

## Marcos Forever

On 25 May, Subcomandante Marcos wrote an open letter to the world from “Zapatista reality” to announce the death of Marcos, a character invented as a media support and spokesperson for the Chiapas revolutionary project. “These words will be the last before I cease to exist.” The same communiqué informs us of the birth of Subcomandante “Galeano,” after comrade José Luis Solís Sánchez “Galeano,” assassinated by paramilitaries on 2 May. “One of our own must die so that Galeano can live. And so that Death, that impertinent one, will be satisfied, we give Death another name in place of Galeano’s, so that Galeano can live and so that death can carry away not a life but just a name, letters emptied of meaning, without any history or life of their own.” We know that José Luis Solís himself had borrowed his name from the author of *Open Veins of Latin America*. The Subcomandante, who always acted well ahead of the old *ególatras* [egotists] of French poststructuralism, put into practice, in the realm of political activity, the death of the author that Barthes announced in the space of the text.

Over the last few years, the Zapatistas have constructed the most creative alternative to neoliberalism’s necropolitical governing techniques, but also to Communism. The Zapatistas, unlike any other movement, are in the process of inventing a political methodology to “organize rage.” And to reinvent life.

Since 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (LNZ) conceived, via the character of Subcomandante Marcos, a new way of thinking of decolonial philosophy in the twenty-first century. By distancing itself from the treatise and the thesis (heirs of the ecclesiastical and colonial literary culture that began in the sixteenth century and fell into decline from the end of the last century), it acts from a techno-indigenous oral digital culture and travels through all the networks whispering rituals, letters, messages, stories and parables. Here is one of the central techniques for producing political subjectivity that the Zapatistas teach us: to de-privatize proper nouns by borrowing names, and to undo the individualist fiction of the face by wearing the balaclava.

Not so remote from the Subcomandante, I live in another political space where the same theatrical, shamanic forces are used to question the stability of the name and the truth of the face as the ultimate referents of personal identity: the transsexual, transgender, drag-king and drag-queen and non-binary cultures. Every trans person has (or had) two (or more) names. The one that was assigned to them at birth (their “deadname”) and with which the dominant culture tries to normalize them, and the name that marks the beginning of a process of dissident subjectivation.

Trans names do not only signify one’s adherence to a different gender: they describe above all a process of disidentification. Subcomandante Marcos (who learned more from the pen of the gay Mexican author Carlos Monsiváis than from the virile beard of Fidel) was actually a drag-king character: the intentional construction of a fictional masculinity (the hero and the voice of the rebel) via performative techniques. A revolutionary symbol without face or identity, made of collective words and dreams. The borrowed name, like the balaclava, is a parody, a mask that gestures towards the many

masks concealing the faces of political corruption and hegemony: “Why so much scandal around the balaclava? Is Mexican society ready to let the masks fall away?” Like the face with the help of the balaclava, the name is undone, and collectivized.

For the Zapatistas, the borrowed name and the balaclava function as second names, the drag wig, the mustache and high heels of trans culture: they are intentional hyperboles, signs of a political-sexual transvestitism, but they are also the queer-indigenous weapons allowing them to confront the neoliberal aesthetic. That cannot happen within the “real sex” or the “authentic” name, but through the construction of a *living fiction* that allows them to resist the norm.

The Zapatista, queer and trans experiments invite us to deprivatize the face and name in order to transform the body of the multitude into the collective agent of the revolution.

I allow myself, from this modest platform, to say to Subcomandante Galeano that from this day forward I will sign my trans name Beatriz Marcos Preciado, taking on the performative force of fiction that the Zapatistas have created, and creating it here from the old Europe that is disintegrating. Thus, Zapatista reality exists.

— Barcelona, 7 June 2014

## The Attractive Force of a Break-up

After years of talking, like Walter Benjamin, John Austin, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler, about the performativity of language, I am experiencing the “performative force” like a flame meeting skin.

