

69,280 individuals killed or disappeared according to a complex calculation offered by Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2003. There are no methods apparent for how the figure of X gets resolved, X gets situated and refuses to fit. Pleasantines gone, the violence of X is sometimes necessary and always situational. It stands indirectly proportional to

# punk and revolution

7 more  
interpretations  
of peruvian  
reality

the concrete violence of the state's God-like image and the abstract violence of the militant that promises utopia will follow from revolutionary tyranny. Stripped of all they are, the actors that operate with X patch a number to their black jackets and scream aloud, pushing back and forth, smashing in to various no-futures, yes-futures, and maybe-futures.  $X = 3,443, 514$ .

shane greene

punk  
and  
revolution

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The very word revolution, in this America  
of small revolutions, lends itself to a lot of error.

*José Carlos Mariátegui*

Hay que destruir para volver a construir.

*Narcosis*

dedicated to x

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## warning!

My work has developed as Nietzsche would have wished, for he did not love authors who strained after the intentional, deliberate production of a book, but rather those whose thoughts formed a book spontaneously and without premeditation. Many projects for books occur to me as I lie awake, but I know beforehand that I shall carry out only those to which I am summoned by an imperious force.

*José Carlos Mariátegui*

I bring together in this book seven Interpretations concerning some essential aspects of punk and revolution within what José Carlos Mariátegui once called Peruvian reality. Anyone dumb enough to think he meant it to refer to the nation-state as a “unit of analysis,” or to attach the adjective “national” to his peculiar brand of Marxist thought, has completely missed his point. I say this irrespective of—although admittedly in slight annoyance with—all the global speak and transnational turns that have so many US-based academics eager to fashion themselves beyond the nation. A universalist thinker deeply concerned with the particularities of context, Mariátegui meant it as a gesture of conviction. His main commitment was to ground any theoretical account within specific social structures and historical conditions. Inevitably, this requires leaps of interpretation since such realities shift according to moment and circumstance.

Peru of the 1980s and early 1990s is the historical context for these seven Interpretations. The focus is largely on how Lima punks lived and died amid “the people’s war” that the Communist Party of Peru, popularly known as the Shining Path, declared in 1980 in Ayacucho and that soon engulfed the entire country. The atmosphere of hard-line Marxist militancy, daily political violence, and state terror that resulted, and proved to be the bloodiest period since independence from Spain, was inevitably enmeshed in broader

processes. These other phenomena are not at the core of the analysis but necessarily appear as contextualizing factors: the Andeanization of Lima, as a decades-long process of migration from highland provinces to urban slums intensified amid uncontrollable violence and economic collapse; the resulting invention of a *chicha* culture full of Andean, creole, and Caribbean musical fusions, tabloid newspapers, and informal street markets; radical left journalism and Marxist organizing in many public universities; new social movements trying to defend communities from violence and hardship, such as the women-led communal kitchens in Lima slums or the peasant community patrols in the countryside.

Most of those involved in the eighties punk scene are from families with deep Lima roots. If their families hail from the provinces it is typically from provincial cities (Arequipa, Piura, etc.) rather than rural areas. The vast majority fall somewhere on the continuum of upper- to middle- to lower-middle class and reside in Lima's core urban districts. Few, if any, grew up in the precarious shantytowns that now surround the core of the city after undergoing vast expansion during the eighties, populated overwhelmingly by Andean migrants, or *cholos* in Peruvian speak. In fact, after dozens of interviews, incursion into many homes to access personal collections, and attendance at lots of shows, I have yet to meet a single punk from the eighties generation that was exposed to Quechua in any significant way. Their surnames suggest complex permutations of Spanish, Basque, Italian, German, Japanese, and Lebanese descent much more often than Andean ancestry in a country with a sizeable indigenous, or indigenous-descended, population. Despite this similarity in certain sociological terms, and the smallness of a scene that probably numbered only a few hundred at the time, Lima's punks generated an extraordinary diversity of responses to the chaos of Peruvian reality during a war over the future. This included everything from rock-n-roll apathy toward "real-politik" to radically ambiguous aesthetic provocation to anarchist militancy with liberatory aims. In these varied responses I locate distinct kinds of revolutionary hope and document different experiences of historical nightmare.

Parts of the book have been published in, or rejected from, proper academic venues. Others came out in punk 'zines, all in a mix of Spanish and English. Some parts were released as PIY (Publish-It-Yourself) *arte/facts*, aesthetic announcements of my ongoing actions of Interpretation. They circulated as digital files instantaneously via the Internet, more slowly via the postal service with cut-up cardboard protectors, or with fewer mediators thanks to hand-to-hand exchanges. These anticipatory tidbits were also sold, copied,

given, and probably thrown away in those informal markets in Lima that specialize in underground paraphernalia (comics, 'zines, T-shirts, bad horror movies, pirated rock music). The "PS!" at the end provides more details on why they were done and points to a companion website (punkandrevolution.com) where these and still other interpretations can be found, soundtrack included. The majority of the book remained unpublished until I convinced editors of a press to lend me a space where I might inhabit these voices, try to say something about how interpretative explorations of punk and revolution allow us to rethink the sordid political history of Peru and the world.

