

# REVOLUTION AND REFORM: ON CHANGE, COLLECTIVE AGENCY, AND BECOMING DIFFERENTLY

Sebastián Alejandro González Montero  
*Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia*

Catalina López-Gómez  
*Universidad de La Salle, Colombia*

Ana Mercedes Sarria-Palacio  
*Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó – Diego Luis Córdoba*

*Traditional debates regarding revolution and reform often oscillate between romantic idealizations of human willpower and the technocratic management of social behavior. This manuscript seeks an alternative path by interrogating the underlying images of thought that assume humans can unilaterally command reality through individual actions and institutions. By shifting the focus to a relational ontology, we move beyond attention to the human need to make real their desires and purposes, and to the State-centric privilege of political change, to explore how capable beings navigate a world stubbornly independent of human intent. Drawing on the turbulent historical and political landscape of Latin America, the tension between the collective effervescence of social movements and the pragmatic sober realism required for institutional transformation is critically examined. After that, we propose that reality is not a static container but a dynamic process of motion and becoming. Within this framework, change is redefined as an emergent property of social structuring processes and complex assemblages rather than a direct product of political leadership.*

*Keywords: Becoming, Collective Agency, Latin American Controversies, Motion, Relational Ontology, Social Structuring Processes,*

## INTRODUCTION

Thinking about revolution and reform without stigmatization or idealization is possible by considering the underlying image of thought that informs these concepts.

This entails conceptually elaborating on the procedures at play amid changing realities and on the human role in navigating uncertainty.

That is the general motif of our endeavor here. However, some details must be considered to provide a context for the argument. How can we respond to current demands on research activities –i.e., innovation and relevance– following contemporary social sciences’ ontological premises and methodological developments based on those premises? To say less technically, how can we move beyond traditional romantic motifs that assume the human will to power is sufficient to create a livable world? In contrast, how can we understand realities as uncontrollable, uncertain, and constantly changing without renouncing the possibilities of human agency? Such are compelling questions supporting a methodological decision.

The concepts of revolution and reform must be considered in the contemporary context of reflecting on revolution and reform beyond the idea that change is exclusively produced by political party leadership and the State's role in administering and commanding reality (Calderon & Castells, 2021; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Rosa, 2020; Hui, 2019; Nail, 2019; Badiou, 2012).

There is an alternative to thinking about change. Indeed, it is possible to elaborate on renewed possibilities if the debate is placed at the center of contemporary discussions of change in reality and the communitarian role in producing differentiated modes of existence. In this way, we elude the traditional privilege of thinking about politics in terms of the State and avoid the premise that human will can produce a world on its own.

In light of that consideration, the crucial question of change is reconsidered. How so? If something has lately been debated, it is the traditional dichotomy between freedom and necessity, in favor of awareness of the complex interactions between realities and of beings capable of navigating and becoming differently (Sloterdijk, 2025; 2020).

Advocates of the concept of freedom usually take methodological individualist positions. Advocates of the idea of necessity usually take methodological collectivist frameworks (Negt 2004). In the middle, another conceptual path is possible. Instead of addressing the problem of how humans can effect changes in reality, one can ask how capable beings possess causal powers and collectively create scenarios for living amid an uncontrollable reality.

The premise of that consideration is that living beings can affect reality. However, it is also accepted that reality is stubbornly independent of the human will (Elder-Vass 2010, 14-38; 2020, 253-264; Hui 2019, 10-30). In that context, how can we comprehend those impacts without reproducing the idea that we can manage everything around us?

The thesis we explore here is that all living beings are social because they can constitute assemblages of entities expressing attributes that are capabilities at play in the real. Living beings form multiplicities (or networks) from which enabling scenarios emerge, providing means of addressing uncertainty and unmanageability. In one sentence, all living beings have causal powers because of their constitutive nature as assemblages that can interfere with their spatiotemporal changing environments (Latour, 2005; 2009).

In summary, we consider an alternative regarding the recent debates about the notion of change as oscillating between the assumption that a renovated existence is possible by promoting radical transformations of the present order and the belief that changing reality is a technical task related to the adaptation and modification of social behaviors and the invention of systems enabling us to manage uncertainty.

To clarify that notion, we engage with three steps in the argument. Firstly, we elaborate on the idea that contingency and constant differentiation are ongoing processes in reality. Secondly, we elaborate on the idea that change is about communities struggling to create a livable world by collectively responding to new circumstances and challenges. In the concluding remarks, we explore the implications of that ontology in ways that open up to renovated research possibilities around the concepts of collective agency and becoming differently.

We present here considerations coming from different traditions in contemporary philosophy (Latour, Deleuze & Guattari, Nail, etc.) and the critical development studies (Rosa, Hui, Paschel, Sanders, etc.). That is justified by more than an eclectic endeavor: it lies in an approach to thinking theoretically about reality that promotes questions rather than following well-established academic disciplines concerned with clarity and precision. The idea is relatively simple to express: being reality multifaceted and complex, it is necessary not only to invent new methods of research, but also concepts capable of inquiring into a world that is unformed yet generative in producing challenging situations and events (Law, 2004, 2-7; Rees, 2018, 1-7).

## REVOLUTION AND REFORM

Let us summon the political framework in which revolution and reform concepts have taken place in the Latin America's history as a context for the following reflection: it is the conundrum between the seeds of democracy in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its unfolding challenges associated armed conflicts (Reid 2010, 68-80), the reformist attempts to frame violence into institutional scenarios and dialogical procedures (Reid 2010, 154-158), the evolving populists movements and the rise of social mobilization at large scale (Tilly et al 2019, 99-127), and the cultural changes that took place in the second part of the same century (Tilly et al 2019, 128-130).

Revolution and reform are notions that arise in moments of rising expectations, driven by the desire to reach better times precisely when things are difficult. But they refer to different approaches to that belief.

Turning points that become actual in history are usually called revolutions. It is said that "revolutions often follow an autonomous dynamic, as uncontrolled spirals that aim at obliterating the past and inventing the future from a tabula rasa" (Traverso 2021, 366-367).

It is an expectation that things change. It is a human expectation. It is about high hopes. But who knows? From the present perspective, it is difficult to say something about it. After 'turning points,' will everything be the same as it has been? After the revolutionary celebrations, can we say we are undergoing novelties? How to know if things have changed in reality? How can we tell they have changed for the better?

In the context of the so-called philosophy of movement and the ontology of motion, it is argued that realities are more complex than we usually think (Nail, 2019, 9-11; 63-65). In that scenario, the Same and the Different are ontological categories that should be rejected for their extreme abstractness (Nail, 2024, 40-49). Instead, it can be said that reality changes through differentiation processes attached to multiplicities that are open to experimentation in diverse and nuanced ways (Hui, 2019, 1-7).

On the other hand, it is important to question the idea that we can directly decide on the future: that is, the idea that individual willpower and the desire to control reality through State institutions and bureaucratic means –i.e., public policies, public government, and technical developments– produce change in a previously decided direction that represents necessary improvements (Rosa, 2015, 1-20).

