



BOLÍVAR ECHEVERRÍA
Modernity and “Whiteness”

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Critical South

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Bolívar Echeverría, *Modernity and "Whiteness"*

Modernity and “Whiteness”

Bolívar Echeverría

Translated by Rodrigo Ferreira

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Foreword

Diana Fuentes

For Bolívar Echeverría, white skin is not a guarantee of “whiteness.” However, the latter is in fact an essential requirement of the way of life demanded by capitalist modernity. The difference between these two notions is not just a play on words or a subtle linguistic shift (a gesture so typical of our time, when making an intervention in the use of language has become a primary tool for critique), although there is an element of both of these in this move. Without a doubt, it is a provocation that challenges the long-standing identification of racial whiteness with the image or representation of the modern way of life and its dominant ethos. Yet, above all, it is evidence that the foundation of modern identity does not have in principle a specific racial scheme, although, contradictorily, it has been and continues to be constituted by a kind of racism. Echeverría uses the concept of “whiteness” to introduce a fundamental question: to what extent is the capitalist way of modern life necessarily entwined with the identity category established by white skin? Or, in other words, is modern identity based on elements – even if not fully separate ones – different from the ethnic and racial features of whiteness?

Echeverría (1941–2010) was a philosopher of Ecuadorean origin who spent a large part of his life, and developed a significant portion of his theoretical work, in Mexico. Like

that of many of the most renowned Latin American intellectuals of recent decades, his thought was in a close relationship with some of the most important debates in critical thinking in twentieth-century Europe, and followed a strategy that, in his own terms, could be called “semiophagic.” Referring to Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade’s 1928 “Anthropophagic Manifesto” – which proclaimed, “We are not only barbarians, we are not only Caliban, we are anthropophagous,” as a means to deliberately take ownership of the barbarity attributed to native Latin Americans by colonizers – Echeverría’s appropriation of European thought voices a similar claim. Native Latin Americans took the conquerors’ cultural code and transformed it from within to make it their own. They reassigned the symbolic meaning of the Other, recreated and revitalized it into a new meaning that they could absorb and integrate into their own code.

In this regard, Echeverría goes even further, as he takes up the term *mestizo* (whose semantic and political force has had a long presence in the history of Latin America, particularly in Mexico), and mobilizes it in relation to the survival strategy created spontaneously by the urban indigenous population after the destruction of their ancestors’ world during the conquest. He thinks of *mestizaje* as the strategy that artisans, servants, construction workers, etc. quietly executed while building the new colonial temples, plazas, and cities. Knowing that they were unable to go back to their pre-colonial world and that they would never be able to be the same as their colonizers, the indigenous population played with the conquerors’ code and represented it in a way that turned it de facto into something new, into a new world that they could inhabit. Following this strategy, they managed to perform as Europeans, to infiltrate and transform Europeanness from within. For Echeverría, this spontaneous practice of *mestizaje* was an indirect means of resistance and fundamental to Latin America’s particular mode of interiorizing modernity.

Bolívar Echeverría was trained in European critical thought, as first practiced by the Frankfurt School, itself determined by Karl Marx’s critique of political economy and strongly inspired by ontological phenomenology. He first arrived in Freiburg, Germany, in 1961 with the explicit

objective of studying with Martin Heidegger, whom he had enthusiastically read alongside texts by Jean-Paul Sartre and Miguel de Unamuno previously in Quito, where he was part of the avant-garde intellectual Ecuadorean group Tzántzicos (“Headshrinkers”) and their journal *Pacuna*. This group of Ecuadorean poets and philosophers defined themselves by their radical critique of what Echeverría called “the intellectual marasmus of their time.” Without having the opportunity to study with Heidegger – who by that time no longer offered open courses – Echeverría entered the Free University of Berlin in West Berlin, and joined the group of students who edited *Der Anschlag*, a journal created in 1962 by Rudi Dutschke, who was the most prominent leader of the German student movement of ’68 and with whom Echeverría maintained a long friendship until his death in 1979. As Echeverría himself pointed out, Berlin at the time was not only geographically and politically divided, it was also fraught with social tensions, which in their explosiveness gave way to a highly creative underground intellectual and political life. Studying Marx’s work in this environment, Echeverría developed a reading of Marx that distanced him from the ideological discourse of the Soviet Union, but, at the same time, brought him close to a broader wave of re-readings that helped reinvigorate Marxism. These readings affirmed the radical power of Marxism to critique the powerful mechanisms of social subordination developed both by twentieth-century capitalism and by the Soviet bloc.

