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Discussions and interventions

On design, development and the axes of pluriversal politics: An interview with Arturo Escobar

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Presentation and editorial notes

This interview deals with Arturo Escobar's recent work on Pluriversal Politics and the Pluriversal transitions. The discussion is divided into three main themes: the first section addresses Escobar's reflections on the contemporary civilizational crisis and the politics of the pluriverse; the second section engages with the contents of the Theme Issue, particularly those aspects of the transition that include radical relationality, the transition strategies, ontological and pluriversal struggles, and the notion of terricide. The final section reflects on Escobar's work on development and its implications for the future. The conversation has been edited to fit the guidelines for publication of this journal and supported with the most recent work, both published and unpublished by Arturo Escobar.

We added citations provided by Arturo, or in some other cases that refer to names, works and theories or concepts that emerged during our talk, hoping that this might make it easier for the reader. These additions to the conversation are indicated through footnotes and have also been revised by Arturo, who kindly offered unpublished work to be included. We hope that this interview contributes to the work of those engaging with the politics of the pluriverse, offering some clarity into a few concepts that were still elusive to us as we engage with the Theme Issue, and ultimately, contributes to the struggle for a world where many worlds fit. Our deepest thanks go to Arturo for being so kind with his time and patient with us throughout a long back and forth to design these questions.

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Interview

CT: Dear Arturo, thank you for taking the time for this interview. Getting right to it, one of the concerns that animated our call to engage with the pluriverse was to try to look beyond the imposition of universal and monolithic categories to understand our current epoch/era. Following Antonio Gramsci's famous dictum that 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born', and that we are currently 'experiencing the morbid symptoms of the interregnum', this special issue follows this line of thinking by arguing that we are undergoing a series of multiple crises which reveals the morbid symptoms in ecological, political, economic and social aspects at multiple scales. We see the pluriverse and its promise for alternative ways of thinking and living as a way out of these symptoms imposed by universal categories by paying closer attention to different scales and actors, as well as to their ways of resisting, contesting and/or struggling with patriarchy, capitalism and/or colonialism. You have recently argued (Escobar 2020) that this crisis is, first and foremost, a crisis of meaning. Could you speak some more about what you mean by that and what are some of the challenges that emerge from the ongoing civilizational crisis, and the possibilities offered by the pluriverse from this perspective?

I was thinking about this formulation by Gramsci, and it's really interesting. I've always liked it, but I had forgotten it. I've used a similar formulation by Thomas Berry, a North American ecologist and theologian. His phrase is equally intriguing and an exciting one. To start, I'm going to read a quote from him:

> *It's all a question of the story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it, is no longer effective. Yet we have not yet learned the new story. …. [The old story has become] a dysfunctional cosmology. … it is no longer the story of the Earth. Nor is it the integral story of the human community. It is a sectarian story. (Berry 1988: 123–126)*

For Berry, the prevailing story is the one of us, moderns, inherited from the long history of the West, whether in its Christian or its secular versions. So, the idea is that we are in between stories and that we are constantly searching for new stories that are always emerging. I'm going to talk about one, especially from Latin America, that is emerging and is crystallizing into a formulation of concepts and strategies. I find this story to be a very compelling one.

Let me start by answering a fundamental question: What is the crisis? The crisis is the crisis of the old story. It's a civilizational crisis as indigenous peoples from Latin America have been saying for decades now: that the current crisis is a crisis of a particular *mode of existence*, that is, the Western-modern/colonial capitalist-heteropatriarchal system, or in whatever way we want to call it. When speaking or writing about the crisis, I usually start

with three concepts (let me emphasize that everything I'll say and what I've been writing are not just my ideas. This is very much the result of collective thinking, a process of thinking with some friends, but also coming from a much larger onto-epistemic field arising from Latin America, specifically from social movements, collectives, political struggles and so forth):

The first concept is that of a *civilizational crisis*. The current planetary crisis is a crisis of the dominant *modelo civilizatorio*, or civilizational model, that of Western capitalist modernity. Ever since, and stemming from various sources, the 'crisis of civilization' has become a commonly invoked notion of referring to the multifaceted crisis of climate, energy, poverty, inequality, food, and meaning, a corollary followed: if the crisis has a civilizational dimension, we are in dire need of civilizational transitions. In its contemporary form, the current crisis was anticipated by anti-colonial thinkers such as Aimé Césaire, whose dictums, '[a] civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization. [...] A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization (Césaire 1972: 9)' are today echoed in many quarters of the world. Similarly, the revered Buddhist teacher Thích Nhãt Hanh calls on us to actively contemplate the end of the civilization that is causing global warming and pervasive consumerism: 'Breathing in, I know this civilization is going to die. Breathing out, this civilization cannot escape dying' (Nhãt Hanh 2008: 55). One of the best ways to present this argument is through the concept of *Terricide* [Terricidio]. A concept to which I will come back later.

The second is the concept of *civilizational transitions* or *transitions to the Pluriverse*. And a third concept is that of *radical interdependence* or *radical relationality* as the foundation for the transition and as a new way of understanding life. But, again, these notions are not really new. However, these ideas are re-emerging in the struggles and the philosophies of indigenous communities and territorialized-based people because, as they have always asserted, life is always about interdependence and relationality.

Most modern inhabitants of this world have forgotten that life is about relationality and interdependence and that it's not really based on the separations and the dualisms of modernity. As a result, one can say that a *One-World World* (a world made of a single globalized world) vision of reality has increasingly occupied other visions, disabling their world-making practices and potential to a significant degree. This is what I refer to as ontological occupations. These ontological occupations take place when a historically specific way of worlding occupies the imaginative space of other peoples and places, rendering their world-making ability ineffectual. However, this process is never complete, not even at the heart of the European societies from where such ontology stemmed from, as non-dominant *Europes* and *alternative Wests* continue to be harbored and cultivated in their midst. Meanwhile, in the Global South, visions of transition are grounded in ontologies that emphasize the radical interdependence of all that exists; this view assumes that human existence takes place within a living cosmos; it finds clear expression in notions such as *Buen Vivir* (collective well-being according to one's cosmovision), *the rights of nature, post-development*, and *transitions to post-extractivism* (see Escobar 2018, 2020).

