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Messianism, Teleology, and Futural Justice in Raúl Zurita's *Anteparaíso*

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Anteparadise was conceived as a total structure, a trajectory beginning with the experience of everything precarious and painful in our lives and concluding with a glimmer of happiness. I'll never write a *Paradise*, even if such a thing could be written today; but if it could, it would be a collective enterprise in which the life of everyone who walks the face of the earth would become the only work of art, the only epic, the only *Pietà* worthy of our admiration. I won't write it, but that is the outcome I desire.

—*Anteparadise*, Raúl Zurita (1984)¹

This epigraph, taken from Zurita's introductory note to the English translation of his second book of poetry (*Anteparaíso* in the Spanish original), emphasizes and at the same time calls into question the forward-looking and teleological thread that runs through the course of his poetic project. The

Chilean poet was a founding member of the neo-avant-garde group *CADA* (the *Colectivo de Acciones de Arte*) that intervened in the South American scene of writing in the mid-1970s and early 1980s by way of a series of public and poetic installations, which provocatively questioned the relationship between art and the praxis of life during General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–89). Zurita's own early poetry engaged a series of allegorical and biographical self-mutilatory gestures—he did in fact burn his own cheek with acid in 1975—and thereby explored the violence done to language and/as body writing under military rule. The trajectory of Zurita's poetic career spans four decades and culminated in 2000 when he was awarded the Chilean *Premio Nacional de Literatura*.

To return to the epigraph quoted above, Zurita's introductory comments are particularly suggestive given the way in which his poetry has been predominantly read. It has most often been considered via its allegorical relationship with violence under Pinochet's authoritarian regime, and has been framed by questions of religion, sacrifice, testimony, and corporality.² The ray of hope emanating from Zurita's poetic messianism and visionary ecstasy—which tends to align the sacrificial violence done to the poetic body with discourses of institutional violence under dictatorship—has shaped the dominant critical reaction to his writing.

The epigraph, however, appears to dispel the egocentric, self-messianistic visions that otherwise seem to characterize Zurita's work. Or at least, we could say, the epigraph disassociates the poet himself from the promise of a futural textual paradise, thereby responding in a productive way to criticism of the way in which poetic authors project themselves onto the lyrical voice. The critic Jorge Fondebrider, for example, sweepingly accuses the Chilean poetic tradition as a whole of fundamentally “confusing the figure of the poet with poetry itself” (Masiello 2001, 301). On one hand, the epigraph's conception of futurity effectively distances Zurita, on a larger thematic level, from the more strict conceptualization of religious transcendence suggested by his evocation of Dante's *Divine Comedy* cycle and the temporal realization of Paradise. But at the same time, the epigraph's focus on the collective “writing” of the work that would entail Paradise marks a series of interesting movements in *Anteparadise's* particular textual economy. *Anteparadise's* resistance to the

possibility of an empirically futural Paradise ends up reconfiguring the temporality of Paradise as a construct more ethically “worthy of its name”—more ethical, that is, than any project for the actual achievement of the collective “perpetual peace” to which Zurita ostensibly refers.

My essay thus takes a different path in following the reinscription of hope for the redemption of Chile’s wounded body in *Anteparadise*—which is where the predominant critical reading of Zurita’s poetry locates its point of departure. In its suggestion of the interrupted teleology of justice, Zurita’s *Anteparadise* engages a very Kantian system in such a way as to hold itself back from the “end” that it “thinks” it is proposing. By interrogating *Anteparadise*’s specific teleological workings *vis à vis* a reading of Immanuel Kant’s political writings and the *Critique of Judgment*, my article suggests that *Anteparadise* configures the coming of the messianistic other as a deferred messianistic future. At the same time, my reading is informed by Jacques Derrida’s writings on the horizon-less “to-come” “structure” that describes the ghostly futurity of justice and democracy, as elaborated in recent books such as *Specters of Marx* and *Rogues*, among others.

Turning to the particular visionary textuality of *Anteparadise*, we can see how Zurita’s exploration of the beaches, skies, seas, and mountains of Chile assumes the very form of the physical shapes evoked—in a way that recalls Pablo Neruda’s monumental vision of the Latin American landscape in *Canto General* (1950).³ With each section of the text zooming in to almost a microscopic view of geographic, geopolitical, and biopolitical features, it is significant that this forward-looking, visionary work should begin with images of the sky-writing installation “La vida nueva” (“The New Life,” 1982). Zurita describes this project as

a homage to minority groups throughout the world and, more specifically, to the Spanish-speaking people of the United States. This poem is the conclusion of the *Anteparadise*. When I first designed this project, I thought the sky was precisely the place toward which the eyes of all communities have been directed, because they have hoped to find in it the signs of their destinies; therefore, the greatest ambition one could aspire to would be to have that same sky as a page where anyone could write. (1984)

The particular futurity of Zurita's multiple comments about "La vida nueva" and *Anteparadise* will frame our readings of the necessarily postponed "paradise-to-come" that Zurita's text engages—even at the risk of falling into the kind of reductionist/intentional fallacy argument that Fondebrider discusses. There is a striking insistence on naming divine attributes in "La vida nueva"—in fact, the first fourteen "lines" of the sky-written poem begin with "MI DIOS ES":

MI DIOS ES HAMBRE	MI DIOS ES CANCER
MI DIOS ES NIEVE	MI DIOS ES VACIO
MI DIOS ES NO	MI DIOS ES HERIDA
MI DIOS ES DESENGAÑO	MI DIOS ES GHETTO
MI DIOS ES CARROÑA	MI DIOS ES DOLOR
MI DIOS ES PARAISO	MI DIOS ES
MI DIOS ES PAMPA	MI AMOR DE DIOS
MI DIOS ES CHICANO (Zurita 1997, 9)	