Together, the rejection of the notions of the Same and the Different and the human will power to make real their desires and expectations stands as a scenario to think alternatively about the meaning of living in a changing reality and the quest to make a home in it without pretending to manage everything and without falling into despair.

The premise of the argument here is that, by critiquing notions of revolution and reform, it is possible to question the idea that humans can directly control their lives and *reality*. In fact, we insist that reality must be observed and described in its becoming, with the understanding that we can intelligently navigate it rather than struggle against it. In that sense, we align with the assumption that there is no dualism between freedom and necessity, individuals and collectives, and the State and institutions. Reality entails an immanent life that is constantly becoming differentiated and stabilised by continually interacting multiplicities, open to movements that do not guarantee desirable results -e.g., climate change, economic turmoil, pandemics, etc. (Lawler et al, 2015, 1-6) The challenge there is to navigate movement and change while we try to make a living and build a home, without destroying the very conditions that enable us to do so.

## **The Ambivalence of Politics**

Things can happen differently. We live in an era of alternative political parties, social movements, contemporary vocabularies of inclusion, and debates about social progress, equality, recognition, and related issues from progressive perspectives. Illusions arise here and there, indeed (Calderón and Castells 2020, 170-193).

In Latin America, we have long-standing hopes of seeing other times. There have been years and years of the same conservative political scenario in Latin America (Jorrín & Martz, 1970; Leguía, 2011; Odegard & Rivera, 2019). In contrast, some recent events have nourished hope. Petro in Colombia. Boric in Chile. Lula in Brazil. Mujica in Uruguay. They are far from being a political expression of individual intentionality and ideological standpoints. Instead, they have represented social struggles rooted in territories and communities that have traditionally participated in development processes in the name of justice and recognition in Latin America (Paschel, 2016; Petras, 1990; Rahier, 2012). Let us say something cautiously. Around the recent political dynamics in Latin America, an idea has emerged: there are options.

Changes can take place. Generosity, fraternity, and ideals of justice and equality are around the corner. Based on the promises of change made amid historical struggles in Latin America's peripheries, people talk about possibilities and futures (Chaparro, 2020; Mahon, 2018; González & López, 2024a; Carballo, 2015, 2016; Castañeda, 1993).

At least, that is the impression. There are “moments of collective effervescence in which ordinary people feel an irrepressible desire to invade the streets, occupy the sites of power, exhibit their own strength, if necessary, take up arms, and celebrate liberation through manifestations of fraternity and happiness.” (Traverso, 2021, p. 366). This is not the place to make critical comments on social movements in Latin America. That is a historical enterprise that cannot be reduced to a few pages. In any case, we can consider an idea that stands at the bottom of the conceptual archive in the research of the impacts of the collective agency in changing reality: the long history of social struggles is related to the expectation that it is possible to collectively promote transformations at the levels of the social and politics –being particularly active indigenous and afrodescendent communities in Latin America (González et al, 2024).

It is precisely at the center of that assertion that a dilemma unfolds: expectations of change and the impacts of human action must be weighed against the need to take organizational steps towards desired outcomes. Spontaneous mobilization and organized social movements constantly represent a similar difficulty: the time of dreaming new lives and the explosion of that wish in the mobilization contrast with the assessment of how efficacious those attempts can be in front of the needed changes in everyday issues –from territorial infrastructure and access to technology to wider reforms at the level of the economy and politics (Melmke & Levitsky, 2006).

It may be reconsidered using different vocabulary: It is common for rebels to become calmer after revolutionary festivals. It is because they face practical issues after drunkenness and festivities. Substantial doubts can arise. When is the time to talk about politics? When do we start discussing the legal organization of the State and its administrative apparatuses? When is the time to debate programs and procedures? Who will be responsible for realizing the revolutionary promises of change? Is it necessary to concede? To whom is it necessary to negotiate? How much time is required to make changes real? About four years? About eight years? Is it going to be forever? What about money? Should we renounce making money? Is money essential to support changes? What about authority? Is it necessary to become radical if changes are going to be expected? On the contrary, is legitimacy the absolutely innegotiable ground of any decision affecting communities?

On the other hand, it is a commonplace among world-changers to say that thinking about futures and speculating about the forces that create them are liable to degenerate into mere exercises in abstract reasoning (Badiou 2012, 61-80). ‘The ground of concepts is reality, not the purely human reason transcendental scenario.’ That is a well-known revolutionary slogan: reality is more important than any human intention at the moment of effecting change (Ricoeur 1986, 35-67). It is an essential slogan because it conveys the idea that political views concern the tangible realization of change, not merely the plans we can design.

Well, that is the frame of a dilemma. At the calmer point of deciding what to do, the tricky question arises: Revolution or Reform?

## From Revolts to Political Programs

It is well known that, from unorganized revolts to political programs, the need to translate mere expectations into reality is at play in turbulent times (Marcuse & Popper, 1976; Davis, 1986). That issue has become a genre of writing among political representatives entering office. *A Promise Land* (Obama, 2020). *Promise Me, Dad* (Biden, 2017). *Decision Points* (Bush, 2010). *Una Vida. Muchas Vidas*. (Petro, 2021). *La Salida* (López Obrador, 2017). *Sinceramente* (Kirchner, 2019). It is expected that political figures write about promises of change. They know material challenges are stubbornly present. Economic crises, social needs, environmental issues, inequalities, territorial development, democratic procedures, political rights, etc. Those are practicalities that must be faced after the storm of celebrations. At that point, world-changers seem to become sober and realistic doers dedicated to everyday actions that (it is believed) can make a difference on the ground (Autesserre 2021, 1-18).

Revolution has traditionally been understood as an interruption of history: a break with the same. It changes established orders. For that reason, revolution expresses attractive calls. The liberation of old times is possible, it is said. There is a risk of failure. However, there is also the hope of success. There are no securities. There are no predictable outcomes. Everything is possible (Arendt 1965, 21-57; Zinn 2015, 15-21).

Revolution also requires sacrifices and is always about struggling. We refer to an old picture. A nostalgic one, indeed. Navigating amid uncertainty is always a challenging endeavor that all living beings undergo. In the context of human thought, the revolution has traditionally been depicted as a ship in danger of being destroyed while carrying observers, doers, thinkers, malnourished fighters, supporters, repair workers, artists, politicians, technicians, etc. (Traverso 2021, 1-3). *The Raft of the Medusa*. “How not to see the raft as the remains of a movement that –like the frigate sailing the ocean– aimed to conquer the future and ended as wreckage?” (Traverso 2021, 5).

The concept of revolution is based on human expectations and hope. But it also requires realism. It is not about a naïve belief that the future will be better than the past. Quite the contrary. Accepting that consideration, the theoretical problem lies exactly here: revolution crystallizes the tragedy of not knowing where our decisions and desires will lead us in renewed times. It crystallizes the limits of reason -to use a technical vocabulary.