Another way of stating the same idea is to ask: Where have we been? What is the current situation in socio-political and economic terms and philosophical, spiritual, and ontological terms? There are many answers to that question. I have lately been using a formulation by *Sylvia Winter* (see McKittrick 2015). Sylvia Winter is a Jamaican philosopher. She's in her 90s, and unfortunately, she's not as well-known as many other thinkers. Wynter asked the questions: Where have we been? Where are we now? She

would say that we are contained within or stuck with a *mono-humanist mode of being human* or a *mono-humanist model of the human*. This modern mode of the human sees the human as secular, individual, bourgeois, western, liberal, bioeconomic, et cetera. She has a very detailed analysis of how we arrived at such a mono-humanist notion of the human and concludes by arguing that we need to move towards an *ecumenically hybrid humanity*. The human, for Wynter, is a hybrid of biology and narrative. The human is *homo-narrans*: a human that is biological but also a human that narrates and creates stories and symbols; one who narrates his or her own story. It is not my intention to discuss at length her lucid and detailed analysis here (Escobar 2022). I will instead highlight what I believe is a particularly revealing framing of the question of *Man* (as used by Wynter), the domineering mono-humanist model of the human (originating in Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century), which I find particularly powerful for understanding both the current civilization malaise produced by mono-humanism (including climate change) and the possibility of constructing an ecumenical horizon for humanity.

Wynter posits a two-step process for the emergence of Man, the first of which accounts for the end of Christian theocentrism with the Renaissance, yielding a rational view of Man, the subject of the budding civic humanism of *homo politicus*, which she calls *Man1*. The conquest of America catalyzed this shift from Christian cosmology to a rational worldview, which was indispensable for the emergence of *Man2*, that is, a fully biocentric and economized view of the human. Man2 was grounded on a particular rendering of biological evolution in terms of natural selection, Malthus's theory of resource scarcity and the figure of *homo oeconomicus*, which was ushered in by the then-nascent science of political economy. Man2 implies a mono-humanist view of the Western, bourgeois, secular, and liberal human. Its dominant Darwinian/Malthusian and economic macro-narrative were pivoted on the principle of race and imbricated with capitalism; ever since the experience of all humans became increasingly subjected to the imperatives of accumulation.

Wynter appeals to Franz Fanon to propose a move beyond the bio-economic genre of the human (which she magnificently deconstructs as 'Man2's biocosmogonical and Darwinian-chartered, ethno-class descriptive statement') (Wynter & McKittrick 2015: 42). Wynter finds inspiration in Fanon's notable conception of the human as simultaneously and inextricably biological and social – summarized in the formula, 'Beside ontogeny and phylogeny stands sociogeny' (Fanon 1967: 110), which Fanon uses to explain the dialectic of black skins/white masks confronting all Black people – and in W.E.B Du Bois' notion that the key problem of the twentieth century is 'the problem of the color line' (Du Bois 1903). In these works, and others, Wynter finds a referent-we or genre of the human markedly different from the cosmogony of secular liberal Man. Her expansion of Fanon leads her to emphasize that the human is biological and is also shaped by cultural codes, origin narratives, and storytelling and that these become wired in their brain and behavior. In short, the human is always *homo narran*s. This principle applies even to the allegedly rational narrative of Western Man as naturally bio-economic, which accounts for how difficult it is to change it as the dominant default setting for the human.

For Wynter, it is high time that we, so-called modern humans, bring the laws of the dominant genre of the human fuller into conscious awareness, with a view at loosening its hold, which in turn requires reinterpreting modern modes of consciousness and ways of organizing societies and economies as fully historically constituted and, hence, amenable to change. Not easy, as multiple narratives powerfully implant these genres

in collective culture as a sort of 'second set of instructions.' The following question summarizes the argument up to this point: How to envision a system that would no longer follow a naturally selected/deselected bioevolutionary teleological logic that necessitates accumulation, but rather engenders a worldview and outlook from the ecumenically human hybrid perspective of *homo narrans*? (Wynter 2015: 44).

The philosophical and political implications of Wynter's intervention are enormous since they articulate the need to search for figures of human outside Western humanism. Wynter's placing of Man within modernity/coloniality is essential to this project because this shows how the western human/Man worldview is marked by the confluence of racism, capitalism, and discourses of the survival of the fittest. The response must come from creating a new horizon of humanity that enables an ecumenically open view of the human. So, we now have three concepts: a) we are in a deep civilizational crisis, b) we know that this crisis calls for significant transitions, c) we can think about transitions as taking a place from the perspective of radical relationality and independence, all of which requires developing a greater awareness of where we have been in philosophical terms. I particularly like Sylvia Wynter's formulation of mono-humanism, a worldview that has become increasingly dominant and that we need to destabilize.

The political imaginaries that Wynter calls for go beyond Euro-modern perspectives (those of Man2), transhumanism and techno-utopianism, and even beyond most of the imaginaries that underpin current posthumanist critical theory. Constructing the conditions for such innovative imaginaries becomes one of the essential intellectual-political tasks of our time. At stake here is a novel calling into question any universal idea of 'Man'. I believe that in the work being undertaken at the onto-epistemic and social margins and peripheries of the worlds where Man still reigns (including the academy), we might find auspicious points of departure. Another useful concept is *ex-humanism.* This is not my idea but comes from a wonderful indigenous Brazilian Amazonian intellectual, Ailton Krenak[1], who talks about the possibility of declaring ourselves to be ex-human if (and this is important if) by human, we mean Sylvia Winter's Man, which is also very close to the Man that Michel Foucault (1994) maps in his book *The Order of Things.*

CT: Perhaps we can now ask you more explicitly about the concept of the Terricide and discuss the civilizational crisis that you were just speaking about. We have become wary of using universalising terms and/or concepts such as the Anthropocene to understand our current crisis and its lack of engagement with difference, particularly with transition movements and the multiple scales in which they interact. In your work, you have used concepts like 'Terricide' to describe the ecological devastation and the civilizatory crisis brought about by what has been called the One-World World (OWW) perspective of modernity. What is your view on concepts used to frame our current epochal condition? For example, how are concepts like the Anthropocene contributing or hindering the challenges for a transition towards a pluriverse?