MY GOD IS HUNGER	MY GOD IS CANCER
MY GOD IS SNOW	MY GOD IS EMPTINESS
MY GOD IS NO	MY GOD IS WOUND
MY GOD IS DISILLUSIONMENT	MY GOD IS GHETTO
MY GOD IS CARRION	MY GOD IS PAIN
MY GOD IS PARADISE	MY GOD IS
MY GOD IS PAMPA	MY LOVE OF GOD
MY GOD IS CHICANO (Zurita 1984, 1)	

Each of these lines was traced out in the sky-space, and photos of the first three sky-written lines immediately follow the typed text of "La vida nueva" in *Anteparadise*.⁴ This poem's lines seem to resist the temporal dissolve of the sky-writing medium, since the invocation of "MI DIOS" persists in the sky due to its frequency; it is as if the divine power of the Word possesses a special resistance to disappearance. Cast in terms of nouns whose connotations are predominantly negative, Zurita's exploration of the relationship between the human and the divine in "La vida nueva" is underscored by the intimate

nature of the lyrical invocation of “MI DIOS,” followed by a specific attribute of God that modifies “his” God. The dissemination of these installation photos throughout the text of *Anteparadise* also continually (and figurally) forces the reader to look upward toward the firmament by deterritorializing the circulation of writing. Zurita thus appropriates the sky as democratic reading-space and plays with the supposed permanence of the written word via the rapid dissipation of the celestial letters.

Following the text and photos of the first three “lines” from the June 1982 sky-written “La vida nueva,” *Anteparadise* is divided up into several sections: it begins with a section of poetry titled “Las utopías,” containing a series of poems about Chilean beaches construed as utopia; then moves through “La marcha de las cordilleras” (“The March of the Cordilleras”); “Pastoral”; “Esplendor en el viento” (“Splendor in the Wind”) containing “Tres escenas sudamericanas” (“Three South American Scenes”), which discuss Zurita’s self-mutilatory blindness, as well as several other poems; and finally culminates in a poetic afterword. While *Anteparadise* narrates a journey that retraces the sacrificial scars marking the Chilean landscape, it simultaneously dislocates the poetic space from its physical “grounding” by beginning with “Las utopías,” which nominally points to “no places” (from the Greek *u-topos*) in particular. The promise of a “brighter” future is announced immediately in the first poem of this section, titled “Zurita”:

*Como en un sueño, cuando todo estaba perdido
Zurita me dijo que iba a amainar
porque en lo más profundo de la noche
había visto una estrella. Entonces
acurrucado contra el fondo de tablas del bote
me pareció que la luz nuevamente
iluminaba mis apagados ojos.
Eso bastó. Sentí que el sopor me invadía (1997, 13)*

*As in a dream, when all was lost Zurita told me
It was going to clear
because in the depths of night*

*he had seen a star. Then
 huddled against the boat's planked deck
 it seemed that the light again
 lit my lifeless eyes.
 That's all it took. I was invaded by sleep (1984, 5)*

The clearing described here opens up a visionary, illuminated space in the face of loss, which points to the themes of resurrection, recuperation, salvation, and messianism that typically structure most critical readings of Zurita's poetry. But to take a closer look at the *disaster* that plays out in the celestial and terrestrial trappings of these poems—drawing together the ruin of the image and the etymological and metaphorical separation from the stars put forth as *des-astre*—the call emanating from this reading-event may not be so neatly packaged and put aside in the move toward Paradise, Utopia, or Redemption.⁵

This notion of the disaster as untimely and fundamentally ruinous spreads through the series of poems located on the sandy shores of Chile's beaches, finding its way into the wounds, tears, calvaries, abysses, baptisms that appear to give way to future hope in the trajectory toward one of the final poems in the section—which in fact shares a title with the larger section heading, “Las utopías.” The poems contained in “Las utopías” simultaneously affirm and displace some sort of cognitive recognition of an event or location: “No eran esos los chilenos destinos que / lloraron” or “No eran esas playas que encontraron sino más bien el clarear / del cielo frente a sus ojos” (“Las playas de Chile I,” 1997, 14) [Those weren't the Chilean fates they / wept or Those weren't the beaches they found by but the clearing / of the sky . . . before his eyes (“The Beaches of Chile I,” 1984, 7)]. At the same time, they collapse or compress the sky- and beach-spaces into an almost undifferentiated, forward-looking temporality that nevertheless delimits a future characterized by a notion of justice that, as we will see, doesn't quite “arrive” in the way that *Anteparadise's* messianistic tone might suggest.

In “Las playas de Chile V,” the Biblical vision of transgression is evidenced by a Sodom and Gomorrah-like total complicity of the Chilean people in an unnamed wrongdoing:

*Chile no encontró un solo justo en
sus playas apedreados nadie pudo
lavarse las manos de estas heridas (1997, 19)*

*Chile did not find a single just person on
its beaches battered no one could
cleanse his hands of these wounds (1984, 15)⁶*

Situating the indelible, collective guilt of “la patria” as inextricably linked to the terrain of the rocky beach (evoking a punishment by stoning), the guilt of all *chilenos*—“Porque apedreados nadie encontró un solo justo en esas playas / sino las heridas maculadas de la patria” (Because battered nobody found on those beaches a single just person / but the country’s tainted wounds)—is underscored by violent and erotic images of the body turning on itself:

- I. *Aferrado a las cuadernas se vio besándose a sí mismo*
 - II. *Nunca nadie escuchó ruego más ardiente que el de sus labios estrujándose contra sus brazos*
 - III. *Nunca alguien vio abismos más profundos que las marcas de sus propios dientes en los brazos convulso como si quisiera devorarse a sí mismo en esa desesperada*
(1997, 19)
- I. *He was seen clutching the timbers kissing himself*
 - II. *No one ever heard a plea more ardent than that of his lips pressed against his arms*
 - III. *No one ever saw abysses deeper than the marks of his own teeth on his arms convulsed as if in his despair he wanted to devour himself (1984, 15)*

