bull that, new, returns from the west. Her clouds are absent now, and without a cape to help her, the night fights the bull alone and in silence. Her spirit is not daunted by the storm announced to the east, and among her resources she wears as many sequins as the suit of the best matador.

And there I was, seeing if I would rise to her defense, even though there was no wheat in the stands, when I was held back by the wide smile that, drawn between her horns, the moon offered me. Ten times I begged her pardon, and ten times the stars demanded that I continue to take up the task.

Then I tossed my writing aside and moved towards the center of the nocturnal bullring, asking Durito first to play a *pasodoble*. He said I should return to finish the letter because I'd already taken too much time to write it, and he, Durito, wasn't thinking of helping me. There was nothing more to say, the bullfight was left for later and I returned to my writing and the problem of political morality. The thousand heads that the light made visible through the night's wall began to stir slightly . . .

Where did I leave off? Oh yes! By our critique I am not implying that, contrary to Machiavelli, we are better, more acceptable, or superior. But we do say that it is necessary to be better. The problem is not which political morality is better or more efficient, but what is necessary for a new political morality.

In any case, it's not the nuanced cynicism of those intellectuals anxious for a theoretical support of chaos that will produce a better or more efficient political

22 Immediately following the January 1994 rebellion, Mexican intellectual Jorge Castañeda dismissed the Zapatistas as "armed reformists." See Jorge G. Castañeda, "The Chiapas Uprising," *Los Angeles Times* (January 3, 1994). See also Jorge G. Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994). In 2000, Castañeda went on to become Secretary of State under the Fox administration.

morality. In terms of political parties, Machiavelli runs a complicated scale of compensation: once formalized as alternatives to power, all of their pettiness (secrets, negotiations, opportunism, pragmatism, and betrayals) do not weigh enough to shift the balance of real power in their favor.

But it turns out that the nature of that “pettiness” doesn’t take long to exact its historical dues. And the higher the position reached with all that “little and great political savvy,” the more dues history demands. Once again, Carlos Salinas de Gortari is the model-made-history lesson (that, it seems, no one in the political class wants to learn).

Is it a better world that we offer? Negative: we do not offer a new world. Machiavelli does, and he says that it is not possible for it to be better, that we should resign ourselves to the fact that the grays that inhabit Mexican politics do not become so antagonistic, and that they fade into new shades of gray, more diluted, that is, more gray. We disagree, and not just because of the sad perspective that the mediocrity of “neither one or the other” offers, but because it is a lie, it has no future, and sooner or later, reality sets in, with the stupidity that reality often assumes, and it begins to ruin the halftones and sharpens the most neutral grays . . .

“Seven questions. That would be the right thing to do,” Durito says, who, as is evident, hasn’t forgotten his disagreement with the National Plebiscite. I try to distract him and ask him about Pegasus. Durito’s voice cracks when he answers me.

“What happened to Pegasus is part of that daily tragedy that lives and dies in the D.F. Pegasus was an amiable and intelligent beast, but too patient for the traffic of Mexico City. I had disguised him as a compact car after he refused to disguise himself as a subway car because of all that skidding in the rain. Things were going well, but it turns out “Pegasus” was a “Pegasa” and she fell in love with a Ruta 100 bus. The last time I saw her she was panhandling for the resistance fund.²³ But I don’t regret it, I’m sure she will learn good things there. She said she’d write, but she won’t know where to send the letter.”

Thunder shakes the sky. Out of the corner of my eye I look over at Durito. Silence and a cloud of smoke surround the sculpture. I try to cheer up Durito

23 Ruta 100 is the bus line that serves many of the impoverished communities in the outskirts of Mexico City and functions as part of SUTAUR, *Sindicato Único de Trabajadores del Autotransporte Urbano*, an independent urban transportation union. The union resisted the government’s efforts to privatize transportation in Mexico as well as attacks on its leadership for their support of the Zapatistas. On April 8, 1995, in an effort to destroy SUTAUR, the government declared Ruta 100 bankrupt due to corruption and mismanagement, and arrested six top leaders. On April 10, Luis Miguel Moreno Gómez, chief of Ruta 100, was found murdered in his office with two gunshot wounds. Many refused to believe the government claim that he committed suicide. The Zapatistas directly addressed Ruta 100 in a communiqué in which they explained their initial silence and their unequivocal support for their struggles. See “Al Sindicato de Ruta-100,” *La Jornada*, August 9, 1995. See also *EZLN 2, Documentos y comunicados 15 de agosto/29 de septiembre de 1995* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1995), 427.

and ask him to tell me more about his trip to the capital.