Politically, promised lands require solid endeavors (Obama, 2020, 1-19). To understand that idea, it is necessary to engage with an existential vocabulary:

It is known that we must work to achieve what we want. There is too much desire and energy at play in building futures. Intense endeavors entail both optimism and tribulation. We refer to the challenges and afflictions of ordinary people living in changing realities: we do not know whether conditions will improve (Sanders, 2016, 445-449). In any case, we have to struggle. Ordinary people are troubled by the past and present, living in distress as they seek a better life. Being troubled by the thought of what our lives would be like if everything could be changed reveals the existential condition of those standing at the borders of reality and expectation (Sanders, 2016, 184). ‘Reality’ and ‘Utopia’ were traditional words for the following intuition: We live in the middle of facts and desires, constantly challenged by frustration because of the contrast of those

extremes. In that scenario, the idea of revolution is compelling because it evokes extraordinary change in the context of people seeking more than their usual meat and an end to the tedious commute between home and work (Evans, 2015).

## Revolutionary Promises

Too much is at stake when thinking about emancipation, liberation, progressiveness, social justice, equality, liberty, and inclusion. However, despite all promises made by the emissaries of the new coming, there is no certainty. The future can be elusive, and not everyone can afford such openness. Rich and powerful people can always fly and go to other lands. They have money and connections. For us who do not have that, issues are radically different (Sanders, 2023, 2025). That is the reason to be scared and anxious. And who is not able to understand?

Once again, questions arise when promises of change are made.

Does the revolution depend on the captain's and subordinates' competence? What will happen if those responsible for making changes make mistakes? What will happen if those responsible for making changes have their own agenda? What will happen if those responsible for making changes are unconcerned about ambition and simply open to their desire to do business? Who will be called upon to respond to the world-changers' missteps?

Changing realities represents an enormous bet. Revolution is a dangerous gamble because the promises of change can be so grandiose that they remain unrealizable. Changing the world can also become an excuse for personalities eager to promote selfish views and individual interests. Can revolutionaries consume their dreams by failing to reach their goals of freedom and self-determination? Can revolution become its own shadow by not coming as a time to change but as a time of the worst? It is the authoritarian possible turn of revolutions. Historically, "the tragedy of revolutions lies in the fatal metamorphosis that drives them from liberation to the struggle for survival, and finally to the edification of a new oppressive rule" (Traverso 2021, 25).

Those previous considerations and questions ground a methodological decision. These days, revolution must be reconsidered in the context of the current cultural mood and new images of reality –i.e., a renovated ontology attached to a different ethics. How so? Revolution is the notion of future possibilities. However, that promise must be assessed in the present, given the changing nature of reality and the historical awareness of the risks posed by the revolutionaries' promises. Indeed, the concept of revolution is currently about the conflict between hope and resignation: the obstinate search for alternatives that runs parallel to capitulation. No more promises. Let us say that revolution is not about the desire to reach better times. It is about the ambiguity of deciding what we want and the struggle to have it, in the context of nothing more than uncertainty and uncontrollability.

## Hope and Labor

'Hope' and 'Labor' are common words in revolutionary circles (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 93-149; Mouffe 2005, 8-34). Those words are important because they display central assumptions.

Hoping means believing that other worlds are possible. Otherwise, we are condemned to metaphysical nihilism, with no outcome different from passive attitudes and sadness. People fighting against poverty, economic turmoil, lack of opportunities, discrimination, etc., cannot give up. That implies that changing the world requires labor. ‘If you are willing to do the work, everything is possible,’ goes the commonly shared saying among representatives of contemporary progressiveness and old-fashioned militant world-improvers (Sloterdijk 2014, 440-446; Badiou 2012, 7-11; Autesserre 2021, 1-4). The ‘Cause’ is worthy. Even death is beautiful and heroic if change is possible. The future, it is said in that spirit, is grounded on the newfound revolutionary morality and aspirations of those giving their lives to reach the promises of other lands. The idea is relatively simple and encouraging: new times require hard work and focused people, workers striving to find better times.

That consideration represents an additional topic regarding traditional revolutionary idealism in Latin America. Revolution entails practicalities: real changes unfolding as reforms. The historical path to be traversed before witnessing change demands efforts to transform the actual design of things – i.e., the State and its regulations, public policies and related institutions, economic measures, and political procedures (Arendt 1965, 115-120).

Let us explain ourselves. It is said that revolutions arise from their grassroots base: people’s desires and attitudes – i.e., the power of ordinary citizens supporting collective initiatives to improve living material conditions and to struggle against conflict (Autesserre 2021, 18-19). Even so, revolutionaries typically prioritize political ideas over human expectations and desires. It is said that revolution entails more than the eagerness for the new. The traditional thesis is that revolution pushes history because it concerns social conflicts –e.g., class clashes, economic difficulties, political disagreements, and violence. Antagonism is the engine of revolution at the heart of the social-historical dynamic that shapes realities. For that reason, revolutionaries have relied on their ability to discern the appropriate conditions for revolution and to provoke action through ideological means and political leadership (Arendt 1965, 130-140; Negri 2003, 91-102).

But changing implies doing things. It is a curious situation. At some point, revolutionaries have to become pragmatic and face the realities of governing and administering the world. Various questions arise in that context.

How can we recognize the threshold between the thunder that shakes history and the need to focus on the agreements and negotiations required to support a government capable of overcoming the obstacles to achieving the promised transformations? Are we passive spectators of the facts that express change and mere beneficiaries of the revolution’s gifts? Do we have to wait for revolts before intentionally implementing changes? Do we need the system to change the system?

On the contrary, can we force realities to change? Where does everything begin: with uprisings, or with rationally established goals? Is everything beginning to change because of the politically organized masses, led by the leaders –i.e., those waiting to play an irruptive role in the State? The revolutionary’s motto is well-known: “I want to affect people like a clap of thunder to inflame their minds with the breadth of my vision” (Evans 2015, 57). What risks can those who want change and listen to those who claim to bring it to reality face? Is violence necessarily involved? Is authority

plainly realized towards those who understand and accept (and also towards those who do not understand and accept) the price for reaching real changes? Do we all need the voice and insights of the illustrated revolutionaries “who know what to do”?

Suppose we seek to promote change rather than waiting for historical forces to develop before transforming reality. In that case, it is necessary to begin by recognizing that antagonisms lie at the root of history and of leadership's role in summoning them (Traverso 2021, 32-46; Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, 2-19). There lies a difficulty. Revolution is supposed to be the event in which change becomes real. How does revolution happen? It is not easy to know. There are diverse factors at play. Revolution concerns more than material forces. It involves human drives. Turmoil, stress, dissatisfaction, weariness, etc.: people must be pushed to the point of desperation before change becomes real. Indeed, the history of people's pressures and frustrations, and their capacity to effect change, has been a controversial theme in Latin America for decades (Carozza, 2003; Bauman, 2007; Wienpahl, 1979; Franzt, 2018; Nail, 2019; Woods and Rose, 2019).

Thinking about that is relevant because history is usually understood as the context in which collective struggles occur, thereby giving rise to dynamics of transformation. It is not unusual to find revolutionaries constantly debating whether it is possible to reach the historical moment at which measures can be deliberately taken, or whether history must proceed through its ongoing present – i.e., its non-humanly controlled rhythm (Traverso 2021, 26-30). That particular ambivalence links the notions of revolution and reform.