The abyssal wounds opened up by the contact between teeth and arm mark the site of shifting configurations of self, other, ethics, and justice in this poem. Floating, ghostly specters haunt the beaches—“como si en este mundo no hubiera nadie que los pudiera / revivir ante sus ojos” (“as if there were no one in the world who could revive / them before his eyes”)—dying an undead

death hinging on a crucial *as if* (“como si”) that would foreclose on the possibility of resurrection. Calling into question the futural possibility of bringing the dead back to life—which ostensibly refers to Judgment Day’s apocalyptic revival of the dead—this curious play links potentiality with what appears to be the *impossibility* of recuperation or redemption. It releases a series of transformations and substitutions that seem to give rise to justice, or at least to “a just person”:

IV. *Pero sus heridas podrían ser el justo de las playas de Chile*

V. *Nosotros seríamos entonces la playa que les alzó un justo desde sus heridas*

VI. *Sólo allí todos los habitantes de Chile se habrían hecho uno hasta ser ellos el justo que golpearon tumefactos esperándose en la playa* (1997, 19–20)

IV. *But the wounds could be the just person of the beaches of Chile*

V. *We would then be the beach that raised them a just person from those wounds*

VI. *There alone all Chile’s inhabitants would have coupled until they became the just person they beat swollen awaited on the shore* (1984, 15)

The emergence of this prophesied “justo” through some sort of transubstantiation of wound into righteousness continues to be framed as a conditional possibility through the use of the conditional grammatical tense (“podrían ser,” “seríamos,” “se habrían hecho”) that does not definitively temporally situate this series of metamorphoses. These temporal dislocations at play in Zurita’s poem evince a guiding thread of conditionality through curious “as if” clauses that have a ghostly relationship to teleology. Further examination of this strongly Kantian guiding thread—which draws on the kinds of political and teleological thinking that Kant elaborates in his so-called “political writings” as well as in the *Critique of Judgment*—shows how this “untimely” passage uniquely reformulates the futurity of justice.⁷

My reading of the equivocal messianism that runs through *Anteparaiso*’s curious teleological structure depends in large part on Kant’s use of the term *Leitfaden*, which roughly translates as “guiding thread.”⁸ The particular textuality of this guiding thread, I think, is indicative of a principle of reflective judgment that takes its guiding principle from itself, and therefore

has interesting consequences for hermeneutical or allegorical readings that would cast “the end of reading” (the goal of reading) as “the end of reading” (to stop reading). From an analogical standpoint, the special privileges that I am according to the “como si” in this passage mark a similar move in Zurita’s poem that allows the process of “judgment” to move forward but not arrive at a final purpose. This plays out in a very Kantian way, at least according to the kinds of formulations about teleology that Kant outlines in his political writings and in the second part of the *Critique of Judgment*. On the one hand, I am not explicitly concerned at this point with a detailed elaboration of the development of Kant’s notion of judgment as a bridge between pure and practical reason (which would find its origin in humankind’s judgments of the beautiful and the sublime in nature in the first part of the third *Critique*). At the same time, some specific philosophical maneuvering will be required to navigate the locus “where reason is seduced to poetic raving,” to use Kant’s suggestion in the *Critique of Judgment* (295). With this in mind, reading “through” the ghostly futurity of justice in Zurita’s *Anteparadise* (and especially in “Las playas de Chile V”) is a productive approach to Kant’s views on teleology and a deferred future. And an interesting consequence of this particular reading is that the untimely future (de)constructed in, or by, Zurita’s text might be better accounted for by a multifarious “structure” that Derrida has described as “justice-to-come,” as we will see.

For Kant, the guiding principle at play in the third *Critique* allows one to judge nature “as if” it were organized by a supreme legislative being, “as if” it were made to be judged—without which it would be impossible to form a coherent experience, and humankind would thus be left with the despair of a formless, orderless existence. This principle thus permits several extrapolations pertaining to the political organization of societies, morality, and the notion of justice, which are laid out in detail in Kant’s “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” and “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (1999b, 1999c). The importance of the guiding thread can be understood in terms of the Copernican revolution that turned philosophy’s primary attention away from the noumenal (the “things-in-themselves”) to the phenomenal (the thing’s “givenness”), a discussion of the development of reason (in a historical mode as Enlightenment), as well as the ordered principles of

societies (the state of nature vs. civilization discourse so prominent in the eighteenth century).

We might first examine Kant's formulations in terms of the way in which this principle of reflective judgment bears on the particular temporal hinge of the "as if" in Zurita's *Anteparadiso*. In this manner, we are able to turn from these quasi-teleological moves toward a Kantian view of justice "needing" to hold itself back—in a way that very much resembles the effort in "Las playas de Chile V" to defer the realization of Utopia. This suggestion that justice "needs" to hold itself back in Zurita's text, lest this utopian vision result in grave, apocalyptic consequences, is elaborated in the specific textual and teleological economy of *Anteparadiso*. Let us return for a moment to the passage in question:

*Porque apedreado Chile no encontró un solo justo en
sus playas sino las sombras de ellos mismos flotantes
sobre el aire de muerte como si en este mundo no
hubiera nadie que los pudiera revivir ante estos ojos* (1997, 19)

*For battered Chile did not find a single just person on its
beaches but the shadows of themselves floating in the air like
wraiths as if there were no one in the world who could revive
them before his eyes* (1984, 15)