“What can I tell you? I saw what is seen in any city, large or small; injustice and anger, arrogance and rebellion, great wealth in the hands of a few and a poverty that each day swallows up more people. It was worth seeing. For many, fear is no more; for others it disguises itself as prudence. Some say it could always be worse; for others the situation will never be so desperate. There is no unanimity, unless it is in the repudiation of everything which is government.”

Durito lights his pipe and continues:

“One early morning I was about to fall asleep in one of the few trees on the Alameda.²⁴ It was another city then, different from the one that lives by day. From high in the tree I saw a squad car patrolling slowly. It stopped in front of a woman, and one of the officers stepped out of the car. His demonic look gave him away. My intuition never fails: I knew instantly what was going to happen. The woman didn’t move and waited for the officer as if she already knew him. Silently, she gave him a roll of bills and he put it away looking from side to side. He said goodbye, trying to pinch the woman’s cheeks but she brushed his hand away brusquely. He returned to the vehicle. In an instant the squad car pulled away . . .”

Durito is quiet for a long time. I suppose he finished and has returned to his paperwork, and I should return to mine: instead of arguing which political morality is better or more “efficient” we could talk and argue about the necessity of fighting for the creation of a space in which a new political morality can be born. And here the problem resides in the following:

Should political morality always be defined in opposition to the problem of power? Alright, but it’s not the same as saying “in opposition to the taking of power.” Perhaps the new political morality is constructed in a new space that is not the taking or retaining of power, but serves as the counterweight and opposition that contains it and obliges it to, for example, “lead by obeying.”

Of course, to “lead by obeying” is not among the concepts of “political science” and it is scorned by the morality of “efficiency” that rules the political acts from which we suffer. But in the end, confronted by the judgment of history, the “efficiency” of the morality of cynicism and “success” remains naked unto itself. Once it looks itself in the mirror of its “accomplishments,” the fear it inspires in its enemies (who will always be in the majority) turns against itself.

On the other side, the side of the “pure,” the saint is discovered to be a demon, and the inverse image of cynicism discovers that it has made intolerance change direction and religion into exchange rate and political project. The puritanism of National Action, for example, is part of a sign that it remains unexhausted in the Mexican Right.

24 One of Mexico’s finest parks, the Alameda sits between Avenida Hidalgo, Avenida Juárez, Calle Ángela Peralta, and Calle de Doctor Mora. Located amidst its renowned sculptures, fountains, and monuments is the Diego Rivera Mural Museum.

Well, dawn is approaching, and with it, the time for goodbyes. Maybe I didn't understand the argument/controversy/polemic that the resurrection of Machiavelli invited, and I see now that I presented (and did not resolve) more polemical lines than the original. And I don't think that's bad; it probably is, in any case, not too "efficient."

Surely the debate may continue, but it's unlikely to happen face-to-face given ski masks, persecution and military siege . . . In the words of Muñoz-Ledo, "I don't believe that he, Marcos, is someone who will remain on the country's political scene." Did he already have a "pact" with Chuayffet? A "disappearance," like the ones ordered from the Ministry of Government of Chiapas, by that other great PRD member, Eraclio Zepeda?²⁵

In the meantime, Power will continue to promise us the Apocalypse as an equivalent to change. He deduces that it is better to avoid it and resign ourselves to it. Others adduce, by their silence, that the Apocalypse is eternal and that chaos is not about to come, but that it is already a reality . . .

I don't know how to finish this, so I turn to Durito for help. The spectacle of his sculpture silhouetted against the storm's lightning bolts is astonishing. The sudden bursts of light make the darkness that covers it more contrasting. Maybe that's why I didn't see Durito come out from behind the ruins, and for a moment I thought something extraordinary had happened. Durito was now smoking, sitting on top of the little piano.

