

The Symbol of the Mask

El símbolo de la máscara

Julio Martín Alcántara Carrera

ABSTRACT

The *Zapatista* Indigenous Movement from Chiapas, Mexico is an example of the anthropological dynamics between the visible and the invisible in Western culture and the possible revolution of perceiving reality as such since they had to cover their faces with masks in their rebel anti-system movement in order to be considered as having the same dignity as other human beings: they performed a revolutionary act that changed the symbolic order of the visible by the public exhibition of their colonial submission. The mask *gave* them a face, disrupting the order of the visible with uncanny faces. In this article, a nondual model is proposed to capture the inessential ground of the given composed of endless perspectives in continuous transformation by the generation of ontological novelty: an open cognitive horizon of symbolically empty points of view irreducible to one perspective. For Krishnamurti, the revolutionary act is to *see without an image* in order to phenomenologically attend to things as they are beyond the known and the unknown such as Stilinović and Malevich pursued the dissolution of symbolic representations through art for the transformation of human reality.

Keywords: mask; visibility; rite; paratopic force; terra ignota.

RESUMEN

El Movimiento Indígena Zapatista de Chiapas, México, es un ejemplo de la dinámica antropológica entre lo visible y lo invisible en la cultura occidental y la posible revolución de la percepción de la realidad como tal, ya que tuvieron que cubrir sus rostros con máscaras en su movimiento rebelde antisistema para ser considerados con la misma dignidad que los demás seres humanos: realizaron un acto revolucionario que cambió el orden simbólico de lo visible mediante la exhibición pública de su sometimiento colonial. La máscara les dio un rostro, trastocando el orden de lo visible con rostros insólitos. En este artículo se propone un modelo no dual para captar el terreno inessential de lo dado compuesto por infinitas perspectivas en continua transformación por la generación de novedad ontológica: un horizonte cognitivo abierto de puntos de vista simbólicamente vacíos e irreductibles a una perspectiva. Para Krishnamurti, el acto revolucionario es ver sin imagen para atender fenomenológicamente a las cosas tal y como son más allá de lo conocido y lo desconocido como Stilinović y Malevich perseguían la disolución de las representaciones simbólicas a través del arte para la transformación de la realidad humana.

Palabras clave: máscara; visibilidad; rito; fuerza paratópica; terra ignota.



Journal of the Philosophy of History
Resistances

INFORMATION

<https://doi.org/10.46652/resistances.v3i5.88>
ISSN 2737-6222 |
Vol. 3 No. 5, 2021, e21088
Quito, Ecuador

Submitted: April 05, 2022
Accepted: mayo 13, 2022
Published: mayo 18, 2022
Continuous publication
Dossier Section | Peer Reviewed



OPEN ACCESS

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no possible conflict of interest.

Funding

Conacyt, Mexico, doctoral fellowship.

Acknowledgments

I thank Alexis Rivera for corrections to the first version of this article.

Note

The article is a product of my research on the epistemic foundations of human thought.

PUBLISHER

RELIGACIÓN
CICSHAL
Centro de Investigaciones en Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades
desde América Latina

1. Argument

The members of the *Zapatista* Revolutionary Indigenous Movement from Chiapas, in the Mexican Southeast, have chosen to cover their faces, as a political statement and symbolic gesture, with *pasamontañas* so long as they are recognized as human beings deserving the same dignity as the ones who decide the order of the visible. A *pasamontañas* is a particular *balacava* that has been used in Latin America by some guerrilla movements. It was known in the 19th century as an Uhlan cap or Templar cap. The name comes from their use at the Battle of Balacava, during the Crimean War in 1854, and refers to a town near Sevastopol in the Crimean Peninsula, where British troops there wore knitted masks to stay warm.

If we call this [...] mode of human activity “gesture”, we can then say that gesture, as pure means, breaks the false alternative between making that is always a means directed to an end –production– and action that has its end in itself –praxis– but also and above all that between an action without a work and a necessarily operative action. Gesture is not in fact simply lacking a work, but instead defines its own special activity through the neutralization of the works to which it is linked as means (the creation and conservation of law for pure violence, quotidian movements directed at an end in the case of dance and mime). That is to say, it is an activity or a potential that consists in deactivating human works and rendering them inoperative, and in this way, it opens them to a new, possible use. This holds both for the operations of the body and for those of the mind: gesture exposes and contemplates the sensation in sensation, the thought in thought, the art in art, the speech in speech, the action in action. (Agamben, 2018, p. 84)

Visible here means known, accepted, normed, and even existent. By this action they show openly that they do not exist in the same way as certain Western communities given that Western values —such as freedom, self-determination, dignity, life— have not been applied to them in spite of having universalist pretensions. By the term *Western values*, which I use for convenience, I mean the set of values considered to be necessary for actual phenomenal living interactions. However, one must take into account that this set of values is not the appropriate state of possible living interactions that assures an actual and respectful interaction. Otherwise, as it tends to happen, other communities should portray Western values in order to be really free. This is frequently associated to the notion that, if such communities fail to free themselves in the Western way, they should be freed from their slavery by Western powers. In this sense, slavery means to live with an identity foreign to that of the center of visibility, i.e. the West, that seeks to apply its cultural mindset to other collectives, implementing those distinctions without taking into account the material dynamics of others ecosystems. However, states of minimal attribution of dignity and respect may be achieved similarly under other non-Western values. This symbolic alienation triggers the emergence of revolutionary movements that attempt to reshape the restricted values attributed to the given.

Dual models of reality with settled identities and partial cognitive horizons will inevitably give place to revolutionary endeavors, from unseen fields of human experience to unrecognized

human collectives. In contrast, nondual models enable an open interaction with the given and its symbolic framework. The unknown field of reality will be symbolically framed in this nondual approximation under the concepts of *Terra Ignota* and the *paratopic force*, i.e. the unified vision of reality (represented as “an unknown land”) and the actualization of the given respectively.