While these phantasmagoric shadows of the *pueblo chileno* might not contain among them the remains of even one just person, the articulation of the "como si" makes it uncertain if in fact there does exist someone capable of carrying out redemption and resurrection, as the last two lines would suggest. Dislocating the temporal situation of this uncertain Savior, what this stanza suggests is an equivocal reading of the possibility of salvation in a book that should ostensibly mark a passage or prequel to Paradise. *Anteparadiso*'s deferral of Paradise does not follow a mechanical causality that would imply the empirically future arrival of this Redeemer, but rather finds a "self-interrupting" teleological trajectory whose final "end" must necessarily not be the "end" or completion of a dialectical process. In this way,

the Utopia announced by the arrival of the prophesied “justo” can only be accompanied by the specters and ghosts proper to the apocalyptic destruction of the human race: “las sombras de ellos mismos flotantes / sobre el aire de muerte como si en este mundo no / hubiera nadie que los pudiera revivir ante estos ojos” (1997, 19) [“the shadows of themselves floating in the air like / wraiths as if there were no one in the world who could revive / them before his eyes” (1984, 15)].

This opposition between the mechanical and the teleological is made apparent in the series of physical transformations detailed toward the end of “Las playas de Chile V.” Presented in axiomatic or list form, this poem seems to bring forth the just person from collective wounds, while the *chilenos* (as the shores of the stony beach) raise the just person from these wounds, and witness the eventual righteousness of the *pueblo* who becomes the long-awaited Redeemer:

IV. *Pero sus heridas podrían ser el justo de las playas de Chile*

V. *Nosotros seríamos entonces la playa que les alzó un justo desde sus heridas*

VI. *Sólo allí todos los habitantes de Chile se habrían hecho uno hasta ser ellos el justo que golpearon tumefactos esperándose en la playa* (1997, 19–20)

IV. *But the wounds could be the just person of the beaches of Chile*

V. *We would then be the beach that raised them a just person from those wounds*

VI. *There alone all Chile's inhabitants would have coupled until they became the just person they beat swollen awaited on the shore* (1984, 15)

Yet at the same time, the way in which these metamorphoses are so intricately folded on themselves on the liminal border of the beach seems to warn of a danger inherent to a notion of mechanical causality in the advent of the Messiah/Savior figure—opposing the apparent sequential nature of these events of transubstantiation to Kant's notion of teleology in the third *Critique*.⁹ And while the prefigured emergence of this long-awaited, messianistic figure in *Anteparadise* at first appears to follow mechanical laws—as evidenced by the rapid transformation of wound into Savior, *chilenos* into beach that raised a just person, etc.—the book's teleological foundation also

depends on the deferral proper to the interruption of the “as if” (“como si”) that puts time so radically “out of joint.”¹⁰ The untimely nature of the coming of justice, one might argue, is not necessarily a bad thing, given the historical context of dictatorship and repression that overtly dialogues with Zurita’s poetic production. This might at first appear to contradict my insistence on the interruption of the odd teleological structure of the coming of the Messiah. But what Kant’s take on the teleological formulation of reflective judgment tells us about the coming of this chosen “justo” is that His coming must always already be futural and deferred, lest we realize the “perpetual peace” that would be the total annihilation of the human race. The implications of these formulations for Zurita’s text are profound, especially when one considers that the nonteleological view of Utopia troubles this text’s temporal placement “before Paradise” (*Anteparadise*). It is almost as if, *vis-à-vis* these Kantian moves, there can be *no* writing after *Anteparadise*’s necessarily failed or flawed targeting of Paradise.

Let us turn, for a moment, to this insistence on deferral and futurity, since a detailed excursus on Kant’s writings on judgment and politics will clarify this particular need to interrupt the teleological process in its purported move toward salvation and Utopia. This curious formulation finds its origin in the search for a peace “worthy of its name,” which, according to Kant’s highly studied “Perpetual Peace” essay (1999c) on the state of nature and the constitution of civil society, would not be merely a cessation or suspension of hostilities. Kant begins his text with an anecdote about a Dutch innkeeper’s signboard that named his residence “The Perpetual Peace” alongside a picture of a graveyard. He is deeply troubled by the pessimism proper to this notion of peace as requiring the annihilation of the human race. To describe the way in which perpetual peace must continually defer itself in the service of the preservation of the human race, Kant’s essay initially calls into question the analogical move that links the genesis of the state and the formation of an international federation. Where for Kantian individuals unite at a higher level to leave the violence of the state of nature, the individual states do not *quite* do the same to form a larger international unit, since the internal organization of each state is not the same as the lawlessness of the state of nature. Since there is still a need for

a quasi-hegemonic setup (with superior and inferior parties), it is possible to extend the trajectory of Kant's argument to see how this is in fact the *worst* possible outcome—even worse than the state of nature—because the expansionist nature of the anarchical state (that desires to take over the world) overturns the possibility of peace as something more than just a suspension of hostilities (Kant 1999c, 113). The following questions thus remain in the context of reading Kant: Is perpetual peace necessarily the graveyard to which he alludes in the first paragraph of the “Perpetual Peace” essay, with his suggestion that peace might require the total destruction of humanity? Or does the logic of teleology—as we've been proposing—require a series of interruptions or a holding back in the move toward an end, rather than an asymptotic approach to and arrival at an Idea of justice? These are issues that haunt *Anteparadise's* problematic messianicity, in such a way as to have productive consequences for the legibility of the futural visions that predominate in Zurita's book.