"But, how did you get out from under there?"

"It was very simple. I was never down there. I moved to one side when the piano started wobbling. In an instant, I decided that no work of art deserves to be on top of my body. Besides, I am a knight-errant, and for that you need to be a soulful artist and there are few of those. Alright, what troubles you, my dear 'Watson'?"

"I don't know how to end this letter," I say with embarrassment.

"That's an easy problem to solve. Finish the way you started."

"How did I start? With a period?"

"Yes. It's elementary my dear 'Watson,' it's in any book of mathematical logic."

"Mathematical logic? And what does mathematical logic have to do with political morality?"

"More than you think. For example, in mathematical logic (not to be confused with algebra) the period represents a conjunction, an and. The period is the same as an and. To say A and B, or A plus B, you write A.B. The period is not the end; it is a sign of unity, of something that increases. It only defines the X num-

25 Emilio Chuayffét resigned as *Secretaría de Gobernación* (Mexican Interior Minister) on January 3, 1998, as a result of political pressure following the massacre of 45 people in the town of Acteal on December 22, 1997. He was replaced by Francisco Labastida Ochoa. Porfirio Muñoz-Ledo was elected president of the PRD on July 1993 and held office until July 1996 when he was replaced by Mario Saucedo Pérez. Eraclio Zepeda was appointed *Secretaría de Gobierno de Chiapas* (Secretary of State of Chiapas) in 1994.

ber of paragraphs between one period and another, where X is a number that the mirror does not alter and reflects faithfully,” Durito says as he arranges his papers. To the west, the sun uncovers clouds and seizes the sky.

And things as they are, I end this postscript with a period and, according to Durito, I don’t end but I continue.

Vale, well: and . . .

P.S. that invites you to solve the enigma that contains its central theme:

Instructions:

First. *Through the Looking Glass (and what Alice found there)*, Lewis Carroll, Chapter II, “The Garden of the Live Flowers.”

Second. Each period marks the end of a paragraph.

Third. Punctuation marks don’t count.

Fourth. Numerical chaos in the logic of the number in the mirror:

1-111. 14-110. 9-109. 247-107.
11-104. 25-103. 47-97. 37-96. 3-95.
14-94. 3-89. 24-87. 22-86. 6-85.
10-84. 48-82. 21-81. 43-79. 55-78.
10-77. 49-76. 83-72. 21-71. 42-64.
6-63. 27-62. 52-61. 63-59. 13-58.
11-57. 3-56. 6-54. 101-53. 141-51.
79-50. 35-49. 32-49. 51-46. 11-45.
88-44. 12-43. 12-42. 31-41. 3-40.
24-39. 15-38. 20-37. 18-37. 17-36.
27-35. 22-33. 111-32. 7-32. 115-31.
20-31. 12-31. 5-31. 68-30. 46-30.
31-30. 12-30. 9-30. 54-29. 45-29.
12-29. 49-28. 20-28. 9-28. 40-27.
15-27. 42-22. 111-21. 91-21. 29-21.
3-21. 34-20. 6-20. 81-19. 66-19.
44-19. 36-19. 18-19. 11-19. 123-18.
90-18. 80-18. 76-18. 65-18. 43-17.
4-17. 51-15. 48-15. 28-15. 16-15.
47-14. 20-14. 8-14. 39-13. 12-13.
55-12. 54-12. 53-12. 18-11. 43-10.
25-10. 41-8. 9-6. 6-4. 1-1.

Fifth. In the mirror, chaos is a reflection of logical order and logical order is a reflection of chaos.

Sixth. A.A=?

Seventh. There are seven mirrors: the first is the first. The second and third open

the mystery of the chaos that is ordered in the fourth. The fourth is constructed with the fifth and the sixth. The seventh is the last one.

Vale, once again. *Salud*, and as you can see (given trees, transgressors and odontology), it's not so easy.

love the branch²⁶

Subcomandante Marcos

EZLN

Mountains of the Mexican Southeast

* * *

26 The original Spanish, *amar a la rama*, is a palindrome.