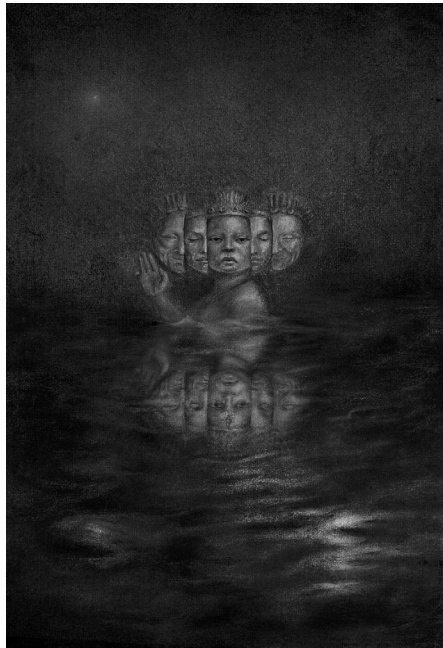
2. Objective

The objective of this article is to discuss how symbolic frameworks belonging to partial partitions of reality give place to revolutionary movements like the *Zapatista* given that the main epistemological issue of dual frameworks like the Western one is that they do not take into account phenomenologically the inessential ground of the given as an element that enables the relativization of the existing symbolic references while being open to other phenomenal encounters unforeseen by current models of reality.

In 3.1, I underline the lack of attention to and awareness of the whole phenomena that compose reality that stems from a state of lack of empathy to the other based on dual models with fixed symbolic identities. In 3.2, the *Zapatista* Movement is presented as an anthropological example that helps us disentangle the dynamics of the visible and invisible in the dual symbolic framework of the West, where this movement managed to bring to the public sphere the archaic experience of the mask through their *pasamontañas*, which portrays them as hidden forces of the living beyond Western actual recognition of equality. In 3.3, I address the fact that symbols were once an expression of freedom that has progressively been normalized as the nature of reality, causing great harm to the unexpected development of nature and life under the so-called objectivity. In 3.4, I defend the idea that human beings belong to a nondual ontology composed of endless perspectives of the given that cannot be reduced to any of them, since this radical inclusion of endless perspectives is what makes reality possible. In 3.5, the self-conscious mask is proposed as a paradoxical tool that has been revolutionarily employed by the Zapatistas, artists, and others to express something beyond the current symbolic constraints through other liminal symbols. The symbol of the mask can be generalized to any analogy within a symbolic language.

As a preliminary conclusion I advance that the dual Western cosmovision has itself symbolically masked the phenomenal world by means of fixed symbolic identities and through a misconception of the inessential nondual ground of the given, thus inhibiting the perceptual and cognitive development of their agents and the actual recognition of non-Western collectives: while agents have been regarded as *subjects*, the Other, represented by non-Western collectives and nature, has been abused and destroyed. The alienation in such a dual cosmovision has arrived to the point of denying human freedom up to the point that its logic is deemed to be rationally dismissable due to a lack of logical and ontological grounding, e.g. if the dynamical systems of the universe gave rise to evolutionary processes, these systems cannot be closed to evolutionary transformations: the emergence of human consciousness is the demonstration of the nondual creation of novelty within the inessential ground of the given.

Figure 1. The Symbol of the Mask.



Source: Pilar Sekho, based on Julio Alcántara's visual concept for this article.

3. The Symbol of the Mask

Why do we need a symbolic frame to recognize life conditions of other cultures with the same degree of dignity as ours? Present common sense, embodied by Western values and implemented through past historical events, suggests that without a symbolic frame it is not possible to grasp another, for the assumption is that we do not perceive the phenomenal realm without mediations. If this were the case, it would be arguable that the symbolic realm causes the adequate perception of the phenomenal one, which is in itself debatable.

3.1 Exposition of the problem

On the one hand, if dual epistemological frameworks pursue a truthful explanation of phenomena without being analogically closed to dynamics beyond their explanatory scope, they have to recognize the inessential ground of the given. On the other hand, nondual frameworks have to clarify the status of the symbolic realm of representation in their ontology, since symbolic references of nondual frameworks are theorized on the basis of a variety of metaphysical orders: from defining the ontology of reality as a mathematical structure to the inessential ground of reality. The former defended by Max Tegmark under the spectrum of current scientific practices and the latter created originally within Indian culture. In what I put forward in *Imago Orbis* (Alcántara, 2021), I propose a nondual model of reality based on first principles for the scientific study of consciousness' emergence and of the causal structure of experience that assembles a unified epistemological framework from logic, metaphysics and physics to biology, neuroscience and ethics. This model underlines the abstraction of the conscious agent departing from concrete determinations to enable an adequate understanding of interdependent arising of unified pro-

cesses in the open-ended universe whose evolving dynamics deploy complexity by simple rules of interaction under three causal layers: self-organized dynamics of energy, autopoietic biosystems and self-consciousness. Since every phenomenal unity expresses singularly the whole dynamical composition of the systems, the greatest variety of the dynamical systems is necessary for its continuous evolution: diversity of views implements a multidimensional concrete reality.

The nondual ontology of reality is expressed through symbols for the sake of creating a common epistemic ground, because they are just sonorous, pictorial and abstract devices, framed by human perception, by which to realize the self-conscious deployment of the universe from human monadic interactions. Monad means an indivisible unity. It comes from the neoplatonic tradition of Plotino and later recovered by G. W. Leibniz and contemporary neuroscientists like Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. The inessentiality of reality means that the metamorphosis of the given is, at least, beyond the present human cognitive grasp due to the emergence of novel dimensions of interaction and to the colossal variety of combinatorial possibilities entailed in the perceived cosmos and their interdependence. The combinatorial dynamics of a spatial point in movement within the known dynamical systems of the universe is non-ergodic, i.e. that such a point has more states than the ones it has spatially gone over, at least, from the beginning of the universe so far known. There is no central tendency in the probability distribution of a point in a dynamical system by which it could be accurately described based on current theories, e.g. the human system has been deployed through non-ergodic autopoietic dynamics out of equilibrium. Complexity is thus not an outcome of interactions. Rather, the guiding rule for the creation of novelty is theoretically grounded on the Leibnizian Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles.