Since my last article on the statistics of couples and break-ups, my life has become a performative effect. The day the column was published, I was unable to open the newspaper. As if addressed to us both, the headline read: “Israel-Hamas: Is This War?” The truce did not last in Gaza. Fighting started up again, the two camps rejected accusations of violating international law. She accuses me of exhibitionism, of wanting to display a relationship crisis on the public forum. Our friends—the same ones who told me that a love letter would make anyone come back—write to me to say that this time, maybe, I’ve gone too far. The column, translated into many languages by anonymous internet authors, travels to cyber monitors at the speed of 4G. Even though I am Faceless, on social networks, the comments kept coming: “It was about time,” “they had it coming.”

I am suffering from the performative force of my own speech acts. I am ashamed of loving. I am ashamed of not succeeding. I am ashamed of my writing. Ashamed of the congruence between life and writing. Ashamed of the distance, also, between life and writing. Confronted with language, I am vulnerable. I realized that our love affairs do not belong to us. I had uttered the word “break-up” like a superstitious spell to avert it, an umbrella to ward off the downpour.

I furtively hoped that our couple might be among the magnificent 12 per cent—the 12 per cent of people who manage to overcome a crisis. But once the word “break-up” was uttered, as in a journalistic shamanic ritual, the break-up took place.

Queer theory, a punk phrase invented by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990 (theory of the abnormal, knowledge of deviants, as if to say: a theory of madness created by the mad to denounce the horrors of the civilization of sanity), was the result not just of the feminist reading of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, but also of a “pragmatic turning point” in understanding the production of gender identities. In 1954, the linguist John Austin stated that there was a difference between constative and performative utterances. The former describe reality; the latter seek to transform it.

With performative utterances, language becomes action. Words say nothing, they do things. “It’s raining today” utters a fact; “I declare you husband and wife” produces effects in reality.

Derrida mistrusts Austin’s rational taxonomy and postulates that the success of a performative utterance does not depend on a transcendent power of language (a kind of divine voice declaring, “Let there be light!”), but rather from the simple repetition of a social ritual that, legitimized by power, hides its historicity. A theater where the words and characters are determined by convention.

Performative force is the result of the violent imposition of a norm that we prefer to call nature to avoid confronting the reorganization of the social relationships of power that any change in conventions would bring about. The debate around marriage for everyone was actually a war for control over performative power. “I declare you...” but who is declaring, and to enact what? Who has the power to decide to whom this terrifying performative utterance can be applied? What violence are we re-enacting when we say this?

Can this power be distributed in a different way, can this violence be limited?

Butler would go even further in her thinking about utterances on identity (gender identity, but also sexual and racial identity, “man,” “woman,” “homosexual,” “black,” etc.) as performative utterances that pass as constative, perlocutionary acts that pass as illocutionary, words that produce what they are supposed to describe, questions that take the form of scientific statements, or commands that are presented as ethnographic portrayals.

For the subaltern, speaking implies not simply resisting the violence of the hegemonic performative, but above all imagining dissident theaters where the production of a different performative force can be possible. Inventing a new scene of enunciation, as Jacques Rancière would say. Disidentifying oneself in order to reconstruct the subjectivity damaged by the dominant performative language. Is there something, a space, between the couple and its break-up? Is it possible to love beyond conventions? To love beyond the crisis, not as a couple? How can counter-rituals be created? By taking a chance on another performative utterance, who will we become?

— Barcelona, 30 August 2014

## The Courage To Be Yourself

Today you are granting me the privilege of talking about “my” courage to be me after making me bear the burden of exclusion and shame throughout my entire childhood.

When I received this invitation to speak of the courage to be me,<sup>6</sup> at first my ego purred as if it were being offered a full-page ad for which it would be both the product and the consumer. I saw myself already awarded a medal, a hero... then the memory of oppression attacked me and erased all complacency.