AE: Let me start with the last question. The notion of *the Terricide [Terricidio]* was proposed by the *South American Indigenous Women Movement for Buen Vivir (SAIWM).* It was first used by Mapuche women in Patagonia linked to the notion of Buen Vivir, which is a collective form of well-being or good living, a holistic, non-developmentalist notion of social life. The concept originated about 6 or 7 years ago, and since then, they have been elaborating on its meaning. In essence, what they mean is that we are killing the earth and the planet. But this doesn't involve only the killing of the physical or biological ecosystems. It also refers to the killing of knowledge and spiritual relations

to those ecosystems, which are notably crucial for indigenous people and ultimately for everybody on the planet. If this is the case, they would say that we need everybody in the world to join in the project of creating a new civilization matrix centered on the concept of Buen Vivir. By this, they mean that we need to take care of the earth and care for each other.

So why do I find that concept more attuned to the Earth and more politically relevant than the concept of Anthropocene? There are several reasons. First, I don't want to suggest that the Anthropocene is useless -it's an important concept- but it's a limited one. After all, it is still anthropocentric, and it lends itself too easily to technological solutions and managerial approaches. One could say that terricide emerges as a parallel concept to the Anthropocene; however, it doesn't lend itself so readily to those managerial and technoscientific approaches. It decenters the Anthropos, enabling the question: is it possible to free contemporary thought – whether in daily life or the academy – from the constraints under which it currently thinks to enable it to think otherwise? For the indigenous women struggling against terricide, this can only be achieved by re-embedding ourselves in the land and seeing ourselves deeply as belonging to the Earth and the stream of life, as many indigenous and territorialized peoples have done for thousands of years. This starting point diverges from most academic theorizing; it provides a direct route into the space where relationality abides.

An axiom of the notion of civilizational transitions is that the current problems cannot be solved with the categories and historical experiences that created them. This point was recently brought home forcefully by a seemingly straightforward statement by the brilliant Mapuche activist Moira Millán: *Necesitamos una revolución del pensamiento* (we need a revolution in our thought). It is revealing that this sentence was uttered not by a famous academic or philosopher but by an activist deeply committed to the struggle for the well-being of the Earth and her people. The conclusion she arrives at is no less instructive: our current form of *pensamiento* [thought] is the basis of what she and the SAIWM, which she co-founded, have come to name Terricide. Thus, we now know we need to develop knowledge of the earth to relate to the earth wisely. There are limitations to that, but I think the concept of the Anthropocene still calls into place this idea that we (humans) can master everything or a *will to mastery*. If we develop the proper knowledge and correct theories, the right science and technology, and the right managerial attitudes, we will finally be able to figure out how to manage the Earth wisely for the benefit of all. Again, that will to mastery and control is so much at the heart of patriarchal, anthropocentric modernity.

So why do I find these concepts and notions problematic? Perhaps I should say that more than problematic, they are limited because they originate in the *modern onto-epistemic formation* (or what we can refer to as a constellation of fundamental premises about life, knowledge, and the world that indelibly shape practices and structures), or the modern episteme, by which I mean the knowledge space where all modern social theory comes from. As a result, modern social theory faces at least *four limitations*:

First, the modern social theory that emerged and crystallized by the end of the 18th century -this is very much centered on Wynter and Foucault- is blind to its locus of enunciations. That is to say that it is blind to the fact that it has emerged within this dualist onto-epistemic formation of Man. Because of its abstract character, modern social theory leaves out the realm of embodiment, practice, and experience, which is essential to understanding the relational-making character of the world. Foucault refers to it as the episteme regime of Man in *The Order of Things*. Very similar to Sylvia Wynter's work.

Second, modern social theory forgets that there are different kinds of humans. That the *Anthropos* is not just one human. It is multiple kinds of humans, and it especially forgets to account for the experiences and realities of the humans that have been at the receiving end of the colonizing and imperializing drives of modern Man, especially the colonized people, the subalterns, indigenous peoples, peoples from the global South, etcetera. So, there cannot be any notion of universal man, and that's very clear. Yet, the Anthropocene still shelters or hides some of the notions of universal man and a universal fix. There cannot be a technological fix for the Anthropocene.

The third limitation of modern social theory is that it leaves out a lot from the domains of experience, embodiment, emotions, intuitions, feelings, spirituality that are important to understand social life. None of that really enters into modern social theory. Some philosophical currents deal with that, but not in modern social theory per se -that is, political, anthropological, sociological, and economic theory-, which doesn't have a place or room for the range of practices and realities that come along with feelings, emotions and intuitions and with the ineffable and sacred aspects of life.

The last limitation is that modern social theory ultimately separates theory from practice. Now, we need knowledge that goes and transcends that binary between theory and practice.

As we try to develop new concepts, we need to be mindful of the ways in which modern social theory originated in the ontologically dualist space of the modern episteme. We need to think beyond the binaries, ideologies and colonizing attitudes of modern knowledge. But, of course, that's easier said than done. It is challenging to do so, but we first need to produce a language with concepts that exceed the modern onto-epistemology. To me, a concept like the terricide does precisely that, as it is closer to the Earth, and it summons us to be close to it, to dwell on it, from the realm of the ancestors, from the domain of spirituality, to try to find ways to come up with a collective project of a new civilizational matrix.

The concept of terricide brings forth the need for a mode of accessing the current planetary predicament capable of taking us beyond the categories with which we currently think, make, and purport to amend the world. It helps us ask questions such as: is modern thought, in whatever guise (from mainstream liberal notions to contemporary Marxist, deconstructive, and post-dualist approaches), capacious enough to help us see, and hopefully escape from, the grand edifice it has built for itself and which provides the sturdy conceptual architecture of contemporary global designs? Or are we instead confronted with the fact that the contemporary crisis puts in evidence once and for all the insufficiency, when not lethality, of modern modes of thought and existence to deal with the crisis? Confronted with the globalization of 'a hegemonic mode of civilizational (mal-)development', the only conclusion possible is that our modes of thinking must be 'radically transformed to become radically transformative. This much is clear: that we can no longer solve modern problems solely or perhaps even primarily with the same categories that created them – growth, competition, progress, rationality, individuality, economy, even science and critique. Transitioning into new modes of existence requires different categories and modes of understanding, which takes us into the territory of relationality and pluriversality.