Epistemological frameworks, dual or nondual, create communities based on their practices and symbolic references that bind together irreducible differences among phenomenal singularities such as human beings. These symbolic languages should comprise the factual and symbolic recognition of the inessential ground of the given to enable an open interaction with the contingency of reality through *an attention without images* that ought to frame the perception of the Other, be it in a natural reserve in the jungle or in an interaction with a sentient being, thus avoiding the spread of an artificial sense of homogeneity and enabling the emergence of novelty.

Dual theoretical standpoints can hardly be sustained under a nondual ontological ground given that the perceptual specificity of human beings should be analogically encountered in other sentient beings under an evolutionary process, but expressed by different biological structures, which produce uncanny manners of relating to the environment, e.g. the animal kingdom manifests a great variety of perceptual and cognitive abilities irreducible to human perception or symbolic language. This lack of empathy and self-conscious development of dual approaches surrounds the treatment towards sentient and other human beings with a false necessity of a symbolic frame for understanding phenomenal interactions: these approaches imply that it is not possible to understand other living conditions without a previous representation. The polemical issue is that, in order to deserve recognition, one has to fit the cosmovision of the one who is materially able to give such recognition under a partial model of reality.

Now, first of all there is no method. Because any method, system repetition or habit, is essentially part of the corner of that field. The first thing is to see the actual fact of the little corner and what its demands are. Then we can put the question, “How can we make the whole field completely sensitive?”, because in that lies the only true revolution. When there is total sensitivity of the whole of the mind, then we will act differently; our thinking, feeling, will be wholly of a different dimension. But there is no method. Don’t say, “How am I to arrive, achieve, become sensitive?”—you can’t go to college to become sensitive, you can’t read books or be told what to do to become sensitive. This is what you have been doing within that corner of the field, and it has made you more and more insensitive, which can be seen in your daily life, with its callousness, brutality, and violence. [...] So we become callous because we are functioning, living, acting, within the small petty little corner of a distorted field. (Krishnamurti, 1973, p. 191)

The bottom predicament is that the Other has been misconceived, because we are not paying attention to actual phenomena, including our own episteme. This lack of awareness triggers wrong projections of the identity of oneself and the Other. Humans tend to name things without knowing how to embody their understanding. Instead of placing an abyss in the center of meaning in order to be continuously attentive of the manifestation of the real, humans nowadays are themselves the abyss, since they are submerged in an iteration of imposed values determined by the order of the visible, which causes a homogenization of human diversity and a loss of the potentiality of human creativity. However, life is not reducible to one cultural expression under the ontological structure of reality, which is composed by infinite singular perspectives of the universe (Alcántara, 2021).

Symbolic languages must take into account the factual and symbolic recognition of the inessential ground of the given because they originated from the radical experience of being before the absolute contingency of reality, which gave place to the feelings of wonder and perplexity and their manifestation in myths: culture provides a field for the expression of diversity in a unified intelligible soil. Notwithstanding, we have been taught that the world has already succeeded in attaining its ultimate development and that it has been so difficult to reach this progress that risking what we have for another possible circumstance would bring a worse situation for the global community. The assumption is that in order to change the order of things much violence and offering would be needed and such cost is unaffordable. For the *Zapatistas* the destruction of life and nature in their environment are already sufficiently real, so much so that they have to raise awareness about these damages. They have purposely destabilized the order of the visible by bringing the hidden force of nature through self-conscious action, by mystifying everyday life with the introduction of *alien* unknown practices into the public sphere: a mask gave them a recognizable face in the public sphere.

3.2 The archaic experience of the mask

In this section, the *pasamontañas* of the *Zapatista* Movement is presented as an example of the effects that dual models of reality that do not take into account the inessential field of reality produce in the form of revolutionary uprisings due to their settled symbolic identities.

The uprising of the *Zapatista* movement, deemed rebel and anti-system, took a stance on January 1th, 1994 against the order of the visible with the affirmation that they are the others, the unrecognized, the forgotten from the encounter of the two civilizations on October 12th, 1492. On this same day, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was launched. They took up the slogan “Tierra y libertad”, previously used by the Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata who pursued the ideals of freedom and sustenance for everyone. This use of the slogan “Land and Freedom” was inspired by the Mexican anarchist Ricardo Flores Magón, originally used by the Russian revolutionary organization *Zemlya i Volya* in 1878.

This social movement provoked a violent reaction from the order of visibility, which constantly harassed their autonomous territory, called by them *Caracoles* –it means snails to point out an analogy of the persevering path of the snail with its slow but constant movement such as the long term process of the *Zapatistas*– and mainstream media discredits them as violent and retrograde from the positivist standpoint of the so-called scientific and technological progress. The embodiment of the unknown through the mask contradicts the fundament of the visible, which acknowledges materiality and reality through the implicit veil of the symbolic definition determined by the extent of the visible. If the guard of law cannot see your whole face, how can you be trusted?

So once again, what is one to do? All that one has to do is to see. See the corner, the little house that one has built in a corner of a vast, an immeasurable field; and living there, fighting, quarrelling, improving (you know all that it is going on there), *see it*. And that is why it is very important to understand what it means to see, because the moment there is conflict you belong to that isolated corner. Where there is seeing there is no conflict. That is why one has to learn from the very beginning–no, not the beginning, but now–to see. Not tomorrow, because there is no tomorrow–it is only the search for pleasure, or fear, or pain that invents “tomorrow”. (Krishnamurti, 1973, pp. 192-193)

In the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle in 1996 they stated:

No morirá la flor de la palabra. Podrá morir el rostro oculto de quien la nombre hoy, pero la palabra que vino desde el fondo de la historia y de la tierra ya no podrá ser arrancada por la soberbia del poder. Nosotros nacimos de la noche. En ella vivimos. Moriremos en ella. Pero la luz será mañana para los más, para todos aquellos que hoy lloran la noche, para quienes se niega el día, para quienes es regalo la muerte, para quienes está prohibida la vida. Para todos la luz. Para todos todo. Para nosotros el dolor y la angustia, para nosotros la alegre rebeldía, para nosotros el futuro negado, para nosotros la dignidad insurrecta. Para nosotros nada. (Comandancia del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena, 1996) [The flower of the word will not die. The hidden face of whoever names it today may die, but the word that came from the bottom of history and earth will no longer be able to be torn away by the pride of power. We were born from the night. We live in it. We will die in it. But the light will be tomorrow for the most, for all those who today cry the night, for whom day is denied, for whom death is a gift, for whom life is forbidden. For all the light. Everything for everyone. For us the pain and anguish, for us the joyous rebellion, for us the future denied, for us the rebellious dignity. For us nothing. Author’s translation].