You are offering me this privilege the way you'd give a little drink to a sick person suffering from cirrhosis of the liver, while at the same time denying my basic rights, in the name of nature and nation, all the while confiscating my cells and organs for your crazed political control. You are granting me this courage the way you'd leave a few casino chips for a gambling addict, all the while continuing to refuse to call me by a masculine name, or to allow my name to bear the non-feminine form of adjectives, simply because I have neither necessary official documentation nor a beard.

You are gathering us here like a bunch of slaves who have been able to lengthen their chains, but who still remain more or less docile; who have obtained their diplomas and who agree to speak

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6. Beatriz Preciado wrote this text for a discussion on the courage to be oneself organized by the “Mode d’emploi” festival at Lyon.

the language of their masters. We are here, in front of you, all bodies assigned as women at birth, Catherine Millet, Cécile Guibert, Hélène Cixous, bitches, bisexuals, women with rough voices, Algerians, Jews, racialized women, masculine women, women of the South. But when will you get sick of sitting down facing our “courage” as if you were attending an entertainment? When will you get sick of making us other so that you can become yourselves?

You are granting me courage, I imagine, because I have spoken up for whores, for AIDS victims and for the crip, I have spoken in my books about my sexual practices with dildos and prostheses, I have talked about my relationship to testosterone. That is my whole world. That is my life and I have lived it without courage, but with enthusiasm and rejoicing. But you know nothing of my joy. You prefer to pity me and you still grant me courage because in our politico-sexual regime, in the reigning pharmacopornographic capitalism, to oppose the gender and sexual binary regime is the same as denying the incarnation of Christ in the Middle Ages. You are endowing me a great deal of courage because faced with genetic theorems and administrative papers, to deny the empirical existence of the gender binary today is comparable to spitting in the king’s face in the fifteenth century.

And you say to me: “Talk about the courage of being yourself,” just as the judges at the Inquisition said to Giordano Bruno for eight years: “Talk to us about heliocentrism, about the impossibility of the Holy Trinity,” all the while gathering the kindling to make a big fire. In fact, like Bruno, and even if I can already see the flames, I think that a little change of course will not be enough. That everything will have to be turned upside-down. Explode the semantic field and the pragmatic domain. Get out of the collective dream of the truth of sex, as we had to get out of the idea that the Sun rotated around



the Earth. To talk about sex, gender and sexuality, we have to begin with an act of epistemological rupture, a disavowal of category, a cracking of the conceptual vertebrae to allow for the premises of cognitive emancipation: we must completely abandon the language of sexual difference and sexual identity (even the language of strategic essentialism, as Spivak proposes, or nomadic subjectivity, as Rosi Braidotti proposes). Sex and sexuality now are not the essential property of the subject, but rather the product of various social, discursive technologies, political practices of controlling truth and life. The product of your courage. There are no sexes or sexualities but uses of the body acknowledged as natural or prohibited as deviant. And don't bother getting out your newly-minted transcendental card: maternity as essential difference. Maternity is just one possible use of the body, among others, it's not a guarantee of sexual difference, or of femininity.

So keep your courage for yourselves. For your marriages and your divorces, your infidelities and your lies, your families, your maternity, your children and grandchildren. Keep the courage you need to maintain the norm. The cold blood to lend your bodies to the constant process of regulated repetition. Courage, like violence and silence, like force and order, is on your side. On the contrary, I claim today the legendary lack of courage of Virginia Woolf and Klaus Mann, of Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, of Angela Davis and Fred Moten, of Kathy Acker and Annie Sprinkle, of June Jordan and Pedro Lemebel, of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Gregg Bordowitz, of Guillaume Dustan and Amelia Baggs, of Judith Butler and Dean Spade.

But since I love you, my courageous equals, I hope you will lack courage in turn. I hope you will no longer have the strength to reiterate the norm, no longer have the energy to fabricate identity,

to lose faith in what your identity documents say about you. And once you've lost all courage, weary with joy, I hope you will invent other and unknown uses of your body. Because I love you, I desire you to be weak and contemptible. Because fragility, and not courage, is what brings about revolution.