This notion of the pluriverse comes from the Zapatista imagination, which came up with the maxim that the transitions should aim not to change the current world – the neoliberal globalization and the "capitalist hydra"—but to create a new one, *a world where many worlds fit*. This dictum stands as the most succinct definition of the pluriverse. Many other concepts like the Anthropocene are limited because of their connection to

modern social theory. For instance, the concept of Sustainable Development, which is being streamlined or revived through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), is an agenda that has become very important, but that is still part of the same episteme. The same can be said about newer concepts with the prefix "smart", such as smart cities, smart bodies as smart homes, smart selves, smart lives. You can say that these concepts open the possibility for a newer kind of agency on the subject as an agent that is more active in producing its own reality. Nevertheless, they are problematic because they are still about calculative rationality and control.

Based on Heidegger's philosophy of technology, we can argue that these notions are still trapped within that calculating, instrumental, and algorithmic rationality that limits the scope of choices into some sort of prefabricated ideas about what is good and desirable, what one needs to be "successful" in globalized society and markets. But most of all, they are limited because they also leave out so much of the story of life, of what is part of existence.

So, where do we seek new insights if we see the limitations of some of these theoretical interventions like the Anthropocene? I mentioned terricide as an example but let me give you two other examples. The first comes from a wonderful Nigerian psychologist and philosopher Bayo Akomolafe (2020a, 2020b) and his Emergence Network. Bayo talks about how climate change, for example, is not a problem. For him, climate change *is* the world we inhabit. Akomolafe argues that climate change is *ontologically un-frameable*. It is incalculable and undefinable. We cannot straitjacket climate change into a concept like the Anthropocene or a set of technoscientific solutions. Climate change requires a different attitude towards the world from us. It requires new ways of thinking and concepts that he links with connecting back to spirituality, to the people's struggles that come from different onto-epistemic experiences and so forth.

The second example is from the Chinese philosopher of technology Yuk Hui. Hui (2020) is a challenging read because he demands substantial philosophical knowledge, especially of Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and so forth, but I particularly like his last book: *Art and Cosmotechnics*. He argues that we are at a juncture where new conditions for philosophy, thought and thinking are emerging. This is happening because we now stand between the triumph of modernity -especially through technology- and its meltdown. Modernity hasn't come up with new compelling stories about life, with workable social systems and so forth. So in between its triumph and its unraveling, there's a possibility for the emergence of new conditions for thought. Hui is very critical of artificial intelligence and such technologies. Very much like the Korean cultural critic Byung-Chul Han. In his latest book, '*Non-Things*' (Han 2022), he argues that we have lost the connection to things. Things are no longer the source of experience and meaning because of the pervasive digitalization of life. Digitalization does away with the phenomenological dimension of life and things. The consequence is that we need to re-establish presence, and a connection to things, the body, the landscape, and place.

CT: Thank you very much, Arturo. Perhaps we can then start moving from this interpretation of the crisis to praxis, or some of the things we could do. In your recent book (Escobar 2020) and in the several talks that you have given around it, you use the term "Entramado de conceptos" or a "constellation of concepts" to describe a set of neologisms or concepts that are emerging from Latin America such as autonomía, comunalidad, territorialidad, pluriversalidad y decolonialidad [autonomy, commonality, territoriality, pluriversality and decoloniality]. Could you speak more about these concepts and why they are so relevant in the struggle to navigate the civilizatory crisis? For example, you have argued that the pluriverse has a double meaning or two different registers. These concepts are essential

for the design of what you have called the axes or principles for transition strategies (Escobar 2021a). You have also argued that it is precisely how these concepts enable another language, another way of thinking, that they allow us to move beyond what is not possible under the separationist ontology of modernity.

AE: As I was saying, we can see that there are many new stories emerging. I think that the ones that have been crystalizing in Latin America over the past two decades are compelling and important. But, of course, there will be stories arising and crystallizing from many other parts of the world as well. A new Latin American narrative of life is emerging at the interface between social movements, political struggles and social theory, between social movements and the academy. I adapted the term "*entramado*" (entanglement) to the field of concepts from Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar (2017), who, in my mind, is one of the most important and original thinkers in Latin America today, together with Rita Segato. At this interface -and again, this is my own reading of what I see happening- we can see an entanglement of principles made up of six interrelated emerging concepts. These six concepts are *Territoriality, Communality, Autonomy, Re-existence, Transitions to the pluriverse and Buen Vivir, and politics in the feminine*.[2] To understand how these six concepts interact, we need to start with what I call 'modernity's toxic loops of existence', in which we are trapped. These loops originate in the dominant story that we have been telling ourselves so far: that humans are individuals existing in economies driven by markets, legitimized by the state, a form of *homo economicus* that assumes that we are competitive by nature, that we engage in innovations to solve problems in the most efficient possible ways, and so forth. I argue that we are trapped in these toxic loops in the sense of seeing ourselves in the world in terms of individuality, competitiveness, markets, rationality, instrumentality, maximization, optimization, and so forth.

The emerging tapestry of concepts (or *entramado de conceptos)* I mentioned is not exhaustive, and they don't intend to be. On the contrary, I highlight them because they provide the basis for a narrative about life that differs significantly from the dominant narrative of liberal, secular, rational capitalist modernity. Precisely the narratives that constitute these toxic loops of existence. By contrast, notions like territoriality, communality, autonomy, pluriversality, and re-existence appear here as the seeds of a new language, enabling us to re-think paths beyond the existing crisis. I will briefly discuss these concepts, although each has a complex genealogy and is the subject of rich debates in the Latin American intellectual and political landscape. These concepts aim towards the constitution of an onto-epistemic formation that enables "making life" in re-embodied, re-communalized, re-localized and re-earthed manners. Taken as a whole, this conceptual assemblage constitutes a platform, or a new language, for thinking about post-development, post-extractivist transitions and transitions to the pluriverse, with Buen Vivir as a guiding star. Although these concepts have emerged slowly over the past three decades from multiple sites throughout the continent, these concept-practices result from embodied, often collaborative and grounded epistemologies.

