

# Insult/Internal Debate/Echo

*Dylan Rodríguez*

## **preface (insult)**

Suspicion and accusation are a minimal disturbance to a force that spills endless violations of spirit, memory, and flesh. There is no state of exception, just a grinding normal that concedes reform in the demand, inventing and refurbishing a Civilizational imperative. White supremacy is but a minimal term for this extended order of things. Its dangers become refined and acute under changing protocols of recruitment, retention, expulsion, and elimination. The white nationalist imperative surges and retreats. Contrary to liberal narratives of the reaction's periodic and exceptional rise on waves of mobilized xenophobia, misogyny, and populist racialized "hate," the white national form is constantly in evidence, everywhere, shaping the multiculturalist diversity initiatives that re-embody the inheritances of 1619 and Manifest Destiny.

The nominal abolition of United States apartheid has been followed by more than half a century of proliferating, innovative, and sometimes authentically new regimes of gendered racial domination and state sanctioned racist violence. Against all apparent and sometimes spectacular evidence of its absurdity, there is a resilient narrative of national racial progress, characterized by the insult of an insistence.

The depth and normalcy of the interdisciplinary, multimedia, terror-inducing methodologies of racist reaction are not mere resurgences or disruptions, but are affirmations that such racial progress is in fact at hand. There is no hypocrisy in the gestures of subjection when they are already enmeshed in the coercive promises of postponed or suspended futurity for those who fit the civil-enemy profile of gendered racial domestic war. In such instances, survival tends to be a question raised for the absolute present tense, and so the edge of the insult is in the insistence that there *is* a future to be shared, in fact, that there *is* a "humanity" within the deadly span of raciality that can ever even be remotely common, familial, or universal.

## **internal debate (redemption)**

The United States, if it is to exist as such, is always necessarily a theater of racial nation-building with vacillating movements and subtitles: post-civil rights multiculturalism, resurgent white nationalism, post-racial liberalism, law-and-order, the War on Drugs, the War on Terror, and the infrastructures of tolerance and repression are never finally separable. There is a deadly coherence to the historical variations of this statecraft and

cultural formation, crystallizing in the allegation that certain counter-positions within their fields correspond with redemptive possibilities.

The historical record shows what the allegation of redemption entails when waged and executed by the subjects of a transatlantic, hemispheric, and global promise of white human vindication: formed in the crucible of the Encounter, it is the making of Mankind in White Being (with all its gendered correlates) that determines the economics, jurisprudence, political philosophy, social science, and geographic coordinates of conquest-in-permanence. There is preliminary and always-unfolding violence in raciality as a principle term in Mankind's cohering of language, vision, feeling, science, spirit, and subjectivity in this globality of imagination and economy.

The fraud of the post-racial and the post-civil rights allegations, then, is not merely in the unbroken chain of racist casualties produced through systemic and scene-specific assaults on both collective physiology and the mere possibility of shared, symbolic integrity. The deepest discrepancy is in the pretense that there is *any* possibility for categorical rather than piecemeal (temporary, fleeting, flimsy) inclusion in this apartheid speciation of "humanity," an apartheid that cannot be dismantled in law or even nominally abolished, unless Mankind—and crucially, the material and symbolic grounds of Mankind's global integrity as such—becomes the subject of a creative disintegration (some will call this terrorism, others call it their hope for tomorrow). The speciation draws its dominance from a changing circuit of abstraction and embodiment: there is a template for humanity's progress, there are terms (scientific, Biblical, politico-economic, or otherwise) through which the most evolved, blessed, modern, and autonomous of the human species may be recognized as such, and these abstractions are always tied to notions of manifest personhood, including but not limited to genes, spirit, blood, epidermis, and cranial capacity (such is the rough description of humanity's speciation—a *narrative* of differentiation within the category of human being that militarizes the terms of the ascendant species-group). These are the premises of White Being.

Apprehend the United States, in the fullest distensions of its colonial and chattel formation, as an internal debate over the relative violence, vulgarity, sophistication, and political capaciousness of white humanity. The latter, you will recall, is the position that offers humanitarian favors against the wish and urge to violently decline them. There is a claim that persists beneath the din of civil accommodations, that changes in tenor but not in premise. Accusations of backwardness, savagery, tribalism, and even fundamentalism become self-replicating when such humanitarianism is rejected by the ungrateful, suspicious antagonists of white humanity's creeping universals. The language of urban-to-rural insurrection—when the people "riot," "loot," burn, and destroy—moves from a vocabulary of anti-humanitarianism (which, in this sense, is also a recalibration of the world to mirror the evil) to insist that it is in the moment when the representatives of white humanity extend the helping hand that there must be a state of militant opposition; a tensing against the insult. It is in times like this that the white human creates the groundwork of its forcible universality.