What are *the locomotives of history*: the human will to change or the necessity to do it coming from the forces of reality? If that is accepted, commitment, detachment, and fidelity to change can only be measured by the disposition to risk everything in the name of historical innovation. In that understanding, we are considered individuals of little importance. Interiority, rationality, desires, and expectations are despicable because they merely display selfishness and egoistic means of making a living and doing business. In contrast, non-humanly determined historical coordinates promote differences. Considering revolution as an engine of change beyond human intentionality has been ritualistically invoked by those strongly biased toward materialist viewpoints. No obstacle can resist the inexorable advance of time. Revolution as an engine refers to the idea that history runs expanding itself (Traverso 2021, 33-43).

Challenging reality requires more than that, although. If something is particularly compelling about the concept of revolution, it is the constant reference to trust in what humans can do with their hands. Revolution ambiguously refers to both the historical event of change and the human will to change (Negt, 2004; Sanders, 2023, 2025; Jullien, 2004).

One image helps summarise that thought.

Humans and history. We have commented on a compelling contention between those extremes. Is it changing the product of historical causality? Is it changing a human enterprise? Again, the debate between necessity and liberty is at play. Revolution is the force of change. However, it remains unclear whether change results from human endeavors amid historical antagonisms. That represents a profound ambiguity. It is the tension between the idea that history exceeds us and the idea that

we can cultivate our garden here on Earth. Mental sanity, emotional saneness, and quotidian well-being are at play in there, for sure.

A non-human world is there, nevertheless. Reality always stands limitless beyond us. It is fierce and uncontrollable. Reality unfolds on the side of its open history. Another way to put it is that reality lies on the side of the infinite scenario of becoming differently. It is the monstrous return of the uncontrollable (Rosa 2020, 110-116; Badiou 2012, 50-52).

In the middle of that, the question is: How can we sustain the idea of the revolutionary determination to change reality and the theme of a world in reform by the hands of resolute humans? There is no answer to that classical question. Or there is no alternative to choosing between the imperative revolutionary's idea of risking everything to change and the reformist trust that humans can work to build a future for themselves.

## BECOMING DIFFERENTLY

We have considered revolution and reform as concepts related to the problem of change in reality. In the following, we argue that an alternative to that dichotomy exists. It is the conceptual attention-structuring processes of collective agency and communitarian endeavors that produce a livable world, grounded in awareness of uncertainty and becoming. Some conceptual steps are needed to explore that possibility. The following pages are dedicated to those steps in the context of Latin American debates about emancipation and social struggles.

The late early 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of triumphant positivism, marked by ideas of justice and equality: times when it was believed that history progresses from backwardness to development through human intervention in reality and the insistence on making real utopias (Hobsbawm, 2016, 1973, 2011, 2007; Reid, 2020, 179-188).

In that Latin American scenario, a *cul-de-sac emerges* between the promises of change by populist revolutionaries and the reformist response, driven by the desire for greater purchasing power, stable business conditions, and technically (not ideologically) qualified management of the State. Dreams contrasted with global dilemmas. It is the Left's declaration of the real opportunities to change societies in the name of common citizens against the Centrists, and the Right's pledge to slash problems and liberate the spirit of development (Reid 2020, 307-315).

Are there alternatives to consider in light of the times in which we live? The following is our central thesis:

Truly, civilized and modern humans have acquired the power to do as they please without having to chant and drum to high powers. Apparently, there is no need for divine aid. Humans have carried out what they set out to do, translating their ideas, values, and plans into action. Even more, trust in the power of human adaptability and change is the basic assumption of progress. We have accepted that belief does not secure anything, in any case. There is no God. There is no Destiny. We place great confidence in human capabilities to address uncertainty. That is not enough, nevertheless. The torments of freedom imply more than reliance on what humans can do. Something has changed in the recent image of reality. The fact is that living is not

just about what humans want. It is not merely about what they can do. At the same time, living is not about surrendering to external movements and forces. The faith in human rationality and efficacy is in crisis. It has had a high price: gods and demons have changed names and still kept humans on the run with restlessness, vague expectations, psychological complications, and an insatiable need for pills, alcohol, drugs, food, social networks, money, properties, and a large array of neuroses. That situation underscores a critical point: the contemporary challenge is to consider how to live in a reality in constant motion and to learn to adapt to and navigate it. Being and motion have replaced the laws of history, the presence of supernatural beings that gently sustain us, and the arrogance of believing that we can make a home as we have planned and dreamed (Sloterdijk 2020, 133-145; Hobsbawm 1973, 95-100; Jung 1964, 70-71).

In the present, we live under the impression that reality changes through open dynamics –i.e., the ontology of motion (Nail, 2019, 63-75). That premise is essential in thinking about new ethics and politics. If it makes sense to work on reality, trying to make sense of it and promoting a sense of direction and purpose, it is by undertaking more modest collective endeavors to build futures. Humans are arrogant apes. The myth of human exceptionalism has produced terrible children: poverty, climate change, ecological amnesia, authoritarianism... (Webb, 2025, pp. 1-10; Sloterdijk, 2025, pp. 34-42). The alternative lies in introducing change and movement into the ideas of efficacy and agency. Ontological forces are usually invoked by those who believe that reality is uncontrollable yet manageable. That is a contemporary idea, repeated by those who hold that reality is productively making its own being.

Because of the relationship between motion and reality, it is not clear whether we will enjoy the revolutionary promises of the coming days or the fruits of reforms promoted in the name of the human will to make dreams real. True, reality is uncontrollable. We currently can accept that. In any case, we cannot simply assert we are passive beings. The contemporary recognition of ambiguity is everywhere. It is a more powerful ambiguity than that expressed in the contrast between revolutionaries and reformists. We can work on realities, but only to a limited extent and always at the mercy of uncertainty. We live at the edge of uncertainties, trying our best. That is all. The point is that we can do so in recognition that any effort to make sense of reality and find reasons to get up in the mornings nevertheless represents an engagement with collective attempts. No one can live by their own account. If there is something remarkable in the traditional thought of revolution and reform, it is the idea that it is impossible to make sense of reality and work in the name of the future through individual initiatives alone.

## **The Social Construction of Reality**

The idea that facing reality is a collective endeavor shapes differently the ways in which we can think about the challenges of living.

Perhaps the day of accepting that reality is not the container of things, but the environment of events produced by the movement of highly interconnected living beings, is coming. Technically, the word ‘Reality’ refers to an ontological category. That is to say, reality is the realm of events and existences in which multiplicities constantly interact in the process of becoming something else. Following a

contemporary tradition, it is possible to affirm that reality is about living beings expressing motion within processes and structures disclosed by their actions: it is a unified yet multidimensional scenario of behaviors, forces, and dispositions that take concrete form and unfold in time (Nail 2018, 2018a, 2019, 2022, 2024, 2025).