The first concept is "*territoriality*": Territories are seen as spaces where life is actively crafted through manifold practices, resulting in unique worlds –hence the expression, often voiced in activist circles, of "territories of life and difference." Over the past decade, this cultural conception of territory has become more decidedly relational; hence, one hears activists defending rivers, mountains, or forests as being intimately connected with humans, evincing an unbroken continuity between humans and the territory – statements such as "we are the river," or the mountain, and so forth, at the basis of such struggles. Humans cannot be without the territory; they are one with it.

The second concept making up the emerging Latin American narrative is "*communality*". It asserts that we are communal beings, communal in the sense of a "we." In Spanish, this is referred to as the we-condition of being [*la condición nóstrica del ser*]. Communality argues that we exist in a community and in the territory, with a whole range of other humans, non-humans, spiritual beings and so forth. Under conditions of colonization and ontological occupation, territoriality and communality need a degree of *autonomy* (the third concept) to have a chance of flourishing without being reabsorbed into newer forms of delocalizing globalization. Social movements and collectives also understand their political struggle in terms of *re-existence* (a fourth concept), which shows that it is not just resistance but about the recreation of the conditions for existence in the contemporary conjuncture, in a way that is deeply attuned to the earth. All these concepts point at the need for pluriversal transitions from the perspective of *interdependence* (a fifth concept). Interdependence means aiming to transition to different ways of being and models of life. This is what we call the pluriverse.

Pluriversal transitions mean transitions from an allegedly globalized world made up of a single world – what John Law calls the One-World World (OWW), that of capitalist modernity, to a world where many worlds fit. The pluriverse also refers to life's ceaselessly unfolding character, its continued co-emergence out of the dynamics of matter and energy. At the crux of it, for biologist Lynn Margulis, is the notion that life both produces (i.e., autopoietically self-maintains) and reproduces itself. As she argues, life is, above all, a 'sentient symphony,' 'matter gone wild, capable of choosing its own direction to indefinitely forestall the inevitable moment of thermodynamic equilibrium' (Margulis & Sagan 1995: 213). Life is history and process through and through. From the get-go, life is a relation, flows, impermanence, contact, and endless transformation – in short, pluriversal. Unfortunately, humans (or Wynter's *Man2*) have forgotten this fundamental dynamic of life.

The final concept is "politics in the feminine." Pluriversal politics is politics infused with a feminine understanding of life. Feminine is understood ontologically here, especially following the group led by Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar, Mina Lorena Navarro and Lucia Linsalatta in Puebla, Mexico, and also Argentinean anthropologist Rita Segato. For them, politics in the feminine (*política en femenino*) is centered on the production and the reproduction of life from a perspective of care (Segato 2016). Here we are reminded of the stakes at hand by the Latin American feminist dictum that there is no decolonization without de-patriarchization and de-racialization of social relations. This emphasis is particularly well articulated by the diverse movement of communitarian feminisms led by Mayan and Aymara activist-intellectuals, such as Gladys Tzul Tzul, Julieta Paredes, and Lorena Cabnal. Tzul Tzul highlights the potential of the communal as the horizon for the struggle and as a space for the continuous reconstitution of life. Her perspective is absolutely historical and anti-essentialist; it stems from a reflection on the *entramados comunitarios* (communitarian entanglements), with all the forms of power that traverse them. When they talk about politicizing the feminine, they mobilize the feminine as a political principle for a type of struggle that is dysfunctional to capitalism. From this perspective, the reconstitution of life's web of relations in a communitarian manner is one of the most fundamental challenges any transition strategy faces. As stated by Segato (2016: 106): '[w]e need to advance this politics day by day, outside the State: to re-weave the communal fabric to restore the political character of domesticity proper of the communal.' Thus, feminist relational politics needs to be incorporated into many, if not all, transition practices.

In this context, it should be emphasized that femininity is intended to revalue women's historical links to body, place, and community and women's ethics of care, but within a thoroughly depatriarchalized and de-racialized care perspective. In other words, it unsettles the patriarchal imposition on women to be relational caretakers while denying them autonomy over their bodies and economies. As feminist social and solidarity economist Natalia Quiroga (2020) puts it, if capitalism cannot exist without patriarchy, the corollary is that the entire economy (and economics) needs to be depatriarchalized and reconstituted under the principle of the care of life for all.

These women teach us that re-existing means much more than resisting; it involves creating and transforming autonomy in defense of life. By taking these six concepts, we can now formulate what I have been calling the *six axes or principles for redesigning the world* (or re-worlding for a transition into the pluriverse). We have a context in which community relations and social life have been increasingly individualized by globalization, where we need to re-localize many activities or make activities as opposed to just buying everything from world markets. Let me briefly explain these six axes and principles as strategies for transition.

The first axis has to do with the re-communalization of social life. A locally oriented life is one lived in relationship with the humans and other forms of life around us, including, for many peoples, the spiritual world. The co-emergence of living beings and their worlds results in what Gutiérrez Aguilar calls 'communitarian entanglements' that make us kin to everything alive. Oaxacan activists refer to this dynamic as the we-condition of being. If we see ourselves *in this way*, we can adopt the principles of love, care, and compassion as ethics of living, starting with our home, place, and community (see Martínez-Luna 2015; Guerrero 2019). Two brief things to mention here. First, re-communalization does not entail isolation but is instead a condition for a greater sharing and interconnectedness rooted in a re-woven fabric of life that is more collective and integrated with the entire span of the non-human. Secondly, a common counterclaim is that communities are often the site of forms of domination and oppression and are too localistic or 'romantic'. The first one is undoubtedly true, particularly in gender and generational terms. This is indeed the case in nearly all actually existing communities, and strategies of re-communalization must take current power relations into account. The latter points to work such as geographers J.K. Gibson-Graham, who revealed the globalocentric nature of many of these critiques. Each social group and locality will have to develop its unique set of re-communalizing strategies, attuned to place, landscape, and diversity. But I do not believe any social group today can escape this predicament; we (especially those of us in modern secular liberal social orders) have lived far too long as allegedly autonomous individuals; this fiction must go, once and for all. Whether in the Global South or the Global North, in rural areas or urban territories, we are bound to re-weave our relations to others based on care and respect; this re-weaving needs to be genuinely relational. It is a fact that today's communities are ineluctably open, connected, and traversed by de-communalizing economic and digital pressures; this makes the process difficult but also enlivening.