The resulting whole, if it can be called that, turned out less how I originally intended it and more just how things shook out. So it should be with a book in direct dialogue with Mariátegui. In compiling his famous *Seven Interpretative Essays on Peruvian Reality* he declared himself in conversation with Nietzsche and "warned" readers not to expect recognizable formulas, to engage instead with his idiosyncratic divergences from Marxist dogma and academic convention. At the end of a multiyear process, one witness to spurts and bursts of writing, booms and busts of revising, and fits and starts of aesthetic intervention, a process that also entailed more than one personal crisis and lots of laughter with the frustration I feel amid academe's overly enlightened ways, and many passionately false promises that I was "80 percent done," I finally became aware of what I was doing. More or less.

I was appropriating Mariátegui's form, and some of his content, for a reason. I wanted to imagine one of Latin America's most creative Marxist thinkers—the one exiled to Europe in 1920 only to return to Peru further radicalized three years later; the one that founded Peru's first Communist Party the same year he published his famous *Seven Essays*; the very same one whose traumatically injured body bound him to the materiality of a wheelchair for most of a very short life—as possessing the spirit of a punk contrarian. It was some Lima punks I know that inspired the thought. They gave me floors to sleep on and argued with me vigorously over beer. They were the ones to visualize something distinctly punkish in Mariátegui's peculiar way of viewing the world, along with Peru's particular and universal place in it.

I also started thinking in terms of intertextual, subtextual, and countertextual dialogues between Mariátegui and a horde of other intellectual misfits: this problematic graduate student with the thesis that pissed off the Soviet intellectual establishment (Bakhtin); that most dangerous of dangerous women in the history of the United States (Goldman); a suicidal German Jew never entirely on board with the whole Frankfurt thing (Benjamin); a

French vandal without much of a father figure (Debord); even that exiled German philosopher mooching off his friend Friedrich's British capital to create *Capital* (Marx). Clearly, the implications of the book extend well beyond the precise geopolitical confines and specific history of the nation-state called Peru. Or, rather, the point is that the particularities of Peruvian reality provide us the chance to rethink more universal dilemmas.

It was only toward the end that I realized I wasn't producing something that could be called "Seven Essays," since only the first five really correspond to that genre. Numbers 2 and 3 make direct allusion to those Mariátegui writings that represent the core of his creative reinterpretation of historical materialist thought. Number 4 has three prior lives, all of which I claim but only one of which appears here. Number 6 is a series of twenty-four situations that reflect the most sensitive topic in the book. Half "posters" I designed and half "field notes" I took, there's an entire multitude behind their construction. Together, they would be better appreciated if displayed on an appropriately sized wall. Number 7 started out as Number 1 and went through a mass metamorphosis. The result is a dialogue between two thinkers with much in common, upstairs and down, since both used the imaginative power of their intellectual superstructures to challenge the distinct fragility of their material bases.

Even then, amid these seven distinct Interpretations, there were still other stories and less elaborated notes on Peru's *rock subterráneo* ("underground rock") movement of the 1980s and early 1990s. These fragments simply appear here and there to add countertextual testimony. Nonconformity with the singularly distant, arrogantly all-knowing, and overly calculated voice of the scholar was as much the product of idiosyncrasy as it was intention. I am of course dependent on this very same institution — the professor's paycheck and assorted privileges. But I often feel "far removed from the academic techniques of the university," as Mariátegui (1971, xxxiv) once put it.

Dissonance, some chaos, rough juxtapositions, a bit of repetition of the same chord, some melodramatic irruptions: Aren't these things one might want in a book about punk rock? Inevitably, punk suffers plenty from its own internal contradictions. It has an authenticity complex. It has a highly contradictory politics of race, class, space, and gender even while pointing toward a horizon of anarchic all-inclusiveness and primal aesthetic freedom: a living beyond the limits while still being forced to live within them. Punk also has its metadiscourse about dying and being reborn, an implicit theory of history and revolution as dialogic becoming rather than the rapture of

rupture. But you'll hopefully find only a mandated minimum of academic correctness and no fucking promises of truth or reconciliation.

I did want to delocate punk and then relocate it somewhere else. I aimed to remove it from its overly familiar place in the history of Anglo popular music forms and the Euro-American avant-garde. I thought it was high time we get past other context-specific dilemmas — a decaying New York, a nihilist London, a superficial LA — so often assumed to explain why punk held global resonance in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Underground rock, the phrase initially used to describe Lima's punk-inspired music and art scene, emerged in the 1980s just as Peru converted into a battlefield, a war of wills to state power and a bloody fight between Marxist militants (principally the Maoist-inspired Shining Path, and to a lesser degree the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru, MRTA) and a faux democratic apparatus quick to reveal its authoritarian dark side.

The unique roles — sometimes militant, other times oppositional or even apathetic, often times ambiguous and anarchist — played by those in Lima's underground music and art scene represent a largely invisible chapter in Peru's war. I try to tell it here in these seven different ways to demonstrate a couple of basic points. First, punk's political possibilities, like its creative drive to irrupt, are greater than many have thought. The emergence of an urban subculture in the context of revolutionary proposals and radical political instability make this clear. Second, Peru's war is not nearly as two-dimensional as most postconflict narratives construct it — Marxist subversives versus the state and a civilian population "caught in between." Factoring punk anarchists into the mix results in telling the war otherwise and incites the interpretative imagination with the possibility of a political praxis that defines the revolutionary differently — and history with it.

"This is all that I feel honestly bound to tell the reader before he begins my book" (Mariátegui 1971, xxxiv). Yeah, that about covers it.

Lima

2014

shane mariátegreene