Echeverría’s relationship with Dutschke’s group, through which he read György Lukács, Ernst Bloch, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, among others, and discussed the Latin American political situation with interest, is proof of his solid intellectual formation and political involvement during those years. Shortly before, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 had brought to life for the whole world that Lukácsian phrase that Echeverría often quoted: “the era of the actuality of the revolution,” i.e., the fact that the time had arrived in which the revolution against modern capitalism seemed imminent. From this point forward and for the whole following decade, this meant thinking about the horizon of possibilities from which to revolutionize history itself. Moreover, this explains the renewed interest in those

authors who decades prior, away from all traditional schemas and dominant tendencies, had produced readings of Marx's work that focused on his radical interpretation of capitalism as a mode of configuring all forms of social life, from the seemingly most insignificant and finite to the most extensive and historical ones. It is under the influence of the authors of this unorthodox Marxism, such as Roman Rosdolsky and Maximilien Rubel, that Echeverría approached Marx, and understood that it was impossible to revolutionize social life without attending to what Sartre called the instances of "practico-inert" mediation. As in the case of many radical Latin Americans living in Europe, it was during this same time that Echeverría also passionately read Frantz Fanon, an author who, as some of Echeverría's last essays demonstrate, made an indelible mark on his thinking.

After having obtained the degree of Magister Artium in Germany, Echeverría arrived for the first time in Mexico in 1968 – that paradigmatic, and also tragic, year from so many geographical perspectives. In Mexico, Echeverría joined the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), where he obtained a bachelor's degree in philosophy (1974), a master's degree in economics (1991), and a doctoral degree in philosophy (1997), and where he worked as a professor and researcher for the rest of his life. During his first decade in Mexico, he wrote the essays that would constitute his first book, *Marx's Critical Discourse* (1986), a text in which he displays his astute and ambitious reading of Marx's *Capital*. Informed by Rosa Luxemburg's theory of communist revolution and the conviction that "Marx's discourse" constitutes the most powerful criticism of bourgeois society, that book contains a structural definition of *Capital's* general argument, taking the dichotomy of value and use-value as its basis. During those years Echeverría was also part of the editorial committee of the journal *Cuadernos políticos* (1974–90), a basic referent for Marxist thought in Latin America.

In regard to his style of writing, Echeverría can perhaps best be described as an essayist. His writing contains an element of fragmentation that, as Adorno said, experiments with form and allows concepts freely to emerge and recognize themselves in language.¹ This style, on the one hand, affirms the conviction, shared with critical theory,

that it is impossible for philosophy to systematically grasp the totality of the real, a characteristic of all discourse on modernity; and, on the other hand, it also asserts the fact that Latin American philosophy has a peculiar way of using language. To philosophize in Spanish, and in Latin American Spanish in particular, for Echeverría, means articulating oneself in a language and with certain configurations of speech whose possibilities for reflective discourse differ considerably from those that European history considers as modern philosophical discourse, given that Hispanic philosophy has cultivated other ways of discourse that have been much more connected to poetry than to science. This feature links Echeverría's work to the rich Latin American essayistic tradition, which stretches from an immemorial past across several fields, including literature, philosophy, history, politics, and journalism. Thus, for three decades Echeverría worked on elaborating an extensive critique of capitalist modernity, which he developed in relation to the specific contemporary reality of Latin America, in books such as *Las ilusiones de la modernidad* [*The Illusions of Modernity*] (1995), *Valor de uso y utopía* [*Use-Value and Utopia*] (1998), *La modernidad de lo barroco* [*The Modernity of the Baroque*] (1998), *Vuelta de siglo* [*Turn of the Century*] (2008), and the posthumous 2010 book that is now presented here to the reader as *Modernity and "Whiteness."*

One of the distinctive features of Echeverría's thought is his particular understanding of modernity and its relation to capitalism. As a keen reader of the first generation of Frankfurt School writers, his critique of modernity resonates with Benjamin's concerns about the disenchantment of the world and the social alienation in capitalism. Yet, above all, Echeverría's work arises from being theoretically dissatisfied with Weber's biunivocal correspondence between the spirit of capitalism and the Protestant ethic. For Echeverría, Weber's description of this relation seems to imply that a non-capitalist modernity is impossible, or, in other words, that the only imaginable mode of harnessing the modern revolution of productive forces for human society is precisely that which is outlined by the Protestant ethic.