— Lyon, 22 November 2014

## I Would Like to Live

The memories of my last trip to California rise up with the intensity of fiction, as if they were from a novel by Kathy Acker. Their colors are brighter than the colors of Kassel's reality. The smell of the sea, the gleaming coats of the seals, the shouts of demonstrators in the streets... present themselves to my mind with the consistency that belongs only to that which comes from literary narration. In this novel, a certain Donald Trump had won the democratic elections in a country called the United States of America. He had promised to build a wall along the entire length of the Mexican border. He had increased the country's military budget by 54 billion dollars. He had declared that "torture was necessary to extract the truth from these fucking terrorists." He had publicly stated that "the most important thing in a woman was to have a nice little ass."

In this novel, to feel united in the face of what was happening, Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens organized a dinner for their friends, in their house in San Francisco. The dinner was a ritual during which each participant had been invited to give something, and to take something back. The Mexican-American artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña had written a poem which began, "I would like to live as if Donaldo Trompazo did not exist. I would like to live as if Donaldo Trompazo had not won the election. As if Donaldo Trompazo were not president today." No one managed to laugh, or to make the slightest comment. It was night, the silence of the living

room let you hear the birdsong outside as if someone had recorded it in high fidelity and were playing this track with the help of a prosthesis implanted directly into the Hersch cerebral convolutions, in areas 41 and 42 of the Brodmann map, on the primary auditory cortex. The birds sing and Guillermo's voice becomes a blade chiseling a sculpture composed of air and sound vibrations. "I would like to walk to Tijuana as if Donaldo Trompazo did not exist. I do not want to say his name, because I would like to live as if Donaldo Trompazo did not exist."

I don't know anymore if I'm dreaming, or if I'm remembering. The image of Guillermo's body appears before me, as if it were the Indigenous Virgin of the Border. The songs of the birds are confused with the shouts of children playing in a concrete park you can see from the windows of the Fridericianum. The work rhythm required by putting together and organizing the documenta 14 exhibition, the fact of staying in the museum for twenty-four hours, preparing artists' works... makes it harder for me to distinguish reality from fiction. My own life is crumbling away, as if it were a story I read long ago that I am now unable to remember precisely. A story in which I myself had another face, another voice, another name. Our shared story is crumbling away. Another is appearing, that someone could have written in 1933 or 1854 or 1804 or 1497. I haven't been back to Paris in months. All my things have remained in the last house I lived in. The woman who lives there still writes to me to say that she has just brought some things belonging to me down to the basement. She says, "It's terribly cold. I've seen again the things we lived with. We were so happy." And I reply, lying: "I remember every minute we spent together." But I don't remember anymore. I can only imagine.

Politics is a fictional text in a book which is our own body. Politics is a fictional text, but it's written with blood as ink, collectively. In

this fictional text, anything is possible: a wall separating the United States from Mexico; the complete closing of borders to anyone with a passport from Arabic-speaking countries; the privatization of public health; the criminalization of homosexuality and abortion; the condemnation to death of anyone with HIV; institutionalization of anyone physical or psychically different... History teaches us that the most absurd, most brutal thing has always been politically conceivable: it was possible in ancient Greece to build a democratic system (which we still admire today) that excluded women, children, slaves and foreigners; it was possible to exterminate the native populations of the Atlantic islands and the American continent; it was possible to construct the economic system of the plantation in which the white 15 per cent of the population subjected 85 per cent of the population captured in Africa to slavery; it was possible to settle in Algeria and call idiotic the population that was born there; it was possible to expel the Palestinians from their own homes; it was possible to say to women that if they did not give birth they did not exist; it was possible to build a wall in the middle of Berlin to divide the West from the East, the good from the bad; it was possible to convince people that sex is the work of the devil. I remember, or am I still imagining, Guillermo's voice, "I would like to live as if Marine Lapeine<sup>11</sup> did not exist."

— New York, 28 April 2017

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11. A reference to Marine Le Pen, currently head of the ultra-right Rassemblement National party in France, formerly known as the Front National. "La peine" can mean suffering or pain.