This is the other side of the aforementioned redemption: a rejection of the invitation to thrill in the absolute violence of a charity. There are different versions of the

gesture—modernization, independence, full citizenship, franchise, rights. Appendages of another body, an alien body. Rejection comes later, when the charity is experienced as redemption in their evil, white evil, which created the need for their industrialized condescension in the first place. It is part of the generalized fact that the white human condition—the condition of Mankind’s restoration, remaking, and periodic reconstruction—is already steeped in an edifice of accessibility (the common sense of humanism rests on the myth of access). This human in the seat of humanism calls on other species to feed, to shit, to vote, to work, to speak, to dance, to enlist, to sit at the table in the house for a little while (but don’t overstay your welcome, because you should beware of the grounds of such hospitality). What if, after “American Apartheid,” there is only more chattel, more displacement, more of apartheid’s spatial and physiological ordering?

### echo

Meanwhile, there is a darker echo that restates the gestures of global white assistance—philanthropic, structurally adjusted, diversity inclusive, military occupied, and otherwise—as a conjugated dehumanization. The echo shudders an anti-colonial and plantation-burning violence, another kind of redemption in the symbolic genesis of white humanity’s de-centering. In this instance, it is not the dark suffering that matters, but rather *the fact* of the exposure, the vulnerability, the imminence and inevitability of the suffering—this is what explodes the presumptuous arrogance of the white humanist universal, which is another way of saying that in this glimpse, we are daring to privilege the inheritance of a sensibility that the world exists on *Mankind’s terms*, and this is an intimacy with the most alienating feeling. To be in a world not of your making, to be told that you must *become* in a manner alien to the conditions of your exposure.

It is often this alienation that fosters another differentiation, one that speaks collective genius in the imagining and fugitive practice of Mankind’s obsolescence, the denaturing of the human speciation and thus, the reduction of white evil (by extension, white liberal humanism) to a localized, dysfunctional, even tribal matter that finally has little or nothing to do with the insurgency of all other life, including the other humans who have fantasized the demise of Mankind over many generations. The violence of which they accuse the savages and the slaves is often attributed to this idea. *Merely the idea.*

In Dallas a few are felled by a sniper’s rounds in the midst of a demonstration for Black lives that was irreparably, painstakingly, also pro-police. A scattering thereafter, unsure how to read the blood on tar, a few wondering aloud what would happen if the fleeting moment of anti-state terror were socialized against its dense congruence with the proto-genocidal facts of Blackness. Here is another opportunity to alter the protocols of war by considering the absolute asymmetries of fatality and casualty—another way of showing the identity of law and brutality, thus the misapplication of our common phrase, “police brutality.”

Consider the recent periods of crisis, emergency, and militant reformist demand as a political inheritance in continuity with the limits of that internal “American”

debate. In this framing, the stakes are entirely affixed to the reorientations of Mankind and the question of whether a potential transformation (expansion) of its imagined collective is remotely capable of altering the intensity of casualties that fabricate the Indian, the Negro, the Alien, et. al. The blurring confluences of human life (in all its vulnerability and incommensurable wildness) with Mankind (in its self-narratives of autonomy, mastery, and ascendancy) provoke the other allegations of redemption, which are *only ever aspirational*. It is why, in contemporary parlance, “diversity” is always tethered to “tolerance and respect:” the vulnerable wild ones are the subjects of a domestication that never quite works.

The sources of the echo are the involuntary inhabitants of the blurring, outside Mankind (subhuman, colonized, expropriated, chattel) and incarcerated by the contingencies of white civil society’s freedoms. To live inside the blur in this way is to be intimately *familiar* with the perpetual condition of war and conquest, even as there is constant struggle to apprehend the consequences of the totality, because there are counter-positions within the blur. There are casualties of varying intensity, some contingent and others paradigmatic. Yet there remains a persistent demand that crosses these counter-positions, anchored in the demand for security of body and the dream of collective futurity. This demand-dream runs the risk of coalescing with the terms of the internal debate. It is the militancy of an insistence on *becoming* the tolerated and respected, which of course is not really a *becoming* at all. This is when the echo is most open to misreadings, disciplined-harnessed-monetized by the organized entrepreneurial compromises of the “Non-Governmental Organizations” and the Non-Profit Industrial Complex.