Does reality randomly present itself without any prefigured beginning or predetermined end? Restricting individuals to their concrete constituent conditions leads us to presume that pre-given rules and mechanisms determine reality. Fate, historical linear progression, passiveness: well-known consequences can come if that assertion is accepted (Badiou, 2000; Hossenfelder & Palmer, 2020; Beck, 2021).

On the other hand, saying that reality is not linear and predictable reproduces a more disturbing thesis: reality is uncontrollable (Nail, 2018a, 2019). Conceiving of ourselves as living on the edge of chaos can make us feel more vulnerable than assuming we exist in a mechanistically guided one. An existential question arises here. How can we make plans if everything will undoubtedly change?

As we have pointed out, a romantic defense of human freedom is at play in debates about revolution. In that context, reality is usually understood as the scenario in which individuals create networks of movement and interaction (culture) that transform it in accordance with plans and aims. Of course, recognizing choice as an essential element of the individual's life does not mean reality is not deeply involved in the causal constitution of human lives. There is freedom. But reality is also a factor to be considered. That traditional (Kantian) solution has recently been reinterpreted in contemporary terms. This is the point: there are alternative ways of understanding those determinations than by relying on the notions of restraint, external coercion, and willpower. Reality is currently understood as an emergent entity in which humans produce and change their environment through metabolic processes that are strongly linked to the forces and other living beings of the world (Giddens and Sutton 2021, 69-108; Ramalingan 2013, 133-144; Lawler et al., 2015, 1-17). To put it more traditionally, the living creates a world through the realization of their constant actions and constructive forces without becoming separate from the world in which they participate (Badiou 2012, 39-52; Traverso 2021, 52-57; Hawkins 2021, 29-38).

## **Living with Uncertainty**

The implications of that image of thought are amazingly compelling. Reality can be considered mechanistically objective and ruled, but meaningless. It is an old conception. People, elementary particles, natural forces, planets, animals, rivers, land, etc., are real. They do not respond to transcendental inquiries. They exist indifferently to us because natural forces are inevitably obedient to causality (Gadamer 2016, 3-12).

Contrastingly, reality can be understood in relation to the problem of human order and the meaning of existence. We can accept that reality exists independently of us. Simultaneously, it can be asserted that humans have invented a world to make sense of what we do here (Grondin 1993, 137-142).

Finally, there is no world, no order, and no meaning. This is a radical assertion. There is no consistent reality. Instead, reality involves multiplicities that interact, produce changing environments, and combine real resources and collective agency (Elder-Vass 2010, 40-62).

Revolutionaries would happily say: If this world is meaningless, let us imagine and create significant realities. It does not matter if those creations respond only to human needs. What matters is that humans are the creators of the reasons for living and fighting. Moreover, if there is no cohesion at the bottom of reality, that fact only concerns the level of the simplest universe's forces and elements. Love, happiness, democracy, liberty, equality, justice, etc., are human issues not related to the cosmos but to the human pursuit of sense. In that sense, more than teleological visions of history, the concept of revolution permeates illusions of salvation and of achieving a promised land (Traverso 2021, 91-101; Žižek 2008, 171-227).

We have already stressed it. The salvific meaning of revolution is a salient feature of an old-fashioned Latin American tradition. From the 19th century onward, thinking about revolution raises questions about historical, social, and political ruptures, and about the possibility of establishing new powers through the people's political endeavor to live sovereignly.

Reform is the concept of a more nuanced trust in the human will to power. That is to say that the power of changing reality does not belong to a redemptive personage but to the institutional roles of societies producing their own rules and exerting action in the world. In any case, trust in human capacities remains. It is just adjusted to the confidence in social institutions (González et al, 2025).

The history of Latin American attempts at emancipation through revolution and reform is varied and influenced by geographical factors. Despite differences in concepts and ideologies, revolutions and reforms have often been portrayed as means for people to strive toward a better future. In that sense, revolutions express traditional eschatological expectations: salvation is possible. That must not happen in other metaphysical worlds. We have to be rescued here. Joyfully living is possible! At least, that has been the constant promise made by the emissaries of change (Reid 2010, 179-185).

Reformists are less prone to grandioseness. They trust in human capabilities. However, they can acknowledge that those capabilities are limited, biased, dependent on available data, and always subject to political debates (Koselleck 2004, 43-57; Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 133-145). Reformist options constitute a paradigm for advancing mainstream economic and social development grounded in principles of social justice, equity, and self-reliance (Kotari, 2019). In this way, pursuing change involves a combination of political programs, social movements, and continually improved State institutions (Mitlin, 2007; Maldonado-Villalpando, 2022). Beyond producing historical turning points toward progress, reforms can be understood as calls to promote development at the center of societies differently constructed. Rethinking revolution in the name of reformist development reveals that the struggle to rebuild realities progressively does not create new futures (Traverso 2021, 356-360).

## WORLDCHANGERS

There are still radicals. Some believe change is possible through leadership. Moreover, they believe that viable ways of living will be available to us in the future if individual formulas are adopted. As we have said, the old-fashioned notion of revolution rests on the idea that better days are achieved through organized political

struggles to attain power. From that viewpoint, it is said that revolution transforms explosive desires to change (revolts) into organized endeavors to modify history consciously –all under the influence of a centered political representative of the so-called ‘People’s will’ (Traverso 2021, 79-84).

We may want something better to happen. We may wish that the promises of progress and development finally materialize. We can dream that injustice, violence, exclusion, etc., can be defeated. That does not mean we want something different, nevertheless. Wanting something better can be the same as resignedly wanting changes to an unchallenged existential framework. Simply put, the box we live in stays the same, even if the things we want move inside it.

That preoccupation can also be described using actual terms. Remember, reformist fears of radical change. What we currently have could be better. Politics and economy: things can be improved. In democracies, social progress undoubtedly presents challenges. Democracy is the more desirable form of governance, nevertheless. In contrast to despotism, dictatorship, and authoritarianism, democracy is the least problematic form of governance (Fukuyama, 2022).

A radically different picture can be drawn from the viewpoint of those who regret gestures of submissiveness to reality as it is. Poverty, injustice, exclusion, violence, and corruption are challenges that require structural change (Quijano, 1989, 2000). That is, improvements in democratic structures are not sufficient.

In Latin America, irreverent vocabulary is well known: “Change the system.” In that regard, revolution concerns the promise of universal emancipation, not reforms disguised as dramatic performances of revolution that express themselves as ephemeral transgressions within unchanged coordinates.

The promises of revolution express radical preoccupations. Is democracy the unique form in which any desire for change can be summoned? Are other worlds possible? Can we imagine new possibilities of existence? Can we dream of renovated human beings? Those traditional questions in Latin America insistently reveal something worth contemplating: a profound ambivalence that extremist political figures have recently exploited.