The body inside the mask may die, but the symbol of the mask will remain: the circumstances of the forgotten, the existence of the unacknowledged. The evidence of their existence is their raw life, which they offer for the sake of another possible world: “Un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos” (‘A world where many worlds fit’), an internationalist slogan of the *Zapatista* for the sake of stating that all cosmovisions of the world can live together. It is about “changing the world without taking the power”: modifying the structure of the visible along with the identification and reproduction of human life without pursuing institutional power. This is an expression among the *Zapatistas*, which goes along with another one regarding the commitment of the government to ‘command obeying’ (mandar obedeciendo) the sovereign people. The expression has been used as well by John Holloway’s to reflect on the meaning of revolution today with a book under the same title. “The verb *gerere*, which in modern languages has been conserved only in the term ‘gesture’ and its derivatives, means a manner of behaving and acting that expresses a specific attitude of agents with respect to their actions” (Agamben, 2018, p. 83). The symbolic gesture of the mask represents the night, the oblivion, the lack of recognition. After all, they have been facing, for most of their lives, a situation of being hidden behind the order of visibility. The symbolic intervention of the mask enabled the “alien rebels” to engage in an active interaction with the center of visibility, just as Huizinga stated about the relation between the mask and the savage world:

The sight of the mask figure, as a purely aesthetic experience, carries us beyond ‘ordinary life’ into a world where something other than daylight reigns; it carries us back to the world of the savage, the child and the poet, which is the world of play. (Huizinga, 1949, p. 26)

The mask has disrupted the ordinary world since the beginning of time by bringing into life the forces of the unknown through symbolic self-conscious actions. This symbolic knowledge was, at its origin, an irruption in the flow of events for the first humans, because it changed, counterfactually, the so-called natural order of the world, just as it happens in the ritual staging of the gods through masks.

For archaic man, doing and daring are power, but knowing is magical power. For him a particular knowledge is sacred knowledge –esoteric and wonder-working wisdom, because any knowing is directly related to the cosmic order itself. The orderly procession of things, decreed by the gods and maintained in being by ritual for the preservation of life and the salvation of man – this universal order or *-tam* as it was called in Sanskrit, is safeguarded by nothing more potently than by the knowledge of holy things, their secret names, and the origin of the world. (Huizinga, 1949, p. 105)

The *Zapatistas* brought to life, again, the archaic experience of sacred practices against a fixed representation of life: a symbolic revolution in the order of visibility. The *Zapatista* mask is a transmutation that stems from the endless forces of the unknown into the realm of the visible in order to preserve life on Earth. In Van Gennep’s terms, the *Zapatista* Movement realizes the

separation from the current understanding of life under the three stages of social transformation: the separation from one state, liminality, and incorporation. “For the spectators of the initiation rites, these dance masks, which suddenly open in two parts to reveal a second face, sometimes a third behind the second, all imbued with mystery and austerity, attest to the omnipresence of the supernatural [...]”. (Lévi-Strauss, 2008, p. 877) [Author’s translation]. The deep distinction between modern societies and other ones is that the former have normalized the given by framing it as ‘natural’, in which current scientific explanation and projection contain the set of possible phenomena by reducing it into certain features where unexplainable events represent a non-correspondence inside the grammar of fixed represented knowledge. Meanwhile, other societies still have a ritual interaction with ordinary and unknown forces: an open door before the radical contingency of reality. The inclusion of the unknown through the supernatural means that humans deal with visible and invisible dimensions, thus composing the dynamics of the world, here and beyond everyday perception. This subtle practice changes the whole relation before the given: the surroundings are not any more humanized and domesticated, thus bringing into awareness the necessity of attention to the sustainment and evolution of life.

3.3 The double status of symbols

In this section, I stress that the normalization of symbols in the dual Western cosmovision is the reason for the emergence of alienated interactions with phenomena. The claim of an objective interaction with phenomena emphasizes this alienation given the partial assumption that the so-called premodern times have been surpassed, denying implicitly the holistic orientation of other collectives towards life and their values under the same human dignity.

People who do not adequately represent the values of the visible will not be treated equally. Therefore, the *Zapatistas* are the expression of a hidden human realm due to their ethnographic and cultural features. Where do this mistreatment and misconception reside? Symbols have a double status as counterfactual developments for human interaction with phenomena, and as the perceived order of things. They give a human meaning to the unknown while enabling the understanding of causal dynamics in the universe from a human point of view. Symbolic expression transformed counterfactually the ordinary dynamics to the surroundings in order to establish a perceptual interaction with sets of relations based on iconic traces of the landscape, forcing us to think anew our relation to reality given an enhanced tracking of the surroundings through a symbolic framework, which has been composed by the learning process from past iconic traces of experience.

Remarkably, this virtual facet of the world came into existence relatively recently, as evolutionary time is measured, and it has provided human selves with an unprecedented sort of autonomy or freedom to wander from the constraints of concrete reference, and a unique power for self-determination that derives from this increasingly indirect linkage between symbolic mental representation and its grounds of reference. With it has come a more indirect linkage between mind and body, as well. So this provides a somewhat different perspective on that curious human intuition that our minds are somehow independent of our bodies; an intuition which is often translated into belief about disembodied spirit and souls that persists beyond death. The experience we have of ourselves as symbols is in at least a minimal sense an experience of just this sort of virtual independence—it’s just not an independence from corporeal embodiment altogether. (Deacon, 1997, p. 454)

An object is characterized by the whole set of its predicates, among which human beings have established meaningful interactions framed by human perception and abstraction. How is this cognitive situation handled between Western symbolic expression and the infinite points of view of reality, e.g. the recognition of the irreducible existence of other perspectives and their cosmovisions? This is the paradox: symbols are simultaneously expressions of freedom and symbolic interfaces of communication about phenomena that have been already perceptually encountered. *Factual reality precedes symbolic representation*. Hence, a symbolic language expresses a world of interactions from a particular perspective, since there are vast manners of perception and representation in the relations of a unity with totality. Furthermore, the interface between perception and representation, which has been called “exo-brain” by the Mexican anthropologist, Roger Bartra, is a necessary cultural prosthesis in the interaction between perceptual dynamics and behavior for a self-conscious human being.