In contrast to this view, and challenging a certain kind of narrative that has prevailed in Latin America, Echeverría does

not identify modernity with capitalism. From his reading of Marx, Echeverría recognizes the fact that capitalism is the most typical modern historical reality, and that no aspect is as characteristic of modernity as capitalism. But, at the same time, he argues that one is not identical to the other. In his words, modernity, as a historical phenomenon of *longue durée* – in the Braudelian sense – is the particular character of a historical form of “civilizatory totalization,” based on a prior “neo-technic revolution” that established radically new relations between the human world and nature, as well as between the collective and the singular individual. Thus, Echeverría follows Lewis Mumford when the latter asks in *Technics and Civilization*, “Where did the machine take shape for the first time in modern civilization?”² and then answers by describing a complex temporality involving more than one point of origin in a series of proto-modern experiences emerging from technical innovations tracing back to the eleventh century in Central Europe. The answer addresses a polymorphous fact of specific historical tensions and relations, which eventually led to change in the entire human experience. In Echeverría’s view, modernity is then the determining characteristic of a set of behaviors orchestrated around a new unitary principle established by neo-technics, different from the traditional constitution of social life, and that further perceives the latter as obsolete and ineffective. Thus, at its inception, as a new set of resources became available through a change in technological possibilities, modernity appeared as a kind of challenge to open up a different orientation for social order. This was a challenge to open up the horizon of possibility for a series of new relationships, both within what Echeverría calls “the social subject” and from the human toward “nature” or toward “the Other.” These new relationships would not be determined by the threat of absolute scarcity, as they had previously been in pre-modern societies.

Modernity, defined in this radical sense, refers to the potential for material reproduction to be based on relative abundance. Undoubtedly, this argument echoes Marx’s idea of communism, of the need to establish a new social order given the new conditions of possibility opened up by the development of productive forces. A distinctive nuance,

however, is that Echeverría sees the possibilities opened by modernity as a promise “of a different model, where the challenge addressed to the Other follows instead the model of *eros*.”³ That is, it does not establish a destructive or predatory relationship to nature, aiming to transform it into an inexhaustible source of resources available for human use. Instead, it establishes the potential for a new relationship with the Other, which, freed from the capitalist productivist technique, can even open the possibility of mutual cooperation. However, in reality, this has turned out to be impossible under the conditions of established modernity, of “actually existing” modernity – as he calls it, in reference to the term “actually existing socialism.” This is a version of modernity whose history has become entwined with that of capitalism. Throughout this process, the latter has overshadowed and subsumed the liberatory potential of the former, forever staining it with the reduction of social life to mere labor power, and expanding its own presence at an accelerated and global scale.

Thus, for Echeverría, modernity began with the neo-technic revolution and the consequent challenge that it set forth; whereas capitalism emerged with full force with the deepening, both extensive and intensive, of the process of valorizing value. The temporal dimension of their historical existence not only differs, but also responds to different points of origin. This is why, in the relation between modernity and capitalism, there is a discrepancy at play between form and content or substance. Modernity, on the one hand, is defined as the essence, as the substance of a historical reality founded by technological change and with the capacity to open up multiple possibilities. Capitalism, on the other hand, is a form or mode of production of human life that presents itself as the fundamental and exclusive order of the entire circulation of social wealth.⁴ Consequently, it is possible to imagine the essence of modernity without reducing it to capitalism, while it is impossible to think of or account for capitalism without modernity as an antecedent or foundation. This is one of the characteristic features of Echeverría’s contribution to the critique of capitalism: he explains how capitalism and its principle of accumulation restricted or constrained other incipient forms of modernity,

and therefore were able to establish a hegemonic and even absolute monopoly over modernity. Following this view, one can see modernity as a suspended reality, or, in other words, as a polymorphous phenomenon that was absorbed by capitalism, but that nevertheless contains an acting principle that has not yet disappeared and remains open as a possibility. Its reality resembles that of use-value; it is a principle and a foundation, but its current effectiveness is subject to the mediation of value.

In response to Echeverría's claims, it would be reasonable to ask this question: to what extent is this potential presence of modernity not a matter of a purely conceptual abstraction? In other words, is it possible to observe and verify the survival of other emerging modernities upon the triumph of the dominant forms of capitalism in all aspects of life? How could these incipient forms of modernity survive? Echeverría answers these questions in relation to the logical and historical development of the process of social-natural subsumption. This is why these questions are directly related to his claim that the key to understanding Marx's critical discourse lies in the contradiction between use-value and value, a contradiction contained in the subject/object mediation process through which the human being becomes semiotically inscribed in capitalism. This perspective assumes that the domination of capitalism does not appear as a linear, homogeneous, absolute, or irreversible process, given that the historical persistence of this contradiction reveals the autonomy of use-value, either in moments of ephemeral existence, of unforeseen outbursts, or as subtle expressions in the deepest and most diverse aspects of daily social behavior.