## FREEDOM

The democratic West has traditionally set up strong assumptions. Freedom is essential. It is the freedom to own property. It is the freedom of enterprise and the freedom to grow rich. The workers’ efforts to make a living are based on all other indispensable freedoms: freedom of having an individual picture of the world, freedom of deciding on our bodies, freedom of believing in diverse transcendental beings, freedom of using language and communicating differently, freedom of identifying with colorful brands, freedom of using ideological varieties, etc. Political and economic amendments may be warranted given the current complex situation. Nothing is perfect. We have faced diverse challenges, and there are ideas for better futures. Respect, dignity, inclusion, justice, equality, recognition, and related principles are organizing coordinates for sustaining our optimistic endeavors to build desirable societies (Fleurbaey *et al.*, 2018; Fukuyama, 2022).

Reasons for hope contrast with realities. It seems that democratic promises have remained mere pretensions. That is all. What is the current scenario in which we live? We live in troubled times. Climate change, economic uncertainty, newly emergent authoritarian styles, migration, global criminal markets, inhumane and unsustainable urbanization, emotional weariness, widespread corruption, lack of opportunities, and the expansion of pervasive digital surveillance are among the contemporary issues that remain openly unanswered. Supposedly, anyone can be happy and prosperous, rationally and emotionally guided by scientific reasoning, able to make data-based decisions, sympathetic, progressively open to others, etc. Unfortunately, that is partially untrue (Bauman, 1998; Tilly et al., 2019). “What really remains of the great ideological machinery of freedom, human rights, the West, and its values? (Badiou, 2010: 4). There is no need to qualify that interrogation as pessimistic. No judgments. No moralizing. At least for a moment, let us accept the following premise: the idea of a horizontal new ruling class capable of transforming the economic bases by socializing the means of production was a historical failure. A proletarian class = The Party = Power: a system without hierarchies did not become real. Ironically, it became its opposite: dynamic, joyful struggles turned into organs of centralized, bureaucratic power that tended to produce highly authoritarian regimes and personages (Traverso 2021, 104-108).

Yet it is also true that democracy is far from capable of responding to the next generation of global and local challenges. The government of persons and the administration of things are political idealizations of State functions, crystallized as institutional apparatuses that cannot resolve everything. Again, injustice, poverty, violence, exclusion, illness, etc., are always around the corner, and we do not know how to deal with those things completely. At best, we have made only partial adjustments, contingent on certain conditions (Bauman, 2007; Badiou, 2010).

The effect of that ambivalence is currently a matter of political motivation leading to conservative extremes: the romantic promises of change have failed. Institutions are limited by procedural tools that take time to produce visible results. Meanwhile, people struggle every day. All they need is a living and security to enjoy simple things (going to a restaurant, taking a bus, walking down the street, etc.). If having those things involves strong measures (and strongmen), well, people seem to welcome them (Reid, 2026).

## CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

A nostalgic aspiration is at the bottom of the so-called 'Communist Hypothesis.' It is usually hesitantly murmured as a protest against resignation. There are other realities. Current times are about things that only exhaust some possibilities. That idea must be situated between the aspired exceptional coordinates. The concept of other realities should be expressed in different terms, depending on the vocabulary of the imagination. A higher level of thought about revolution does not restrict itself to a subjective picture of a better world. Even if that picture concerns collective imagination, the idea of other realities is broader, resting on an ontological assumption: the plurality of realities in becoming exceeds the imagined human worlds. How many

possibilities of being there are out there? We cannot conceive of all those possibilities because we are limited beings, thinking emotionally about the empirical materials and phenomenological experiences we encounter, framed by our sociohistorical constitution and cognitive design (Gadamer 2014, 278-387).

Using another vocabulary can be useful here. Revolutions have partially failed. The selfish exploitation of natural resources and the human exploitation of everything that can satisfy our ambitions and quotidian needs are shared experiences. We are consuming this world. Step by step, we are paying the price of that boundless consumption. We are aware of that. Cities are crowded places without options for all. You need money, property, access to information, education, financial support, security, political rights, and other resources to have a place in contemporary metropolises. Without those privileges, you can become an outcast (Bauman, 2013; Dlamini & Stienen, 2022). Working is difficult. You can work all day and realize that you need more. Ultimately, you can feel inadequate, exhausted, unappreciated, and depressed (Standing, 2011; Tan, 2018).

Sociality is a burden. You can meet people to present yourself as valuable, relevant, and meaningful, yet end up with nothing more than frustration, because you recognize that everyone is making similar efforts with similar outcomes: anonymity, weariness, and tiredness. It is worse if you are at the center of digital media requirements (Ehrenberg, 2010).

There is more than social concerns. Poverty and inequality are deeper social concerns. The problem is that those issues represent diverse challenges. People need opportunities and access to improved living conditions (housing, healthcare, education, public services, etc.). In that sense, there is too much to do (Sanders, 2025). Poverty and inequality open the door to violence and mistreatment, among other things (Walker, 2013; Helmke & Levitsky, 2006). Think about migrants as an example of that (Vogt, 2018).

Inequality and poverty go hand in hand with exclusion, environmental sustainability and climate change, global governance and authoritarianism, armed conflicts and violence, urbanization and rural development, land tenure, agrarian change, etc. (Kotari, 2019; Veltmeyer & Delgado, 2018).

Revolutions seem to have failed. Reforms are insufficiently performed. Historical change has not happened. The State and its institutions do what they can, indeed. But the problems we face surpassed them.

Meanwhile, the burden of living is there. The feeling of failure can become a reason to fight. We can always endorse the idea that reality, as it is, does not represent what it could be. We must learn from our past mistakes and recognize that considering open scenarios of being is worthwhile. It is also possible to engage with the idea of avoidance. Is it not preferable to go into screens, video games, unlimited consumption, drugs, alcohol, etc., than to take care of a reality full of problems and deception? In that picture, detachment seems to be a good idea. (Illouz, 2008; 2007; 2012; 2021)

## UNDERSTANDING EXISTENTIAL POSSIBILITIES

Change can be characterized by the notion of the possible rather than by radical historical events and human hopes. In this way, we refer to the ruptures of the regular

order of things, irreducible to the current State, leadership, and ideologically organized social movements. That conceptual gesture helps develop the idea that change involves novelties that are neither directly explainable by the actual State of affairs nor the result of human will. Instead, change can be understood as the realization of possibilities through complex causal processes.

Throughout Latin American history, movements for collective mobilization and social organization have arisen, persisted, and disappeared in response to inherently diverse forces (Tilly et al., 2019). Mobilization and social movements involve more than ideological commitments. They involve collective action in specific locations over a certain period, expressing multiple conflicts about the world as it is and as it is desired to be in the present and future. Changing the world: the interplay between material factors (at local and global levels), the strategic action of organized communities, and the spontaneous emergence of people's disagreements and concerns (Paschel 2016, 221-223).

That contemporary comprehension of what change entails is an alternative image of thought because it highlights that change arises from diverse entities (e.g., mobilization, social movements, institutional procedures, technical plans, science, opinion, economy, etc.) that create new possibilities through mutual interaction. Change is not about directly translating human motifs into action. It is not the direct effect of the State designations. It is an emergent property grounded in the dynamics of living beings trying to live as well as possible. Technically speaking, change becomes reality through the causal power of social structuration processes (Elder-Vass 2010, 192-202).