We face the fact that here emotions are closely associated with symbols, and we can assert that these sensations, devoid of symbols, would be completely different. The fact that symbols are added to the sensory functions is what makes consciousness a process that cannot be explained only by observing intracerebral mechanisms. The sum of somatic functions and symbols explains that self-awareness and sensations, on which it is based, have a causal character. (Bartra, 2014, p. 141) [Author’s translation].

Bartra asserts that somatic functions and symbolic representations have a causal character within a symbolic net of correlations. Once we have established or learned a specific relation between somatic reactions and symbolic representations, they can correlate a certain experience when dynamically receiving the adequate stimulus, without which we would be led by a different symbolic representation, but actually the same phenomenal interaction, e.g. the concept of fire between two languages such as English and Sanskrit could refer to the same phenomenon with a different meaning under its symbolic structure. On the one hand, some theories like current mainstream science assume that the symbolic map is almost complete except for certain abstract paradoxes such as the liar’s one and incompleteness theorems. On the other hand, there are other theoretical assumptions such as the nondual tradition of Indian philosophy, wherein the symbolic map is considered as ontologically different from material substratum: an analogical form of expressing phenomenal interactions.

There is an incomplete map connecting perception, cognition and abstraction to symbolic representations: a symbolic language implies merely an incomplete singular form of expressing the world. While the speakers of a given language could think that the relationship between its sounds and symbols has in intimate relation to phenomena, there are not only other symbolic languages that represent the same phenomenal dynamics differently, but also ineffable sensations and experiences, which are placed within the unknown knowns in the abstract relations of a symbolic framework, because there is the absolute unknown in relation to the nature of reality that involves the ontology of nature and phenomena beyond human imagination. We only represent certain relational features of phenomena using an abstract frame of reference without knowing their ontological grounding, but only the effects in the world from the human perceptual spectrum enhanced by technological interfaces.

What is the implicit cognitive horizon of the current empirical framework? First, we have nowadays the idea that all rituals or practices related to the so-called premodern times have been surpassed. Second, the modern world has established the assumption that modern humans can handle reality as such by the utility features of phenomena through objects based on the distinction between function and meaning in phenomenal interactions under the paradoxical attribution of “an objective meaning” to perceptual dynamics. There is no sacredness *per se*. Third, transcendence exists only in the material substratum of a mechanism: an empiricist nihilist *topos*. From this standpoint people have been judged, disqualified and mistreated, since some of them are still living based on ideas from, purportedly, premodern times. Such implicit affirmation spreads the right to exert violence towards other forms of life by means of stating one stream of historical events as a universal determination from merely one cultural perspective.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (2008) asserted this mistreatment of the Other based on the idea that one’s group, whichever it may be, grasps the given more adequately.

Every civilization has its tendency to overestimate the objective direction of its thought, so it is never absent. When we make the mistake of believing the savage to be exclusively governed by his organic or economic needs, we are not careful that he throws the same reproach on us, and that to him his own desire to know seems better balanced than ours. (pp.561) [Author’s translation].

In our era, the problem is not only whether some communities deny the holistic orientation of others or not. What is at stake is that the unification of the world by *one materialist perspective* is happening. We have a double nihilist judgment based on the so-called objectivity: the others believe in an unreasonable life, and we seek meaning in a world devoid of value in itself. We need complete attention without images to understand it.

The image is, after all, the past –the past, which has been accumulated through experience, pleasant or unpleasant; and with that image you look at your wife, your children, your neighbour, the world; you look with that image at nature. So what is in contact is your memory, the image which has been put together by memory. And that image looks and therefore there is no direct contact. [...] When you give your attention completely, that is, with your mind, with your eyes, with your heart, with your nerves – when you give complete attention, you will find there is no centre at all, there is no observer and therefore there is no division between the observed and the observer, and you eradicate conflict totally, this conflict brought about by separation, by division. It only seems difficult because you are not used to this way of looking at life. (Krishnamurti, 1973, pp. 212-213)

Symbols have been normalized under the epistemic value of objectivity, which is nonetheless another mask, just as the multiple facets of life represented in the mask, within the mask inside another mask. See the Prehispanic fragment of anthropomorphic brazier. Fired clay and pigment, 18 x 22 x 9 cm. Aztec around c. 1300. Collection Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Arte,

UNAM, Mexico City 08-741814 (Solis, 2004, pp. 190, 360). Life realizes a continuous metamorphosis of the given whether we acknowledge it or not, the creative remembering of the mind already realizes the reconstruction of the past from the present moment. The pure presence is unique and the present moment is singular with respect to other present moments (Alcántara, 2021). The transformation of the symbolic representation of reality looms from its own nature. Godard highlighted in *Adieu au Langage* the mystification of symbols and the revolutionary reconfiguration of their meaning to create a novel interaction with reality when the inner experience of human life has been reduced due to the increasing symbolic formalization of its interactions: only free beings can be alien to each other; they have a shared freedom that separates them.

3.4 The unified nature of cultural diversity

In this section, I stress that partial models of reality and their cosmovisions have to be discarded given the fact that reality is an attribute of extreme inclusion. The real is not reducible to one perspective or to the visible realm of the given, just as the concept of *ātman* underscores in regard to the unity of multiple phenomenal expressions.