Echeverría's work thus points to the need to study those instances that connect individuals with their collective entities, and to understand how the latter manifest the aforementioned contradiction in their contemporary life. The actually existing modernity, in its effort to constantly tame any of these unwanted expressions, demands a certain type of behavior functional to the logic of the valorization of value, a human being fit to succeed in capitalist production. This is why the process of capitalist accumulation has entailed the systematic oppression and repression of previous identities,

ones that had to be replaced or reconstructed according to a new ethical model adequate to profit production.

Thus, upon the need to understand the multiple potential modes of social concretion under capitalist modernity, Echeverría develops the concept of historical ethos. He argues that the classic Weberian characterization of the Protestant ethic is too restrictive, given that it deals with only one historical mode of being, that is, with the one that actively satisfied the demand for a new type of human being committed to increasing economic production. The spirit of capitalism represents the emergence of a new man, living by and for capital, which corresponds to a certain type of behavior or spirit, a certain productivist ethos committed to sacrifice and care for the wealth that has been conferred upon him, and for whom, in his attempt to fulfill these mandates, all pre-modern ways of life stand as an obstacle. But, for Echeverría, this productivist ethos, which he calls the realist ethos, represents only one of multiple possible forms to confront capitalist modernity. He distinguishes it from other possible forms; those that he calls the classical ethos, the baroque ethos, and the romantic ethos.

The historical ethos is the concept through which Echeverría thinks about how structural social behavior, located both in the subject and in the object, and, in the context of the social constitution and historical establishment of capitalism, finds a way to make livable a set of conditions that are structurally unlivable, those determined by the abstract logic of value. In this way, he envisions a set of concrete materializations of a strategy destined, not to solve, but to integrate the undeniable facticity of capitalism into the spontaneous construction of life. And, for this reason, he insists upon the importance of finding traces of these materializations; this effort is crucial to critical theory's attempt to think through the present era and to discovering potential ways to overcome the form of modernity that sustains it, that is, the capitalist one. This also explains Echeverría's commitment to investigating the ongoing social consistency of baroque behavior upon today's global civilizational crisis.

So there is not only one ethos of capitalism, but four, and each refers to a different successive impulse of capitalism: the Mediterranean, the Nordic, the Western, and the Central

European. Each one represents a particular way capitalism has acted on society and a preferred dimension from which it has expanded. Among them, the baroque ethos was the first imprint, while the romantic ethos and its politics are the latest. However, in truth, the one that has always played a dominant role is the realist ethos, which has constantly forced others to combine with it. This is why it is only in a restrictive sense that we can speak about capitalist modernity as a civilizational scheme that requires and imposes exclusively the Protestant ethic.⁵ Echeverría develops these reflections in three essays central to the present text, “Images of ‘Whiteness’,” “Meditations on the Baroque,” and “‘American’ Modernity,” as he questions the alleged unidirectional relationship between modernity and Protestant, white identity. He argues that the historical relationship between the capitalist way of life and the Puritan non-European population has been hypostatized to become both a general identity and an essential condition for the ordering of national states. This relationship promotes a certain mode of existence, an appearance, a composure, to the point that it can even dispense with the racial features of whiteness, so long as individuals show their willingness to adapt to and internalize the capitalist way of life, that is, to become “white.” For this reason, he believes, it is possible to not have white skin and still be perfectly “white,” as has happened in many social dimensions of Latin America. This is the kind of identity racism that characterizes life in capitalist modernity. This argument is complemented by the essay on the baroque, which shows how, through *mestizaje*, Latin American modernity set off along a different path than the Central European one, and how the baroque ethos became a spontaneous strategy of resistance in colonial cities, one that still lurks in the shadows of their daily lives today. However, today, in the turn from the late twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century, the baroque strategy loses force and yields territory to the overwhelming influence of Latin America’s powerful North American neighbor and its “American way of life,” a mode of modernity that now expands across almost the entire globe.