These questions find a response in Kant's “Idea for a Universal History,” in which he describes how the development of humankind's still “immature” faculty of reason seems to follow

a regular course in leading our species gradually upwards from the lower level of animality to the highest level of humanity through forcing man to employ an art which is nonetheless his own, and hence that nature develops man's original capacities by a perfectly regular process within this apparently disorderly arrangement. (1999b, 48)

Whether or not Nature is purposive in its nurturing of these rational capabilities—since the savage violence of the state of nature “yielded” to the creation of states governed by civil constitutions (however imperfect)—the necessary push for humanity's natural capacities to develop demonstrates, for Kant, the “beneficial effects” (1999b, 49) of the evils of war, armaments, and violence. This kind of protodialectical reasoning posits a “negative” element that in turn stimulates the development of reason, thus bringing out the importance of teleological thinking in Kant's philosophy. Yet the immaturity of man's moral reason is highlighted by the inachievedness of this

cosmopolitan ideal: whereas Kant esteems humanity to be “*cultivated* to a high degree by art and science . . . [and] *civilised* to the point of excess in all kinds of social courtesies and proprieties” (1999b, 49), moral maturity remains in the future, with merely the *idea* of morality existing in society. He in fact predicts that “the human race will no doubt remain in this condition until it has worked itself out of the chaotic state of its political relations in the way I have described” (1999b, 49).¹¹

In terms of this specific temporal formulation, the futural dimension of this statement of moral (im)maturity points to somewhat of a strange structure in Kant’s work: although the above statement appears to describe an empirical horizon of “maturity” (able to be localized in time and space as Enlightenment¹²), it is possible that the remark is indicative of a curious, disruptive movement that is further developed in his “Perpetual Peace” essay (1999c) and the “Critique of Teleological Judgment” in the third *Critique* (1987). The moment of the full realization of morality is one that, at least in the context of Kant’s writings, can and *must never* arrive, much like the metaphorization of the outcome of perpetual peace in the haunting, graveyard imagery.¹³ Where Kant casts this logic of interruption, the resulting chimeras show reason’s necessary possibility of going beyond its own limits and seeing the horizon “where reason is seduced to poetic raving” (1987, 295). This suspended state of futurity is what actually sustains Kant’s entire teleological system—that is, the condition of possibility for teleology in general in Kant is the guaranteed potential of its failure, or at least its radical interruption before arriving at the “end” of the “end.”¹⁴ This trajectory “toward” a purpose or end doesn’t seem to be adequately described even by a notion of an interrupted dialectic; rather it is necessarily always already interrupted (or threatened with interruption) at *all* possible points in time and space.

The guiding thread elaborated in this admittedly lengthy discussion of Kant’s quasi-teleological system very much bears on the way in which Zurita’s messianistic visions in *Anteparadise*—and more specifically in “Las playas de Chile V”—“needs” to postpone the arrival of Redeemer and Paradise to preserve the possibility of justice. If in fact the teleological structure drawing Chile’s destiny toward the emergence of a singular “justo” from the collective, wounded national body were to “wash its hands” of “las heridas

abiertas de mi patria” (Zurita 1997, 20) [my country’s open wounds (1984, 15)], then the way in which “todos los habitantes de Chile se habrían hecho uno” [all Chile’s inhabitants would have / become one¹⁵] would trigger an irresponsible *erasure* of the ethical call from this literary work. This erasure would arise if the text were to dissolve and even annihilate the singularity of the event of witnessing (by “washing one’s hands of it”), thereby calling into question the relationship between the one (or One) and the many. At the same time, the categorical *Aufhebung* (sublation or overcoming) signaled by this suggestion of the realization of Paradise’s perpetual peace could only mark the *collapse* of the entire teleological system that originally “promised” the advent of utopia through the arrival of the messiah. In this way, the collective work to which Zurita refers in the Introductory Note to *Anteparadise* (1984) is seen to open a futural Paradise (not a *Paradise*) that would consider poetry to be a figure or analogy for the workings of a Paradise that—at least in terms of Kant’s teleological system—can and *ought* never be realized.

As we’ve seen in several different Kantian formulations, this quasi-teleological move differs from an asymptotic approach to a regulative Idea insofar as the necessary possibility of failure haunts the *impossible* realization of its end. If the “end of the end” should constitute the worst possible outcome (as the annihilation of the human race), then the kind of conditions of (im)possibility argument at which we’ve arrived might be better described by a series of “relationships” that play out in the work of Jacques Derrida, in a way that engages the issues of justice, messianism, and eschatology that we’ve been discussing in both Kant and Zurita. The temporal hinge upon which this question rests in Zurita’s text is a function of the differential and deferred arrival of the “just one,” encompassing a kind of difference (*différance*) that Derrida describes as absolutely and temporally *other* (1982). The trace “structure” to which I’m referring here is part and parcel of a nonempirical, horizon-less temporality that, in the context of “Las playas de Chile V,” looks like the prefiguration of a messianism *without* messianicity (Derrida 2002a). This Blanchot-like formulation speaks to the singular event of the advent of justice in the other’s unanticipated arrival, much like the uncertain emergence of a possible “justo”

“[que] los pudiera revivir” (1997, 19) [who could revive them (1984, 15)] in Zurita’s text. Furthermore, Derrida’s theorization of the messianic is open to an interruption in history by a nonprophesied other with “no horizon of expectation (regulative or messianic) . . . having perhaps an *avenir*, precisely [*justement*], a ‘to-come’ [*à-venir*] that one will have to [*qu’il faudra*] rigorously distinguish from the future” (2002b, 257). The attempt to think an empirically futural notion of an *arrivant* thus erases the radical temporal disjunction that would keep open the possibility of justice, losing “the openness, the coming of the other (who comes), without which there is no justice” and demonstrating the way in which the irreducibly futural justice-to-come “opens up to the *avenir* the transformation, the recasting or refounding [*la refondation*] of law and politics” (2002b, 257).