A singular cultural frame expresses an intrinsic irreducible perspective: an elementary feature of the human condition. Cultural differences manifest the evolving and singular human nature by which different physical features, gestures and actions entail the composition of our determination with as many differences as possible in a process of continuous diversification within the determination of the cosmos. Reality is an attribute of extreme inclusion that avoids partiality to its achievement: where there is more variety, there is reality as implication of diversity of perspectives in a unified cosmos (Alcántara, 2021). *The real is irreducible to one perspective*. Meanwhile, the visible phenomenal landscape changes from another perspective and simultaneously different cultural expressions complement phenomena: *multiple points of views of sameness*. This unity in multiplicity has been treated in some cultures like in nondual tradition of Indian philosophy through the *ātman* polemicized by Shankara: the unified field of reality within every phenomenal unity from particles to self-conscious beings beings.

At the beginning the name and the form were undifferentiated and in their process of differentiation from the *ātman* they assumed the name and the form of the space. Thus, the element called ‘space’ arose from the supreme *ātman* just as the dirt of the foam comes out of clear water. Foam is not water, but it is not completely different from it, since it does not exist without water. The water is pure, distinct from the dirt in the foam. In the same way the supreme *ātman* is pure and translucent, distinct from the name and the form, symbolized by the foam. (Pujol, 2015, p. 96) [Author’s translation].

Symbolic representations are culturally individuated, hiding the common ground of life in the expression of a particular form like foam with water: *the identity of human individuation is a symbolic mask, whereas the ātman is irreducible to forms*. “*Ātman* is a dancer, and its actions are only

gestures” (Agamben, 2018, p. 83). The current Western understanding assumes that the physical bodily features comprise the basis of human identity. One should fit one’s physical face in order to be a social entity like: e.g. in the polemic against the practices and symbolic references of the *Zapatista* Movement and Muslim societies. We live in an uncovered reality where the physical visibility of phenomena is the main characteristic of existence. The system of identification forces humans to remain in their skin, so they can be ordered, signaled and incorporated. There is no outside of such a perspective, since reality for all cultures has a visible side: the system of identification can spread itself over all the others. One does not need to know or accept it in order to play with the rules of recognition and specification. There is already a name or a number to identify all entities and living things. What matters is to be expressed in countable material forms.

The transmutation of the total human life into the order of visibility comes from fear. This narrative suggests that civilization is an outcome of our instincts based on an empiricist nihilist philosophy. As if there would have not been counterfactual possibilities in the development of self-conscious life or as if reality were restricted to the partial narrative of what humans have historically done and remembered from such a materialist perspective. This fallacy of taking current understanding of other sentient beings and the so-called premodern humans (e.g. indigenous communities) justifies practices coming from fear to shape partially present human endeavors and culture. Moreover, one can always take past events to validate given practices. The possibility of present time is then entailed through the iteration of historical representations of one cultural perspective as if one narrative could contain all diversity. Even in Indra’s net, the whole perspectives of totality are required to the reflection of its universe. A metaphor to describe non-essential origination or emptiness originated in the *Atharva Veda* in Hinduism’s scriptures, which expresses the idea of interconnectedness and dependent origination through the reflection of the whole drops of water from each drop located in every vertex of an infinite multidimensional net.

The paradox when thinking about the human cognitive horizon from such conditionings is to pretend to exit unfair determinations from the past by affirming a particular human nature from them. If we define the nature of human beings as something, it will follow certain restrictions to the realm of possibility when thinking about counterfactual ways of being. Defining a particular human condition reduces the playing with the possible and teaches how to observe the world; afterwards one just confirms what has been taught: a performative phenomenon of self-reflection, which finds endlessly, through a loop, what has been done in the past. When this occurs, understanding and obeying are often mixed up, since the more accurately one understands reality, the more success one can presumably achieve. If the players cannot change the rules of the visible, then they obey in the same way as they interact with the recognized visible world. It represents an analogical closure: an ignorant person plays games without knowing the implications of her involvement, since her expression of consent is assumed in her normalized interactions. The emergence of such morality contributes to the affirmation of life value as it has historically been looped.

The phenomenal world has been thus symbolically masked. Everything has been given in a fair manner starting from material dynamics of life to cultural exchanges based on an empiricist nihilist philosophy whose lack of fairness is based on the development of a historical process: the order of the visible focuses now on guaranteeing the safety for the acknowledged ones. To disagree with such a perspective means that a person cannot simply acknowledge the value of progress remarked upon when one observes merely the corner of the recognized visible world. And so it goes the synecdoque of taking one part for the whole while violently reinforcing it by the continuous repetition of a partial narrative throughout all possible media of communication, besides the historical practices already implemented in every aspect of life, which produce the implicit notion that thinking or being otherwise is a psychological sickness. This type of time delay is the way to achieve nothing while presuming that the others will someday be acknowledged in the same manner as the ones within the center of visibility. Just the possible set of human attention before the given is wider than what current structure of visibility enables in mere philosophical and scientific terms.

Nonetheless, human cosmovision along with the whole interactions of the universe will evolve to a nondual mythology of an open-ended horizon given that reality is composed and deployed by the most extreme variety of points of view given that the symbolic framework belongs to the factual phenomenal dynamics, which diversify phenomenal interactions in an extreme manner. The nondual mythology will disregard partiality, increasing the self-conscious interactions of singularities with the global dynamics of the universe while enhancing human experience through the practical understanding of nonduality. The phenomenal form of human attention will remain invariant, but its meaningful relations will be transformed by widening the scope of possible interactions with the symbolic assumption of the inessential ground of reality and the unknown landscape of perception. The symbolic representations have no substantial correspondence to phenomena, which are just correlated and embodied by cultural practices and ideologies. The interactions between symbolic and phenomenal realms will continuously transform self-conscious beings in an endless process of metamorphosis.

3.5 The complex self-referentiality of human reality through the self-conscious mask

In this section, I show how nondual models enable us to recognize the contingency of human order and how the concepts of *Terra Ignota* and the *paratopic force* give us the chance to emphasize the inessentiality of the given. A complex self-conscious mask is necessary to understand the parareal vision that assembles the known and unknown realms of the given, which manifests symbolically the ineffable.