That thesis refers to an ongoing debate over whether change arises from inherent forces within unified realities or from possibilities within infinite realities. This debate takes place at the heart of the philosophy of the event and of the ontology of multiplicities and becoming (Crockett, 2013). In that scenario, change refers to the potential of alternative ways of being brought about by differential processes and forces that shape multiple modes of existence over time.

At that point in the reasoning, everything is thought differently –even the vocabulary at play is transformed:

Humans do not command reality. Instead, we navigate multiplicities and face events that shape reality. We have a place within it, but as actors with limited powers and interconnected with other living beings. While we may not lose complete control over history, we are no more than agents influenced by those around us, highly dependent on them, and on how well they do in their lives. The complex network of living beings surrounding us shapes and impacts our actions and possibilities. We play a role in this process. Still, we must also recognize that our experiences are part of a larger dynamic that requires a qualified understanding of reality and contextualization of the proximities and relations that constitute the world in which we live. It is contingency within limits -to use an alternative vocabulary: social structures (e.g., class differentiation) distribute material resources (e.g., economic means) but also determine capabilities by framing individuals' ability to pursue their interests. From consent to resignation: any intentional attempt to promote change clashes with real conditions that enable (or not) action (Chibber 2022, 167-170).

Adding the idea that those conditions are related to the dynamic becoming of reality complements the recognition that the world resists agency as it is structured beyond human desires.

When these assertions are introduced, the concept of change has a new meaning. Social movements and mobilization are believed to express collective resolutions and identity formation processes that create livable environments in a *changing reality*. Reality does not take human forms. It is not obedient. Humans can do things. But limitedly. And always through collective engagements. In other words, change refers to a complex conceptual operation whereby collective ensembles can occur as historical becomings, involving differentiated interactions among capable beings that interfere with one another and with facts.

## EFFICACY

How can we understand that living beings are causally efficacious at promoting stable environments and triggering changes? Firstly, engaging in a radical conceptual maneuver regarding the notion of reality is essential.

It is well known that living beings can be understood as entities unfolding capabilities. Living beings are capable creatures. They are what they do. Considering living beings as capable entities is equivalent to treating them as qualified by their actions. Forest, banks, molecules, animals, humans, institutions, the State, etc.: all living beings are precisely what they do. In that sense, living beings are causally efficacious (Deleuze, 1988; Hardt, 1993 and 2015).

Secondly, thinking about the relational nature of the real is fundamental. Living beings are efficacious in the sense that they can undergo affection. They are active. However, living beings are also passive to the extent that they can endure actions done to them. Living beings mutually affect each other. Communities are defined in that precise sense. They are constituted by structuring processes arising from interactive dynamics (Deleuze 1990, 191-255; Wienpahl, 1979: 72-88).

An additional commentary is vital here. Multiplicities produce multiplicities. Within a relational ontology, there is no place for an assertion of the existence of One Thing for everything else. All living beings are composites of complex components, made simultaneously from complex elements. Objects, molecules, atoms, elementary particles, institutions, language, humans, plants, mountains, rivers, animal communities, fungi, etc. All of them are communities characterized by agency (Elder-Vass 2010, 87-113; 144-167).

If it is accepted that relational ontology, descriptions must replace substantive assertions. You do not say how things are (or must be). You describe how things behave, narrate their internal dynamics, and how they affect others through the links they constantly form. Ultimately, everything is about describing agency and habits in their becoming (Elder-Vass 2012, 37-73).

Finally, what is change? Reality can be understood as a scenario in which complex multiplicities are mutually inseparable, producing compositions that are open to heterogeneous and divergent links. That is the image of an intensely changing friendship at the bottom of the real, which can be described at different levels of

interaction (Badiou 2010, 244-246; Elder-Vass 2010, 18-22). We have already said that describing multiplicities involves narrating their capacity to act and produce behavioral patterns. But describing living beings is also about their capacity to transform. That is to say, assemblages of relations among living beings can vary due to modifications at the levels of their agency and composition (Elder-Vass 2010, 26-27).

Saying that by a conceptual image: Understanding multiplicities involves describing their patterned influences and collectively promoting changes. That idea implies that reality can be represented at different stages of stabilization and transformation, at which living beings realize diverse becomings. From that viewpoint, reality is considered to be made by powerful beings actively acting within more and less striated plateaus, moving according to their internal dynamics that express diverse causal mechanisms –i.e., levels of ontological strata and multiple determination (Elder-Vass 2010, 48-53).

Saying that is interesting for three particular reasons: First, in the context of relational ontologies, reality entails interactions among capable beings that give rise to highly differentiated structures through behavioral repetition. The role of habits is to promote stabilization. In relational ontologies, reality is understood as a complex network of interactions among capable beings, including individuals, societies, and ecosystems. Each entity in this network is not treated as isolated. Rather, it is defined by its relationships with others. This framework posits that, through repeated behaviors—what we might call habits—these beings form highly differentiated structures. These structures include social norms, economic systems, ecological patterns, or personal identities. Habits play a crucial role in stabilizing these structures. By repeating certain behaviors, entities help maintain and reinforce the networks they constitute. This stabilization through habit is essential because it provides predictability and order. It enables systems to function smoothly and efficiently, reducing chaos and unpredictability (Vass-Elder 2010, 19-21; Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 3-25).

Second, new things can be explained by describing contingencies. What does that mean? We have centered our argument on the idea that individual exchanges can configure organized communities through reciprocal determination. In other words, societies are not just aggregates of individuals without connections. They are communities of interactive agents that endorse meaning and rules through mutual determination (Elder-Vass 2010, 54-56).

And third, a profound problem lies at the heart of that idea: the concept of reality is characterized by organic movements involving living entities and events of change that interact within creative processes open to contingency. Multiplicities can determine themselves and return to themselves, producing themselves through agency and interaction. Whenever multiplicities move away from themselves, they actualize their becoming. Those actualizations can be described as living trajectories. These trajectories are shaped by differences in life that evolve over time and across space. This constant becoming of differences shapes reality, creating a dynamic whole we usually identify as living entities that struggle to navigate turbulent environments and adapt to changing circumstances. Each difference expresses a distinguishable entity's power to overcome challenges by differing in space and time – i.e., potency (Hard, 1993, 2015).

Reality is not a box. It is not a preformed, immobile theatre with fixed dimensions. Reality is not a fixed place magically created from nothing in which events occur, and individuals move. On the contrary, reality can be understood as an emergent scenario in which capable beings act upon other creatures, producing dynamic relations across layers, stimulated by activities and movements (Elder-Vass 2010, 20-26).

## CONCLUDING POINTS

The concepts of revolution and reform have a long history throughout the Twentieth Century. They are traditional notions strongly associated with romantic beliefs about human capabilities and the possibilities of action.

That notion should be challenged. We are not sure whether change is directly promoted by massive strikes organized by political will and institutional mechanisms. Our reflection assumes that debate can be reconsidered only if the premises and vocabulary are interrogated.