Admittedly, the relevance of these particular formulations of futurity and justice to Zurita’s poetry in general is made more difficult due to *Anteparadise*’s obvious visionary character—Derrida in fact suggests that “[w]henver a *telos* or teleology comes to orient, order, and make possible a historicity, it annuls that historicity by the same token and neutralizes the unforeseeable and incalculable irruption, the singular and exceptional alterity of *what* [*ce qui*] comes, or indeed of *who* [*qui*] comes, that without which, or the one without whom, nothing happens or arrives” (2005, 28). But does the radical character of *Anteparadise*’s irruption from within the structure of history (thus problematizing the realization of futural textual utopia in this text) go so far as to reconfigure the temporality of messianism and Paradise in poems like “Las playas de Chile V”? Does *Anteparadise*’s apparent prophetic horizon end up annulling the possibility of a decision that would give rise to the justice that in fact *comes*—or can the “interrupted” teleological system we’ve highlighted in Kant’s writings on politics and judgment be read as a way around the issue of the other’s horizon of expectation?

I think that a close reading of the equivocal, dissolving Utopias that populate later poems in *Anteparadise*’s “Las playas de Chile” cycle will provide a response, of sorts, to these difficult questions. To return to the textual economy of Zurita’s poetry, what appears to be a specific trajectory toward the infinity of Paradise in “Las playas de Chile VII” brings to the forefront the question of the collective in the poem’s multiple configurations of utopia:

*Muchos podrían haberlo llamado Utopía
 porque sus habitantes viven solamente
 de lo que comparten, de los trabajos
 en las faenas de la pesca y del trueque.
 Ellos habitan en cabañas de tablas a las
 orillas del mar y más que con hombres
 se relacionan con sus ánimas y santos que
 guardan para calmar la furia de las olas.
 Nadie habla, pero en esos días en que la
 tormenta rompe, el silencio de sus caras
 se hace más intenso que el ruido del mar
 y no necesitan rezar en voz alta
 porque es el universo entero su Santuario (1997, 24)*

*Many would have called it Utopia
 because its inhabitants live only
 by sharing, by their fishing labors
 and by bartering.
 They dwell in wood shacks by the
 seaside and more than to men they
 relate to the spirits and saints
 they keep to calm the fury of the waves.
 No one speaks, but on those days when
 the storm is unleashed, the silence
 on their faces becomes more intense
 than the sound of the sea and they
 need not pray aloud
 because the entire universe is their cathedral (1984, 21)*

Humankind's rustic existence in this Utopia would, to a certain degree, imply the radical dissolution of intersubjectivity. Interacting solely in the supersensible realm with spirits and saints, the intense, oppressive silence hardly puts us in the context of something like a Habermasian "ideal speech situation" in which no utterance is possible. And if the linking of phrases is

reduced to silent prayer in the face of an ominous, violent storm, then the promise of this “nuevo Chile” echoed throughout the book starts to sound like at least as much of a threat as the “old” Chile. Martin Hägglund discusses a similar structure in the context of the “ends” of violence in Derrida’s work, in which Derrida describes the necessary and fundamental convergence of absolute peace and absolute violence:

In a state of being where all violent change is precluded, nothing can ever happen. Absolute peace is thus inseparable from absolute violence, as Derrida argued already in “Violence and metaphysics.” Anything that would finally put an end to violence (whether the end is a religious salvation, a universal justice, a harmonious intersubjectivity or some other ideal) would end the possibility of life in general. The idea of absolute peace is the idea of eliminating the undecidable future that is the condition for anything to happen. Thus, the idea of absolute peace is the idea of absolute violence. (Hägglund 2004, 49)

This conflation of the “end” of violence and absolute violence is also quite prominent in “Las Playas de Chile X.” In this poem, we see a strong emphasis on the blinding evanescence emanating from this new, quasi-eschatological landscape in which the best account of futural vision actually comes from the *dissolve* of these utopian images:

*Porque la playa nunca se espejearía en sus ojos sino
mejor en el derramarse de todas las utopías como un
llanto incontenible que se le fuera desprendiendo del
pecho hirviente desgarrado despejando la costa que
Chile entero le vio adorarse en la iluminada de estos
sueños (1997, 29)*

*For the beach could never be better mirrored in his eyes than
in the spilling of all the utopias like an uncontrollable sob
seething rending heaved from his breast clearing the*

*coast that all Chile saw him adore in the illumination of
these dreams (1984, 27)*

If the optimal visionary outcome is construed here in terms of the dissolution of all utopias, then the uncontrollable sorrow and pain that accompanies the retreat of “un nuevo mundo que les fuera adhiriendo otra luz en sus / pupilas empañadas erráticas alzándoles de frente el horizonte / que les arrasó de lágrimas la cara” (1997, 28) [a new world fixing another light / to his pupils blurred erratic raising before them the / horizon that covered his face with tears (1984, 27)] shows the necessary possibility of failure built into the move toward a Utopia that would be the destruction of all possible utopias and of the relationality of human beings. The thought of erasing the call of the Other that lines up with the address to “Usted” (“You,” in the formal sense) in “Las playas consteladas” casts the heralded divine figure (as undifferentiated God/Messiah) as the Utopia:

*Donde ciegos cada vida palpó a tientas otra vida
hasta que ya no quedasen vidas sino sólo el vacío
esplendiéndoles la Utopía de entre los muertos
descarnados tocándose como el aire ante nosotros (1997, 31)*

*Where blind each life groped for another life until
there were no longer lives but only the void beaming
the Utopia from among the dead gaunt touching
each other like the air before us (1984, 31)*

In the presence of these shifting temporal and spatial designations of Utopia(s), the beaches are *and* are not the Utopia(s) constantly in flight—and as a result speak to a joy in which

*... ni yo ni Usted podríamos
decir si se nos había ido el alma entre
esos muertos desde donde emergiendo todo Chile*