The non-substantial correspondence of phenomena and symbolic representations manifests human freedom. Symbols are a human creation that could be otherwise, which comprises the mystification of the form they express as a singular representation that has been achieved among infinite counterfactual possibilities. Humans wonder, puzzled by the recognition of their symbolic creative understanding. The mystery of having the particular phenomenal form we symbolically wear: the self-conscious mask of the given. “Praxis –human life– is not a trial (an *actio*),

but rather a *mysterion* in the theatrical sense of the term, made of gestures and words” (Agamben, 2018, p. 83). Being aware of such a phenomenon enables us to sustain the inessentiality of our order as the pillar of our liberty. By contrast, *naturalizing the order by forgetting its contingency turns a particular idea into the fixed mask of reality*. Meanwhile the use of a self-conscious mask enacts ritually the original contact with unknown forces: first as irruption from the radical Other in us, second as becoming such another.

The relation between the presence of life and the absence of symbolic representation has been postulated as a paradox, since human presence is always in a lack, a process of becoming. However, we are always *there*, in a place with its full reality, including its symbolic representation just as in nondual philosophical tradition, which cannot be represented and nonetheless has been symbolically expressed, e.g. the Tao in the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Brahman* in *Advaita Vedānta*. It seems that this irreducible duality cannot be surpassed, because absence and presence cannot come together. Nonetheless to be fully present one should be absent from the common understanding and in some sense from oneself, since the common is the limit of our alienation and symbolic frame, under which “normal” and “abnormal” phenomena are typified. Being absolutely present becomes the symbol of its possibility: a concrete symbolic manifestation of the given. Óscar Pujol (2015) interprets the thinking of Shankara about liberation based on attention and authenticity:

Liberation is a superlative manner of existence where ignorance doesn't extinguish the shine of reality. One is more, lives more, more open, more without fear, under a full sun and not in the shadow of maya. One stops to live in the dream of illusion, to live in the abundance of attention. One stops dreaming reality to see it face to face without the artifice of one's mind. (pp. 197-198) [Author's Translation].

After liberation from inauthentic life, the light of the given overcomes any possible fixed symbolic representation, but we will always perceive phenomenal determinations and their shadows, even our own shadows, because ignorance persists even within such a life experience. The distinction between inauthentic life and liberation implies an uncanny horizon simultaneously understandable and fathomless: the *Terra Ignota*, manifesting symbolically the unified vision of the known and the unknown, a concept used in cartography to describe unmapped and undocumented regions, purportedly found in Ptolemy's *Geography* (c. 150 C.E.) and reintroduced in the 15 century during the so-called Age of Discovery.

Being fully attentive vanishes the past partial scope while *the paratopic force* describes the actualization of the real beyond the frame of perception and abstraction. Firstly, a neologism composed of two Greek roots *para* and *topos*, where *para* means proximity and cause like ‘from’, ‘because of’, ‘by’, ‘near’, for instance; and *topos* means place. The *paratopos* signifies the cause of the inessential ground of the given where no phenomenal distinctions are involved in the pure presence of reality. And secondly, *para* means in Sanskrit ‘Supreme’ and ‘Absolute’, from which the *Para Tattva* acquires its signification as the ‘Supreme Truth’ given that *Tattva* describes the ‘that-ness’ of phenomena composed by *tat* (translated as ‘that’) and *tva* (a suffix used to express

'ness'). Hence, the parareal vision of the given is implied by the recognition of the whole dimensions of reality in the unified vision of the *Terra Ignota*, which is transformed beyond every particular perspective by the paratopic force. These concepts reveal the complexity of phenomenal interactions by expressing the ineffable: *the self-conscious mask of the inessential ground of the given*.

The presence is an uncanny field of unfathomable dimensions that humans have masked, e.g. by fear of the unknown, such as the cause of human order based on the instinct of fear championed by Thomas Hobbes. Every type of order creates an horizon of meaning where it settles the realm of possibility for action and perception, but it would be radically different to disentangle the necessity of order from fear. The connection between a definition of human nature and its cultural consequences determines a particular organization, inhibiting its transformations when being based on fixed representations. This central problem of alienation is the hardest constriction for the self-conscious evolution of humanity: whenever two opposite sides battle among people defending a symbolic representation in the form of theory or an idea *X* over *Y* and vice versa, there is antagonism that without a frame of self-conscious action could end in a war justified by many reasons, from survival to security, which are partial images, even though the main problem of human beings is nowadays human beings themselves given that the need for resources for survival has been surpassed, e.g. the economic resources of the world could now eradicate hunger. This situation has unraveled that the reason for the unequal development of other communities has been based on a lack of empathy to other collectives, which is yet another partial idea.

The duality of representation places the theoretical problem at its limit when trying to convey the nonduality of the presence of life. At the beginning of human culture, symbolic representations help us to transform and understand the ecosystem by which the "exo-brain" developed the necessary adaptations in the world for human survival, but the current embodiment of symbols without self-conscious interaction has turned into a cage the symbolic devices for enhanced perception and action instead of taking this second nature as a point of departure in the continuous deployment of human freedom.

The aporia of a self-conscious revolution is finally to become the central expressed representation, but no revolution wants to fix its ideals in unchanged symbolic representations. There is rather a revitalization of life through the revolutionary recognition of the unified vision of reality: the ideal and practice of nondual mediations in human connection to the given under the nondual understanding of the unified realm of life. "There is understanding only when the mind is completely quiet, which means when there is no image" (Krishnamurti, 1973, p. 193). In this sense, Stilinović attempted to dissolve the necessity of symbolic representations to transform reality through art just as Malevich pursued. Both Russian artists were mentioned by Groys (2014) for their position against authority.