The second axis consists of a re-localization of social, economic, and cultural activities. The Covid-19 pandemic has fostered a new awareness that capitalist globalization is not inevitable when our survival as individuals and a species seems threatened. As Gustavo Esteva (2020) states, Covid is re-establishing the importance of the local; regaining our rootedness in the local means re-locating life-essential activities back in the places where we live to the possible extent. Food is one of the most crucial areas, and it is also where a lot of communitarian innovation occurs in many world regions. Food sovereignty,

agroecology, seed saving, commons, slow food, and urban gardens are instances of this renewed turn back to the local; at their best, these innovations also break with patriarchal, racist, and capitalist ways of living. Though taking place at the local and regional levels, these and similar initiatives might foster transformations of national and international food production systems. They could lead to a renewed understanding of the value of commonly held land and re-weaving ties that once flourished between cities and the surrounding countryside. Returning to the local means recovering the capacity for making life across a range of active verbs-strategies: to eat, to learn, to heal, to dwell, to build, rather than in terms of passive services provided by institutions and their experts (food, health, education, housing), as activists say in Oaxaca. Not everything, of course, can be re-localized, but many activities can, as recent approaches to degrowth and the commons argue. The expansion of the '*Commonsverse*' relies on 'the deeper wisdom of the commons, which accepts the idea of distributed, local, and diverse acts of commoning whose very aliveness produces the creativity and commitment to develop solutions adapted to every context' (Bollier & Helfrich 2019: 205) Encouraging examples are found in many domains, including farmers' movements, collaborative digital platforms, organizing of housing and buildings as commons, seed sharing, energy localism, collective rights, novel types of financing, commons-public partnerships, and community charters, to name a few.

This leads me to the third axis: *strengthening autonomy*. Without autonomy, there cannot be a significant degree of successful re-communization and re-localization. Autonomy is sometimes thought of as the radicalization of direct democracy and a new manner of conceiving and enacting politics. It involves reimagining politics as the inescapable process that emerges from the entanglement of humans among themselves and with the Earth but is oriented to reconfiguring power in less hierarchical ways, based on principles such as sufficiency, mutual aid, and the self-determination of the norms of living. All of this requires thinking about a strategic overturning of relations with the heteronomous orders of capitalism and the state. Perhaps most importantly, autonomy requires re-thinking the economy in terms of everyday solidarity, reciprocity, and conviviality. In the modern era, economics has made the economy central to our lives and separated it from the homes, communities, and places we inhabit. Without autonomy, movements toward re-weaving the communal would only go halfway or might be reabsorbed by newer forms of delocalized re-globalization. In many parts of the world, autonomy is at the crux of a great deal of political mobilization but also of less openly political practices. At its best, autonomy is a theory and practice of inter-existence and designing for and with the pluriverse.

The fourth axis is the *simultaneous de-patriarchalization and de-racialization* of society from Latin American feminists. They argue that these strategies must necessarily come together; that is, there cannot be a de-patriarchalization of society without decolonization and de-racialization. Patriarchy is so entrenched in our thoughts and desires that it can seem impossible to transform it, much less dismantle it. This is so because patriarchy, while being a social, economic, cultural, and political system, is also, and primarily, an ontology that privileges separation, hierarchy, appropriation, denial of others, control, and not infrequently, violence and war. If we are to inhabit new ways of living, we must identify, question, and challenge the patriarchal assumptions that are such a natural part of our lives. To de-patriarchalize and de-racialize requires repairing the damage caused by the heteropatriarchal, white capitalist ontology and practicing a 'politics in the feminine' centered on the reappropriation of collectively produced goods and the reproduction of life.

The fifth axis is the *reintegration with the earth*, with the Pachamama. As I have written about recently (Escobar 2021b), we must necessarily arrive at a reconsideration of our relationship with the Earth -Gaia or Pachamama- as integral to any transition process. Drawing on indigenous cosmovisions as much as on contemporary scientific theory, there exists a core, undeniable fact: we live on a planet of profound interdependence. Nothing exists apart from the geological eras and biological evolution that preceded it. New forms of life are always in the process of co-arising. We need to hold this notion of an ever-changing Earth in sight.

The last axis has to do with *weaving networks* or constructing networks among transformative initiatives to encourage the convergence and articulation of genuinely transformative alternatives, particularly from below. Although transitions will necessarily involve many kinds of articulatory initiatives, there is a growing recognition of the need to build bridges among 'radical alternatives,' based on relational and pluralistic worldviews. The project of fostering the creation of self-organizing meshworks, or networks of networks, among such alternatives, is being tackled by a growing number of collective undertakings. The Global Tapestry of Alternatives[3], a project centered on bringing together local and regional networks of radical alternatives, is a case in point.