These are some of the key elements that allow us to approach Bolívar Echeverría and to consider the pressing

significance of his work. He believed that the crisis of modernity – the same civilizational crisis we experience today – should force critical discourse to rethink some of its fundamental political concepts. Thus, he posits a challenge for us to doubt the allegedly “real” or insurmountable rationale of the actually existing world, and for us to imagine and place our trust in the potential existence of another reality, less “realist,” less demanding, and not so gravely at odds with human freedom.

Translated by Rodrigo Ferreira

Translator's Preface

In the Foreword to this text, Diana Fuentes observes how Echeverría's style affirms the existence of a particular quality in Spanish-language philosophy. She describes how this line of philosophy has cultivated certain "ways of discourse that have been much more connected to poetry than to science." Indeed, Echeverría's use of the Spanish language comes very close to poetry in his work. Words unfold in rhythm with one another, concepts entwine and grow apart with passion, and, above all, insights echo throughout the text in reference to other philosophical texts, creating a sense of vibrancy and vivacity as critical and historical connections emerge.

The attempt to reproduce this quality in English, however, has not come without its difficulties. Through the text, Echeverría's constant reference to multiple disciplines, including anthropology, philosophy, history, critical theory, and cultural studies, often creates a dichotomous situation: what might seem a simple vernacular term or a word commonly used in one discipline, when translated, turns out to be a specific technical term in another. For example, the Spanish word *técnica*, which in plural form or in reference to its general concept could be plainly translated as "technique," I have decided instead to translate as "technics." This is in line both with Lewis Mumford's usage of the same term in *Technics and Civilization* – which Echeverría mentions

as a major influence on his work – and with contemporary English-language academic discourse in philosophy of technology (e.g., Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time*). Along the same lines, other terms in Spanish, such as *el mundo de la vida*, *sujetidad*, *objetidad*, *lo otro*, and *indígena*, have also required specific attention. Where necessary, I have included the original text in brackets or a note attached to the translated text.

Most notably, the term *blanquitud* has posed a particular challenge. Echeverría coins this term in Spanish to help distinguish between what he sees as two kinds of racism: one based on the whiteness of skin, *blancura*, and another primarily based on an ethical or civilizational character, *blanquitud*. However, even though Echeverría uses the term *blanquitud* to refer to the latter, at the same time, he chooses it precisely because he means it to resonate with the former. The term *blanquitud* is meant to remind the reader that the kind of racism based on *blancura* has not entirely disappeared. As he makes clear in chapter 4, “ethnic racism ... is always willing to resume its protagonist role and tendency to discriminate ... always ready to revive its genocidal program.” For this reason, in this translation, rather than rendering *blanquitud* in English as a different concept than whiteness (Echeverría on one separate occasion uses the term “whiteness”), or attempting to coin a new term in English that might fail to capture Echeverría's original meaning, the editors of this series and I have decided to render it as “whiteness,” always in quotation marks. We believe this term helps Echeverría stand close in dialogue with contemporary academic discourse on the concept of whiteness. Moreover, by using quotation marks around this term, we hope to remind the reader, as Echeverría often does throughout the text, that “whiteness,” in its ethical-civilizational form, is always a social construct, and therefore also always already a potential subject of deconstruction.

In addition to the challenges presented by these terms, another source of complexity in the translation was the fact that the original volume in Spanish was published posthumously. It contains a number of pieces that, unfortunately, Echeverría did not have a chance to finalize. As the first note in each of the chapters concerned explains, some of

these pieces are transcripts taken from presentations at academic conferences, others are unfinished articles, and, in one particular case, there is a translation of a text that was originally written in English but then was irreparably lost. Together with the publisher, I have taken great care to render the content of these texts as close to the original as possible, yet, at the same time, considering their incompleteness, I have also made a number of editorial decisions to omit unnecessary or obtrusive details, such as redundant words recorded in the transcripts and inconclusive fragments of a text in progress, and to rectify incongruent bibliographical information where possible.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my friends, advisors, and colleagues who have helped me throughout this translation. I am very grateful to Raquel Serur for inviting me to participate in this project and for trusting me with Bolívar's words. And I would also like to thank Kari Hensley, Alexander Galloway, Natasha Schüll, Nicole Starosielski, Emily Apter, Ignacio Sánchez-Prado, John Richardson, Andrew Sartori, Bruno Nouril, Alex Campolo, Ian Alexander, Tulio Lugo, and Sara Ferreira for providing me with their comments and support. Thank you.