We should be clear that the problem is not necessarily in the desire for redemption as a *protective capacity* in circumstances of duress. (At times, finding redemption through faith and spiritual practice is the only accessible pathway to insurgent mobilization around a shared *social-historical* as well as extra-earthly fate.) Rather, the dilemma is in the horizon of the fulfillment. What would happen on the eve of White Being’s concession that Black lives matter? The terms of the internal debate can *only allow for the gesture of a concession*, which subsists on some peculiar idiosyncrasies: the notion of policing in equitability; a reordering of statecraft and cultural structure that affirms respect for and tolerance of those other lives; a statement of egalitarian value that nonetheless endorses another apartheid principle of human speciation, “separate but equal.” It becomes clear that redemption in winning protective capacity is only that, and only for now. This is a problem of mistaken or misplaced horizons. Of course, horizons are open to interpretation and imagination, and must be projected as a matter of definition, so there is plenty of room to do good work here, which requires that the problem of political horizon be posed in the first place, as a problem, in fact, as the kind of problem that renders the conventional (and often indulgent or opportunistic) dichotomy of “theory” and “practice” irrelevant.

Perhaps there is already a solution to the problem, an ingenious rearticulation of the dilemma of mis-imagined, dys-imagined horizon that unfolds in basements, classrooms, and text message strings all the time, everywhere: there is an understanding that resonates in the dark echoing of the problem solvers (the children, the

students, the elders, the shamed, the punished, the abnormal, the sick, the crazy—or so they say). The understanding forms as a byproduct of coerced overfamiliarity with what it means to seek redemption in evil, a knowledge that the adjudication of the internal debate occurs in a general symbiosis with the enforcement of cultural-juridical-military statutes that constantly reconstruct and affirm the anti-civilizational profile; that of those who are drawn into the profile, there are some old, some new, because criminals, terrorists, deviants, aliens, have always been around, some longer than others, and there's little mistaking the Black and Aboriginal common denominator in all of it. The understanding grows and spreads, that the anti-civilizational is an *honorable* inheritance, because it surges into domesticities that are always again frontiers; the plantation is an idea as much as a place, which is why it never goes away, territory (land) is always invoked, and it all materializes in the endlessly justifiable homicide that defines “freedom’s” limits. Move, then, to the margins of the reputable, just beneath the high ground, flourishing in the tears and sobbing, studying within the mourning and grieving, theorizing the pain, it’s already happening, and it needs no refinement.

### **echo (protest)**

A delusion guides much of the righteous protest. It is the belief, tragic in its aversion to historical truth, that *They don't have The Right to do this (to us, to others, to the death)*. The protest stakes its high ground on the claim that the violence is beyond Their Right. Its furnace of outrage is fueled by the demand that They cease and desist, stop stop stop stop the beating killing brutal degrading displays of savage-sophisticated contempt for skin, bones, still-beating hearts. The protest demands recognition that the (your) other human life is worthy of integrity. The protest grasps for words that will somehow touch the brutalizers' thin and nerveless membranes of decency. The protest claims the objects of violence embody dignity, manhood, motherhood, queer citizenship, and perhaps it will also remind them that “we are not criminals.” This activity is not naïve, for the delusion is not derivative of dumb ignorance, but rather of a willful one. The protest works hard to believe in the redemption of Rights forsaken. It is a religious belief—this is what we mean by willful delusion. It is a powerful delusion, to project that the manic aggression of Their world can be harnessed by anything remotely so abstract as Rights. (Of course, abstraction is as well a method of and for revolt, which is why Their colleges and universities are increasingly overrun by an instructional logic of vocational indoctrination, especially in sites of “diversity.”)

Always hiding in these soon-discarded terms of protest appeal is another kind of recognition, popping through the delusion like unwelcome glares from behind. It is the knowledge—a deep knowing in friction with anything actually formally learned—that *nothing is beyond Their Right*, which is to say, They cannot dialog with the protest, they can only ever *tolerate* it. There is another way to view the relation of power: that in Their maddening assumption of Right as capacity for self-making brutality (a.k.a. policing, governing, civilizing), They are daring you to violate the long-settled limits of the appeal to decency and respect. The residual power of the delusion is the always-

available temporality of its belief—some of you know as well as i that the righteous protest is never far from next-level noise, of a kind that turns the deputies' presence into a beast of law.

The end of protest is nearby, as it has always been, even if the form of the convening riff-raff looks familiar to Them. It is another way of saying that there is an inherent, beautiful danger to the theater of collective consciousness when it is fixated on the correction of errors and hypocrisies that are, in the long historical script, the productive technologies of US nation-building.