Let me reiterate that the larger question -on the character of the crises and how to deal with them effectively- is so complex that it demands other epistemologies and politics. This point has been cogently made by Akomolafe, for whom climate change is not a problem that organizations can draw lines around and manage; this is because it is 'ontologically unframable, unthinkable and incalculable.' Others like Tony Fry and Madina Tlostanova (2021) similarly argue that existing academic practices and epistemologies are incapable of comprehending the complexity of the compounded crises. New ways of understanding this unprecedented complexity are necessary to inform effective policy and politics. Short of this, institutions and policy will only perpetuate the de-futuring pressures, perpetually increasing the risk for the planet (the sixth extinction, exponential growth of social and political unrest, etc.), unable to deliver viable futures. The political imaginaries these authors call for go beyond Euro-modern perspectives (those of *Wynter's Man2*), transhumanism and techno-utopianism, and even beyond most critical theory at present. Constructing the conditions for such innovative imaginaries becomes one of the most important intellectual-political tasks of our time. What's at stake is a novel calling into question any universal idea of 'Man.' I believe that in work being undertaken at the onto-epistemic and social margins and peripheries of the worlds where Man still reigns (and this includes the academy), we might find auspicious points of departure.

CT: We want to extend the conversation to your work on political ontology. You, along with others in this and other fields, argue that an approach to reality as objective and external is limited at the very least, given reality's relational character. You use the concept of 'radical relationality' to contest how the modernist ontology (underpinned by an objective understanding of reality and an ontology of separation) is at odds with what you call pluriversal politics. This is also relevant when we try to assess the multiple ways in which the modernist ontologies of the OWW imply a sometimes very literal 'erasure' of other worlds and knowledges - you argue that this implies an ontological occupation. These erasures are underpinned by different types of violence (such as cognitive, ontological and slow violence, to name a few), reproduced through globalization, commodification and individualisation. As we read your work, it became clear to us how the notion of political ontology further expands the work of political ecology. For example, you argue that the Ecological Distribution Conflicts (ECD) theorized by thinkers like Joan Martinez Alier imply ontological disagreements at their core. You also argue

that these struggles also reveal those other worlds or worlding practices that the OWW perspective has occupied. In your recent book of essays, you drew on the concept of radical relationality and added a very intriguing subtitle to the book, which is "The real and the possible." Could you speak a bit more on the possibilities that emerge from adopting these forms of ontological or pluriversal politics? How can these tackle some forms of violence embedded into the OWW perspective? And finally, why do you distinguish between the real and the possible?

AE: A good place to start may be the shift from political ecology to political ontology. This shift, much like all these shifts that I'm describing, occurs both in the academy's social theory and in activist life, or at least I've tried to follow them in both domains as Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser (2018; see also Blaser 2016). However, this is not the usual way of doing things in academia. Usually, most academics working on political ontology or political ecology do it by referring solely to academic debates and academic canons. That's fine and useful in its own way, but up to a point, it also faces some limitations.

Political ecology is a field that brings together culture, politics, nature and power. It was initially developed as an interdisciplinary field with the intention of looking at environmental conflicts, which Joan Martínez-Alier (2021) called Ecological Distribution Conflicts (EDC). I've always thought this was a great and valuable way of understanding environmental conflicts. But I started arguing that these are not *just* economic and ecological distribution conflicts but also cultural distribution conflicts. In the book *Territories of Difference* (Escobar 2008), I did this by adding the variable of culture in a post-structuralist take. What post-structuralism adds to the first-generation political ecology is precisely the notion that discourse, knowledge and culture are essential in mediating the relationship between nature and economy, nature and power, and nature and society.

However, there has been a move towards ontology in social theory over the past ten years. Not just questions about epistemology, like with post-structuralism, but also with ontology, which means considering the real. These questions are about the very nature or the status of the real, or what we consider real or not. This was when things got to be both more complicated but also more interesting and potentially more important in political terms. This coincided with a re-emergence of claims by Indigenous peoples, Afrodescendants and many other groups in the world that their vision, or cosmovision [*su cosmovisión*], as activists in Latin America put it, are very different from the cosmovision of the Modern West. That cosmovision is what we call 'the cosmovision of relationality' or 'relational ontology.' This is an ontology that emphasizes the interdependence between all the entities that exist in the universe. It argues that nothing pre-exists the relations that constitute it, that everything exists because everything else exists—referring to your question in terms of what I call *"radical relationality"* in my book. This answers your inquiry about the book's subtitle: *the Real and the Possible*. The notion of relationality is emerging as a cogent alternative foundation for life and the human to that established by the modern ontology of separation.

Ontological dualism has brought about a profound disconnection between humans and the non-human world, bestowing all rights on humans. Such disconnection is at the root of the contemporary crisis. Thus, the key to constructing livable worlds must lie in cultivating ways of knowing and acting based on a profound awareness of the fundamental interdependence of everything that exists. This is what I have called *radical relationality*. This shift in vision is necessary for healing our bodies, ecosystems, cities, and the planet at large – in short, for civilizational transitions. This ontological perspective

is essential to make the case that what is at stake is the very notion of the real. It is essential to be aware that ontological premises are embedded in narratives and enacted through multiple practices in all kinds of social domains. One may say that ontologies – whether of Man2 or interdependence – are performed in practice, enabling and indelibly shaping who we are and the worlds we construct; they emerge historically and become designing events in the present. When we speak about the real and the possible, we are stating that the world that we collectively design under the premise of separation in turn (re)creates us as beings who experience ourselves as intrinsically separate individuals. This model may be so common-sense that it may not even occur to us to be a kind of worldview, cosmovision, or ontology. Nevertheless, there are many other cosmos, reals, and possible that do not abide by the presupposition of separation. Interdependence is the condition of all living things, including, paradoxically, the condition of the artificial.

There are many ways to articulate this. For example, I'm now working on a book with two friends: Michal Osterwall and Kriti Sharma (*forthcoming*) called *Designing Relationally: Making and Restor(y)ing Life* which focuses on how we can regain autonomy over making life relationally because we have outsourced the production of life, or the making of life, to the State, to experts and corporations, while *we (modern humans)* have *forgotten* much of what goes into the making of life. So when we (Marisol de la Cadena, Mario Blaser and I) went back to look at environmental conflicts with this ontological lens, we realized that often, but not always, these EDC are not just about struggles over resources, property, land or control of the territory, but that they are struggles over something that is much more profound and more basic: they are *struggles over ways of worlding*, ways of building and constructing the world and making life, struggles over cosmovisions, ontologies. So that is still the fundamental insight that we're following today when we think about pluriversal politics. We are thinking in conjunction with people rising to defend the territories as pillars of existence and re-existence as territories of life.