Introduction

“The human only exists as such if it is actualized in the plurality of its concrete versions, each of them different from the others, each one *sui generis*. To negate this diversity would be tantamount to the death of the human. Felicitously, this homogenization is impossible: the map of human diversity will never lose the infinite multiplicity of its color. Difference is inevitable. There is no force that can standardize the multiplicitous landscape of human identities.”

Trust in these words underlies every action taken and every word spoken with pride and in admiration of the human. This is a species that, despite its devastating presence on the planet, still seems capable of reorienting its history and finding alternative modes of life that no longer imply, as its permanent condition of reproduction, the negation of itself and of the Other [*lo otro*]. Humanity itself is at stake in the affirmation of its own diversity, in resistance to and conflict with the unstoppable force of our times, which seeks to condense all humans into an obedient mass. The more homogeneous this mass becomes, the more docile humans will become to the demands of the current social order and to its deaf, yet relentless, will to catastrophe.

There seem to be two conditions that sustain this trust in humanity: the first, originating in the past, remains active in

the present; the second, coming from the future, only begins to appear in the present.

Traditional identity, which is visible in innumerable and unique forms in natural languages, in daily customs and habits, as well as in the cultures that critically cultivate it, comes from a design process that traces back to the depth of time and that endows this identity with an impenetrable nucleus, which has already been put to the test thousands of times and been proven capable of constantly reappearing in the most varied ways. Nothing can really alter it: not when human beings (whom it defines) act from the heights of arrogance and seek to conquer it and oversaturate it with foreign elements, nor when humans, in times of hardship, become embarrassed by it, subordinate it to other identities, deform and mistreat it, or believe themselves capable of rejecting it. Undoubtedly, traditional identity can be transformed, but it remains intact at its core, from which it consistently reappears and makes a mockery of any attempt to subsume it to a global and uniform identity. In addition, the appearance of new collective individuals of every kind, a symptom of the civilizational transformation of our times, implies a proliferation of identities unknown until now. The proliferation of these identities, each endowed with greater or lesser strength and permanence, serves as resistance to the uniform totalitarianism imposed over traditional identity by the productive apparatus designed in capitalist modernity.

The main argument of the texts gathered in this volume attempts to problematize the humanist trust placed in these two apparent conditions related to the indispensable plurality of the human. The purpose of this volume is to explore the mechanisms that lead to that powerful homogenizing impulse to elude, and if not then to integrate, the forms of resistance presented by natural identities – both traditional and new – and to prevail over the centrifugal and multiplying tendency that they bring.

“Whiteness” [*blanquitud*] – not whiteness [*blancura*] – is the pseudo-concrete identitarian quality destined to fulfill the absence of a concrete human identity in established modernity.

The seemingly perfect machinery of production of social wealth, which in modernity serves the process of capital

accumulation, nevertheless has a structural defect: in it resides a particular parasite. This machinery is designed in such a way that the parasitic agent, which has completely subordinated the host, must now take care that the latter does not become extinct. The modern productive apparatus is an inverted cyborg that is not completed by its mechanical part, but is instead completed by its organic part, without which it would be impossible for it to function. Capital needs its agents of accumulation, the worker and the capitalist, which in principle could be robots lacking any will of their own, to possess and reproduce at least a minimum of that exclusive human faculty, which is ultimately what keeps it alive. How to build a human identity whose free and spontaneous will becomes confused in its identification with the irrepressible tendency to valorize its economic value, a tendency that beats with the force of an artificial, “thingly will” [*“voluntad cósica”*]? The solution to this problem could only be offered by a type of human being whose identity is precisely “whiteness”; a type of human being belonging to a particular history that is already over a century old, but that nowadays threatens to spread throughout the planet. “Whiteness” is not, in principle, an identity of a racial order. The pseudo-concretization of the *homo capitalisticus* certainly – and necessarily, for historical reasons – includes certain ethnic features of the whiteness of the “white man,” but only as incarnations of other more decisive features, which are of an ethical order, that characterize a certain type of human behavior, a life or survival strategy. A certain “white” appearance, which can be revealed in highly quintessential forms, is required, for example, to define the ideal modern and capitalist human identity, which would in principle be an identity indifferent to colors. This is an appearance that does not avoid any disfigurement or distortion of whiteness, so long as these elements can contribute to demonstrating on a global scale that human free will and the automatic “will” of capital are unexceptionally interchangeable.

The first five chapters of this volume address this concept of “whiteness.” Meanwhile, the final three are dedicated to analyzing a completely different modern identity, the baroque identity, which has appeared especially frequently in Latin America and particularly in Mexico. In conversation with