There is an alternative to the traditional conceptual ambiguity between revolution and reform. That alternative holds that reality constrains the situations in which living beings can openly act in the name of collectively engaging possibilities. Of course, limits always materialize as finite possibilities for action, constrained by actual boundaries. However, those boundaries change. How? Novelties emerge from collective efforts to respond to a given situation. Organization is a function of the living. Change is involved there. Not as a product of the human will. It is an event. Put differently, oriented-problem responses to reality are gestures grounded in capable beings that constantly navigate facts and options. That is a different image from which some conclusions can be drawn.

## Navigating Reality

‘You need to change minds and behaviors to change things.’ In the spirit of that expectation, changing realities is an imperative that stands between what we should and what we must do. Changes cannot be imposed. Changes are a matter of politics, involving debates, backlash, and turmoil, in that constitutive human powers are the legitimate cause of the institutional and cultural coordinates that frame societies and support transitions in what people desire, believe, and do. Within that view, change typically represents a decision-making space in which intense political interests are developed to fulfill ideological imperatives and visions of the future articulated by visionaries, leaders, and party commanders.

The extreme opposite of that idea is the assumption that change arises from realities of becoming and from the flexible responses of capable beings navigating uncertainty.

Rather than claiming that we are the causes of change, it can be assured that we live in realities whose forces constantly change us. Reality continually shapes environments and affects living beings. Indeed, it is possible to navigate reality but not control it. In that sense, change is a matter of possibilities involving natural forces and

dynamics that constantly interact with living beings' actions yet remain independent of human motives and goals.

### **Interdependency of the Living**

The concepts of revolution and reform have long been central to contemporary theoretical debates, significantly shaping Latin American discussions of liberty and emancipation (Negt, 2004; Cusset, 2008; Chilcote, 2008; Meiksins, 2002). Those debates are open to arguments that require development in light of new considerations. Latin America's Left and Progressive wings have been actively calling for renewed discussions of possibilities for State governance, cultural options, and alternative understandings of the social movements' roles (Paschel, 2016). In the recent decade, Latin America has undergone intense commotion and agitation around the notions of development, social change, the political role of humans, and the cultural frame of human behaviors in the context of complicated facts: migration, identity transformations, the effect of the media in the social dynamics, nationalisms, etc. (Calderon & Castells, 2020).

In that picture, alternative interpretations of reality and communities involve a strong correspondence between the recent idea of the ontological interdependency of the living and the concept of change. We place our arguments at the heart of that picture.

What is the image of thought at play in the context of a relational ontology? Briefly, what is important is the assumption that change arises from collective dynamics and experimentation with possibilities. In this way, change can be understood as referring to complex and diverse realities that require entirely creative human development to manage active scenarios of interdependence without renouncing contemplation of future projects. There is something important at stake. It is the idea that social structures have causal powers that affect freely capable beings who can collectively transform their surroundings. Alternative methodological means are required to describe and understand that. If one thinks that reality is messy and that all living beings face it by acting together, the tools for comprehending it raise other questions, also putting at stake a new ethics.

### **Uncontrollable Reality**

One may metaphorically consider the standing wave in front of a rock in a white river: "The water molecules making up the wave change instant by instant, but the wave persists as long as the rock is there and the waters flow" (Elder-Vass 2010, 36).

Let us use an additional image:

The fish that released the bubbles looks like a carp, though its tail is not red, like a perch, though there is no pattern on its scales, like a snake fish, though there are no spots on its head, like a bream, though its gills have no bristles... It must be the transformed monkey himself (Gearin, 2025).

The living is, at the bottom, formless. It expresses the risk and shadows of unknown possibilities. Becoming-like figures represent scenarios for ambiguities when shapeshifting processes are at play. Unpleasantness, disagreeableness, dreadfulness, uncertainty: those are features associated with figures, personages, and characters that trigger a particularly compelling consideration. Beyond the prescriptions of everyday normalcy, reality displays free forms: existential compositions that exceed intention and judgment – i.e., the ways we divide and categorize the world (Han 2025, 13-24; Kahneman 2012, 196-254).

Multiplicities can exist because they include, exclude, or alter the roles of their internal components through differentiation. By doing that, multiplicities can exist more or less in the same form. However, they can also experiment with changes. That is to say, multiplicities undergo structural alterations within the limits of their structuration.

Is it possible to reframe causal forces as human will and efforts to build a world? Responding positively to that question depends on believing that humans are individually causally effective agents. It is a belief reproducing a problematic assumption. That is, the idea that reality can be reduced to the human will of power.

One of the most critical defects of that idea is that it suggests changes occur so that reality's oppositional images can be differentiated between what a thing was and what it is currently. Where do those initial forces come from? What is the nature of those forces? Do they respond to a particular will? Do they exhibit goals and pretensions? But how? And why? Attributing causal powers to humans reproduces a reductionist belief that, at some fundamental level, all living beings and events can be explained by a generic causality grounded in deterministic forces.

Considering that reality can be changed by human will is simplistic. It is not enough to desire futures: one must enact them in real life. On the other hand, it is also an oversimplification to say that we are at the mercy of external causes. Living beings play a role in what happens, even when compelled to obey the rules of reality.

In contrast, debates on contemporary relational ontology consistently avoid notions of causality and human will, instead attributing causal powers to individual entities (Braidotti 2011, 239-245; Elder-Vass 2010, 64-65). In that way, the problem concerns how reality changes through nuanced behavioral dynamics and existential possibilities associated with complex assemblages and multiplicities. This means that changing realities can be understood by describing capable living beings that experiment with connections, undergo internal modifications, navigate environmental fluctuations, and create organizational opportunities.

At the bottom, this is the same as considering reality through dynamic structures and adaptive systems that experiment with renovations and creations. In that sense, it is unnecessary to presume something more real than the real is at the bottom of everything. It is equally inadequate to assume that some parts of the real have more powers than other parts of it. Why should human beings be considered to have more capabilities than animals, plants, atoms, or mountains? All versions of eliminative reductionism must justify the claim *that some entities at some levels of a multi-level structure have more causal effectiveness than others*. Something complicated to do, indeed.

So, what is reality? Why does reality change? What is the place of living there?

The point here is that describing the components and performative relations of the real represents an alternative way of responding to that question. When you tell the living story of the members (humans and non-humans) of the real and how they produce connections, you have obtained your desired explanation as a form of a description of properties, entities, and activities working at multi-levels of complex assemblages –i.e., the redescription principle (Elder-Vass 2010, 50-60).

Revolution and reform are old Latin American ideas. Ideas that are problematic because they are tied to a rescue mission. Rejecting traditional romantic standpoints and conservative, materialistic viewpoints is the premise of an alternative understanding: reality operates in complex ways. It concerns the mechanisms, activities, processes, and actions that produce the real, not the leadership of a savior, nor the State paradise where all things are regulated. The same can be said about change. Changing is more challenging to understand because it compromises the complex causal powers of diverse actors. In that context, it makes sense to believe that those who promise changes through their actions and purposes are simply liars. They do not have that power on their own. And those who supported them neither.

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