*palpó las Utopías como si ellas mismas fueran las
playas de nuestra vida transfiguradas albísimas
encumbrándonos la patria en la elevada dichosa de este
vuelo* (1997, 31; my emphasis)

*. . . neither you nor I could
tell if our souls had gone off among the dead whence all
Chile emerged groping for the Utopias as if they themselves
were the beaches transfigured pure white of our
lives exalting our country in the lofty joy of this
flight* (1984, 31; my emphasis)

The difficulty in distinguishing between life and death rearticulates the conditional hinge that transfigures, sublimates, and interrupts the tension between redemption and total annihilation in this poem. Yet even in the context of the images of rebirth that are so prominent toward the conclusion of the “Playas” cycle (including play with the obvious symbolism of the color green in “Las playas de Chile XIV”), what appears to be a simultaneous realization *and* holding back of the arrival of Utopia(s)/Messiah/Perpetual Peace is always already determined by this haunting teleological progression. And, in fact, these equivocations or interruptions built into *Anteparadiso*'s teleological system are what preserve the futural decidability necessary to the coming of justice, as Derrida rightly suggests in his discussions of the need to preserve the uncertainty or undecidability of the “to-come” that *comes*.

When “Las utopías”—the next-to-last poem in the section with the same title—does in fact “arrive,” what is at stake is the constant shifting locality of an unrealizable resolution. In “Las utopías,” the incessant, transformative flux of identity continually displaces any notion of the empirical present in favor of what “could not be,” “what could have been,” and “what will be,” by grammatically emphasizing the past tense (X pudo no ser Y), the conditional perfect (X podría haber sido Y), and the future tense (X será Y). What appears to be the potential for effortless reversibility between the physical sites of Notre Dame, Chartres, Nuestra Señora de Santiago, Prayer, sky, desert, landscapes, heights, beaches, and breezes, in fact preserves the negotiation of

futurity in a way that calls out for negation and deferral—in order to sustain what is essentially a dangerous teleological process that cannot arrive at a prophesied “end.”

In the last few stanzas, this poem’s passages and interstices seem to hint at salvation through the awe-inspiring vision of Chile’s celestial love:

*Donde Chile pudo no ser el paisaje de Chile pero sí el
cielo azul que miraron y los paisajes habrían sido
entonces un Ruego sin fin que se les escapa de los labios
largo como un soplo de toda la patria haciendo un
amor que les poblara las alturas*

VII. Chile será entonces un amor poblándose las alturas

VIII. Hasta los ciegos verán allí el jubiloso ascender de su Ruego

*IX. Silenciosos todos veremos entonces el firmamento entero
levantarse límpido iluminado como una playa tendiéndonos el
amor constelado de la patria (1997, 36–37)*

*Where Chile could be not Chile’s landscape but really the blue
sky they beheld and then the landscapes would have been an
endless Prayer long like a soft breeze escaping their
lips throughout the entire country making a love that could
fill the heights for them*

VII. Chile will then be a love filling the heights for us

*VIII. There even the blind will see the jubilant
ascent of their Prayer*

*IX. Silent we shall all then see the entire firmament
rise up limpid illuminated like a beach
holding forth the country’s star-spangled love (1984, 39)*

The endless Prayer, articulated here as “un Ruego sin fin / que se les escapa de los labios largo como un soplo” [an / endless Prayer long like a soft breeze escaping their / lips] gives eyesight to the blind in its transformation of the Chilean landscape. Chile, according to “Las utopías” formulation, will become the silent love literally filling the celestial space, and will be

transformed within the limits of the rising, clear firmament. The Utopias transfigured here clearly occupy the “non-place” that their etymology suggests, in terms of the multiple diffractions of landscapes, heavens, and people into fluid, exchangeable elements in this larger Utopian system. However, the lack of differentiation, together with the exclusion of the present in the forward-looking temporality of these Utopias, looks more like the threatening collapse of life as we know it than Paradise—thus more closely resembling a silent, collective “afterlife” than life. The undifferentiated, never simply “present” futurity of the endless, ethereal Prayer in “Las utopías” recalls the way in which the shifting temporal and spatial markers of utopia cannot and dare not hone in on a fixed, predetermined Utopia in the “Las playas” series, to suggest that the achievement of the ends of a teleological system by means of ending teleology can only end badly. This is a formulation that we’ve seen in Kant’s insistence on the nature of the death-encounter that haunts these “ends,” in Derrida’s notion of the horizon-less “justice-to-come” that nevertheless *comes*, and in the multiple, unrealizable visions of Paradise that sustain futurity in *Anteparadise*.

Admittedly, the series of readings circulating in the critical economy of the “Playas” cycle in *Anteparadise* represents only a portion of Zurita’s poetic treatment of the sacred and scarred Chilean landscape. Nevertheless, a strong case could be made for the way in which the trajectory of a self-inhibiting teleological system moves through “Las cordilleras de Chile,” “Pastoral,” and “Esplendor en el viento” in a similar tenor of engagement with questions of justice, messianism, and eschatology. What becomes more prominent in these later sections, however, is the identification between Zurita’s authorial figure and poetic messianism—especially with respect to his self-mutilatory blinding with acid (transfigured in his first book of poetry, *Purgatorio*, published in 1979), which gives rise to an almost Oedipal notion of the vision-blindness dialectic that plays out in the textual space.