A political authority guarantees the stability of certain modes of speech, forms of behavior, images, and rituals. But these are all material objects and processes. And so the 'spiritual' ideological authority is not able to stabilize them, to guard them against the forces of entropy, against their dissolution in material flow, their fragmentation and recombination with other material elements of this flow. These are the forces that Stilinović stages in his works. [...] They all seem to drift, shift, slip, and stumble into new combinations, contexts, and situations. No effort. No revolt. Rather, they let things go, and they move and slide in different directions – beyond the control of a political or cultural authority. (p. 4)

Freedom is simple because it does not add anything to what already is, but it has endless features when self-consciously expressed. An artistic work, which really manifests uncanny fields, has the constitutive nature to polemicize against human order as a whole. An artistic expression should surpass the limits of understanding, since it outclasses past experience by a novel encounter with the unknown. At the same time, institutional power will always set an order regarding what it can symbolically order once manifested. This is one source of the original politicization of art by those who just want to play the game of institutional power and by the dialogic structure of power between inclusion and destruction, but real art becomes impure when projected by institutional power, even if an art expression is later subsumed by such power, it will mean that it can be restricted to one simple interpretation, which would be the proof of its weakness as an art work.

The ordination of art in a fixed symbolic frame means its end. In the worst case scenario, art would be the Trojan horse in the house of power given its irreducibility to a partial agency of reality. This is why the strategy of power has been to teach the institutional revolution of the order of visibility to frame the disruption of novelty. In contrast, the paratopic force destabilizes the structure of the visible, reconfiguring what is thinkable and possible by an ontological connection with the source of phenomena as the knowledge of the ātman.

Thus, God conforms to the limitations of its name and form produced by ignorance in the same way as the space conforms to the limitations imposed by a jug, a jar, and so on. Thus God's sovereignty, omniscience and omnipotence depend on the limitations produced by limitative conditions of ignorance. In absolute sense the distinctions between sovereign and subject or the notion of omnipotence cannot be applied to the *atman*, whose essential form is free of limitative conditions thanks to knowledge. (Pujol, 2015, pp. 232-233) [Author's translation].

Tarkovsky criticized the constriction of such an uncanny realm in *Stalker* with "the Zone", which is a prohibited place for humans where only a Stalker can bring selected people if the Zone accepts them. The Zone is the only colorful place in the film where things can suddenly change, events have not always an evident causal connection and whoever remains inside can end up being lost. The forbidden entrance to the Zone protects human lives and maybe the place itself from being corrupted. It is easily distinguishable that the Zone is full of vitality in comparison to the place where humans live, aesthetically composed of sepia colors. Maybe this place beyond our understanding is where our nature has its deep source, recalling something archaic and non-perishable as the sacred fire of Zoroaster.

The *Zapatista* movement has done the same recall from another standpoint: the enactment of reconfiguration of events when the uncanny field is not anymore a restricted area, but the whole composition of reality. This irruption of the meta-static essence of the given configures the world in manners that one could not normally grasp under fixed symbolic representations. The entire cultural expression is needed to conceive the unified vision of the *Terra Ignota*. The *Zapatista* masks are the self-conscious vision over such fathomless dynamics of the universe. “Única alma en medio de este mundo, es como fuego hundido en el océano. Habiendo conocido esto se va más allá de la muerte. No hay otro camino para ir” (De Palma, 2006, p. 155). [The only soul in the middle of this world, it is like fire sunk in the ocean. Having known this, one goes beyond death. There is no other way to go”. Author’s translation]. Who is then acting? The *paratopic force* that realizes the creative act of life above settled identities.

4. Conclusions or on the aporia of a self-conscious mask and the unified vision of reality

The coexistence of life and cultural diversity cannot be upheld for long periods of time under dual cosmovisions. When the phenomenal world has been masked by a dual model of reality with fixed symbolic identities and a misconception of the inessential nondual ground of the given, there is simply no place for life. This whole circumstance can be outlined in the famous statement by Thomas Hobbes: *Autoritas non veritas facit legem* (“[It is] authority and not truth [what] makes the law”). This leads to a world ruled by arbitrary powers based on dual cosmovisions that work for their preservation and profit over the active development of true knowledge in which the sustainment of life on Earth and the broadening of human agency could be deployed.

The objective of revolutionary movements from theoretical, artistic and political endeavors is not to settle fixed definitions about human interaction but to actualize human order, because these movements emerge only before fixed dual structures in order to claim their recognition, e.g. the partial definition of a human being can be contested by political, artistic and theoretical movements such as the *Zapatista* movement, the Zone in the film of Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* and the nondual model of reality in *Imago Orbis*. These events manifest the current dynamics towards the evolution of human self-consciousness, whose next step is the acknowledgment of the ineffable dynamics of the cosmos and the evolving transformation of life underlined in the Zone of Tarkovsky in *Stalker*: a place full of colors that changes unexpectedly beyond human imagination. No particular perspective can grasp the Zone due to its fathomless transformations. The *Zapatistas* are metaphorically a manifestation that comes from this forbidden zone of reality which has been neglected due to its irreducibility to the current human order based on a dual ontology.

A nondual model of reality yields a more accurate approximation to reality, which is defined by its extreme inclusion of diversity coming from known and unknown living things along with the sustainment of their ecosystem and the whole ecosphere of life: the extreme inclusion of diversity is based on the absolute interconnectedness of phenomenal interactions. It is a fact that the whole cosmos evolves beyond any settled definition, whose understanding is, however, fundamental for the reproduction of life and self-consciousness. Partial cognitive horizons will be discarded by the temporal dynamics of the universe given their obsolescence.

A representation of the inessential ground of the given and its unknown transformations can be achieved through the vision of the parareal that assembles the unified vision of reality and its forces of actualization with the awareness of its symbolic meaning. The aporia of the self-conscious mask consists in the paraconsistent status of expressing symbolically the ineffable through: e.g. the concepts of the *Terra Ignota* and the *paratopic force*, which are symbolic masks to unravel phenomena beyond partial images of human experience.

To every human being a secret has been consigned, and the life of each one is the mystery that puts this arcane element –which is not undone with time, but becomes ever more dense– onstage, until it is ultimately displayed for what it is: a pure gesture, and as such –to the extent that it manages to remain a mystery and not inscribe itself in the apparatus of means and ends– unjudgeable. (Agamben, 2018, p. 83)

This is the case of the *Zapatista* movement, which has unfolded a reality beyond the subjective experience of the current center of visibility. The self-conscious mask plays with the rules of the visible as it is grounded in a realm beyond its realm.

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