### **the end of Hope**

There are times when things change so rapidly it feels like breathing myth. Walls fall, nations implode, colonies collapse, apartheid melts, but only because *people move* with each other even as they are at odds, quaking the placid plains of history with the unmatched danger of other surging human species. Mankind begins to panic amidst cold calculations of austerity, reform, and military extermination, knowing that civil war is always a global war, an epochal war, when the fate of the species is at stake. Those who have been enslaved, occupied, displaced, trapped, and dominated find power in the fight. Of course, when some of us think about the truth of inhabiting these kinds of places, we realize that there has never been anything but a fight. It is a species-specific knowledge.

But then, the end of hope is a morbid thing. When the fiction of a better future, a revived present, a shared anticipation of life—good life—fades, a certain wildness ensues. There is a creeping sensibility that aggressive, violent neglect is the structuring principle of the modern world, interrupted only by the acute attention of the police and their analogues. They are, in their own way, attuned to our sensibilities in the manner of owners feeling the primal species-needs of their domestic animals—the dog is hungry, it is lonely, the pace of its wagging tail shows it is antsy, it needs to go outside and piss—but their reactions tend to be less generous and nurturing. They know you are upset over the always-bare fact of your naked disempowerment, but they are equally perturbed that you cannot appreciate how far your people have come, for after all, *a few of you are here* sitting at the conference table with them, drinking their coffee and being treated as classmates, peers, and colleagues.

Supremacy is an inherently armed and threatened regime. It must be reiterated, fortified, and violently enforced (usually across a broad, deep spectrum of violence—from genocidal to low-intensity, cultural-symbolic to physiological and environmental). There is little doubt that white supremacy is the convening animus of the United States of America and most of the Western world, and that its liberal disavowals in the era of diversity and official multiculturalism not only fail to displace white supremacy's paradigmatic role in defining social life and the distribution of wealth, poverty, health, and systemic suffering, but actually instigate white supremacist revivals at every conceivable social scale. The argument here is not that white supremacy has disappeared or faded from the ensemble of racial-social power assembled over the last half-century, but rather that it has been incessantly *disowned* by White Being as such, even as white

supremacy galvanizes and organizes white publics into organized and semi-organized fronts for white self-defense, white autonomy, and white rights.

The ascendancy of White Being thus supervises the logic of White Reconstruction. It disciplines and reforms classical white supremacist institutions and their methods of human domination while still ensuring that white supremacy permeates the order of things. In this way, the end of official apartheid and the formal elimination of particular forms of racial colonialism are maneuvers of *sustainability*, more precisely, toward a flexibility of racial power (and suppleness of racial Being) that can absorb “anti-racist” reform for the sake of “human equality” precisely because the White Being’s ascendancy *already assembles the material boundaries, methodology, and common sense pre-conceptions of the Human who is to participate in that egalitarian social wager*.

Within the cultural politics and delimited upward socioeconomic mobilities endorsed by White Reconstruction (which both relies on and despises “affirmative action” as a mechanism for re-ordering the epidermal layers of its generally-but-not-always-white human species), there is a production of new possibilities for attachment, allegiance, and affinity to White Being. There is, in other words, an invitation of sorts to thrill in its fiction, which is to say, to fantasize a “people of color” future within the ascendancy, even when material conditions yield palimpsests of degradation and humiliation within the allegations of the egalitarian. (This is why eugenics is simultaneously an embarrassment to modern biological and forensic science, while obviously persisting as a structuring *logic* of contemporary social engineering, from its liberal reformist to reactionary racist variations.)

The ascendancy of White Being has toxified most of us for multiple generations, in ways that we are constantly mapping, mourning, recreating, and theorizing. It is an ascendancy that, despite its allegations of Civilizational and natural permanence, is subjected to varying intensities of radical, irruptive challenge from below and periodic implosions from above.

On the other hand, rebellions and movements have many points of origin: the high school and college classroom, church/mosque/temple, community organization, warehouse, prison cell, hospital waiting room, living room couch, or apartment complex are as likely as any site to bear the fruit of social insurgency among people who refuse to be passive victims of (or willing participants in) an oppressive system. These forms of action do not necessarily rely on massive numbers to make their imprint on the surrounding world—rather, they pivot on the willingness of committed *collectives* of people (large and small) to analyze, strategize, and act on their surrounding social conditions. Such collective work, often beginning with numbers in the single digits, has shown the capacity to accomplish everything from stopping patterns of domestic violence in an apartment complex and disrupting citywide police brutality to sparking anticolonial revolutions and overthrowing repressive national governments. I think this is the work, as in some ways it has always been.