From a critical standpoint, what is recovered here is the alignment of Zurita’s position in the Chilean poetic canon with the sacrifice-driven recuperation of hope for a fragmented nation living under military rule—as described by many of the prominent critics of Zurita’s poetry, including Nelly Richard, Ignacio Valente, Rodrigo Cánovas, William Rowe, and Idelber Avelar,

among others. At the same time, what is gained by approaching *Anteparadise* via of Kant's teleological thinking and Derrida's writings on justice and messianism, I think, is the possibility of accounting for the radical character of a singular literary event that holds itself back from unequivocally espousing the particular "call-to-action" that it "thinks" it's proclaiming. *Anteparadise* thus necessarily wavers in its announcement of empirically futural salvation, and is actually more cautious in its depiction of the possibility and feasibility of justice than initial readings might suggest. Even so, this investigation of the way in which the "ends" of justice and morality play out in *Anteparadise* is absolutely subject to the same sort of self-reflexive structural inadequacies or internal contradictions pointed out by the close readings carried out in *Anteparadise's* reading of "itself." And after all, one must recognize that what plays at a final reading or end-point in this essay is in fact a discussion of a teleological structure that does not play out as *telos*, that must never reach its end, that in fact can never coincide temporally with its ends.



NOTES

I would like to thank Geoff Bennington for sharing his "generous reading" of teleology and politics in Kant's writings, as well as Carl Good and José Quiroga for their sharp and insightful editing in this article. David Johnson's suggestions relating to the question of teleology and infinity in Kant and Derrida were also quite helpful.

1. Quotes from Zurita's poetry are taken from the sixth edition of *Anteparadise* (1997) and Jack Schmitt's translation (*Anteparadise*, 1984).
2. Some of the more significant critical treatments of Zurita's poetry include studies by Nelly Richard (1986, 1994, 2004), Eugenia Brito (1990), Idelber Avelar (1999), Rodrigo Cánovas (1985, 1986), William Rowe (1996, 2000), and Jill Kuhnheim (2005), as well as a series of interesting (and quite conservative) reviews in the Chilean newspaper *El mercurio* by Padre Ignacio Valente, official literary critic of Gen. Pinochet's regime. (Valente's reviews in *El mercurio* are discussed in several studies on Zurita, including Avelar's [168].)
3. On Zurita and American space, see the work of William Rowe (2000).
4. Photos of the sky-written "lines" of "La vida nueva" are interspersed throughout the book following section breaks, respecting the order of the poem.
5. Maurice Blanchot describes the way in which: "The question concerning the disaster

is a part of the disaster: it is not an interrogation, but a prayer, an entreaty, a call for help. The disaster appeals to the disaster that the idea of salvation, of redemption might not yet be affirmed, and might, drifting debris, sustain fear. The disaster: inopportune" (1995, 13).

6. This poem clearly evokes Genesis 18:23–33, in which Abraham “bargains” with God regarding the salvation of the people of Sodom. In this passage, God agrees to spare the inhabitants of Sodom if fifty righteous people are to be found within the city, then forty-five, then forty, etc.—and Abraham eventually succeeds in reducing the number to ten.
7. In the specific readings that I am proposing, the term “justice” is intricately linked to the performative force of the law—as Jacques Derrida suggests, it is “an interpretive force and a call to faith [*un appel à la croyance*]: not in the sense, this time, that law would be *in the service* of force, its docile instrument, servile and thus exterior to the dominant power, but rather in the sense of law that would maintain a more internal, more complex relation to what one calls force, power or violence” (2002b, 241).
8. For a thorough discussion of the “guiding thread” in Kant’s philosophical writing, see Geoffrey Bennington’s *Frontières kantiennes* (2000), especially the chapter titled “*Le fil conducteur (de la lecture philosophique)*.”
9. The tension between mechanical causality and teleology founds the antinomy presented in §70 of the “Critique of Teleological Judgment” in the third *Critique* (1987):

The first maxim of judgment is this *thesis*: All production of material things and their forms must be judged to be possible in terms of merely mechanical laws.

The second maxim is this *antithesis*: Some products of material nature cannot be judged to be possible in terms of merely mechanical laws. (Judging them requires a quite different causal law—viz., that of final causes. (267)

Although reason cannot prove either of these maxims, it looks at first as if the antinomy is resolved in the following section, in Kant’s statement that this conflict is based on “our confusing a principle of reflective judgment with one of determinative judgment, and on our confusing the *autonomy* of reflective judgment . . . with the *heteronomy* of determinative judgment” (270). Perhaps a key analogy, in terms of the theoretical formulations in this essay, could be drawn between hermeneutical reading strategies as more directly dependent on determinative judgment (despite their insistence otherwise), while this notion of the guiding thread speaks more to a principle of reflective judgment.

10. See Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* (1994) for the most complete treatment of messianism, justice, and the untimeliness of the Other’s arrival.
11. The move toward morality at this point in the “Idea for a Universal History” is curious, which seems to anticipate the link between politics, war, and morality in §83 in the third *Critique*. Kant describes war in this later text in a way that resembles the formulation in the “Idea for a Universal History”:

"[War is] an unintentional human endeavor (incited by our unbridled passions), yet it is also a deeply hidden and perhaps intentional endeavor of the supreme wisdom, if not to establish, then at least to prepare the way for lawfulness along with the freedom of states, and thereby for a unified system of them with a moral basis." (1987, 320)

12. This formulation evokes the opening sentence from Kant's well-known essay "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" (as well as other statements in this piece): "*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*" (1999a, 54).
13. This point recalls the Comment in §76 of the *Critique of Judgment*, specifically the distinction between the theoretical and the practical among Kant's three odd "examples." Where the theoretical approaches the practical, a morality "worthy of its name" (to use a more explicitly Derridean formulation) might very well be impossible; therefore "the moral" would constitute morality holding itself back from achieving "full" morality.
14. At least in terms of the "Idea for a Universal History," "Perpetual Peace," and the third *Critique*.
15. I have slightly modified Schmitt's translation to emphasize the collective nature of justice.

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