The last concept refers to a notion that Marisol de la Cadena and I have been trying to develop: *Pluriversal Contact Zones* (PCZ). These zones are most clearly visible in the ontological conflicts often present alongside environmental conflicts. Let us take a simple example: some ethnic communities in Latin America defend rivers, lakes, or mountains against large-scale mining or hydroelectric dams on the basis that they are one with the river or mountain, that they do not exist separate from it; sometimes, this takes the form of stating that the river, or mountain, is a sentient being, or that it is alive.

From a modernist ontological perspective, this is nonsense: everybody knows that the mountain is an inert being, a piece of rock, or at most an ecosystem, and as such can be mined (destroyed) or managed through environmental conservation, and so forth. These are cases of environmental conflicts that are also ontological. However, suppose we begin to see these environmental conflicts as ontological. Then we also start to see how the interaction between, for instance, a corporation or the state and the activists that are defending territory creates a zone of contact in which different ideas about the world -or different ways of worlding- encounter each other, thus creating a PCZ. Let me give you two concrete examples of this.

The first one comes from Marisol de la Cadena's (2015) book *Earth Beings*. Here Marisol talks about the struggle around a so-called sacred Mountain, *Ausangate*, by local indigenous peasants who are against a proposed mining enclave. Here we have a PCZ in the following way: for the Peruvian state, the mountain is a piece of rock, it's dead, it can be destroyed for the good of the nation, for progress, for development, and that's how it should be. For ecologists and environmentalists, the mountain is an important ecosystem. It's vital for biodiversity, the conservation of water and forests and so

forth, so it should be protected for these reasons. But for the indigenous peasants, the mountain is that, but it's also much more. In other words, the mountain is that but not only that, it is also an earth-being, a living entity. Moreover, they don't see themselves as separate from the mountain. *They are* the mountain. That is the concept of '*being in ayllu'* that Marisol develops so well in her book. The *ayllu* is a relational entity, a relational manifold in which everything is there, and everything exists because of its entanglement, the humans and non-humans, the spirits, the lakes, the mountains, and everything else.

The second example comes from Colombia, specifically from a recent movement for the rights of a river in the Pacific Rainforest region, the Atrato River. I was at an event with one of the activists, a young black woman, an environmental engineer, who explained how their campaign was built on the slogan that "we are the river", that is, '*we are the Atrato'*. This notion is built upon the inseparability between the humans, the people and the river. Now the state doesn't recognize this language. Similar to the case in Peru, for the Colombian state, the river is H_2O. It might be an ecosystem (maybe), thus, the state understands the protection of the river in terms of access to resources because water needs to be protected, managed and rationalized. Still, the State doesn't understand these other forms of relational existence with the river. It sees the Indigenous and Afrodescendant claims of being one with the river - that they don't exist without the river (and so forth- as nonsense. This case is built around the notion of the rights of nature, and there are many other cases in which the rights of nature operate at this interface. For the State, they are only "individuals" with "rights". Although rights have been extended to natural entities, these are still seen as separate, lifeless entities or objects. But for the activists, the "rights of nature" opens up a space of struggle. One may say that "rights of nature" is a compromise or a space to obtain a negotiated outcome that enables activists to protect the territory.

Another concept that Marisol de la Cadena uses in these cases is very useful. In the case of the Atrato River, like in Ausangate's, the different groups have *interests in common* (say, to protect the river), but *these are not the same interests*. It is clearly very different for the State or corporations, environmentalists, and social movements. So, ontologically speaking, interests in common are not the same interest. This also means that PCZs are uncertain political terrains; they are made tangible by *ontological excess*, understood as what is beyond the limit of what can be. Or, to put it in other words, that which is difficult to grasp because it lies beyond the limit of our onto-epistemic purview. Thus, PCZs interrupt, at least temporarily, the coloniality of practices that make the world one. They hint at unknown forms of togetherness that diverse worlds must learn. Scary as this endeavor feels, it needs to be undertaken, for if we open our senses to current events, we may feel the presence of the pluriverse, and its contact zones proliferate. Opportunities for feeling/perceiving these zones tend to follow attempts at their destruction by practices of terricide. Rather than suggesting that PCZs can be designed -they are genuinely emergent, especially where the open political struggle is at play- we (Marisol and I) suggest that they make visible the ontologies of separation embedded in nearly all designs. In the last instance, the approach of PCZs involves recognizing the primacy of relationality anew, opening possibilities for designing pluriversally.

CT: That was a complete and compelling response, thank you very much Arturo. Maybe we can move to the two last issues. First, in your recent interview with Gustavo Esteva (Esteva and Escobar 2017), you spoke about some of the challenges of post-development thinking after several decades in which you, alongside Gustavo, Wolfgang Sachs, Ivan Illich, and many others, declared the 'death of

development'. Development, it seems, has been resilient as it has continued to adapt with a multiplicity of names and incarnations (the most recent being the Sustainable Development Goals). What has changed in the struggle against development, and some of the challenges and threats still posed by the development agenda? Secondly, have more communities across the world embraced a form of post-development thinking? Are there any political strategies for moderns to continue supporting transitions, away from development and towards a pluriverse?

AE: The question that you asked about development could be asked about capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and so forth. Somebody recently asked me a very similar question: have these critiques of development made any difference? What I could say is, well-after 200 years of critiques of capitalism, have they made a difference? After one hundred years of critiques of patriarchy, hundreds of years in the critique to racism and slavery and so forth, have they made a difference?

The answer is yes and no. By this, I mean that these critiques make a difference because certainly without them and without the movements that go along with those critiques, the world would probably be even worse off if that is imaginable. Without worker's, women's, black and ecological movements, who are often themselves the real source of the critiques. Despite this, I don't have to tell you that the world is in pretty dire straits right now. That said, I do not seek to dismiss the importance of these movements and/or their struggles. Instead, I see this as a call on us academics, theorists and activists to think about the productivity of our thoughts, theories and critiques. This is especially a call to reject the idea that doing a critique on paper from the safe space of the academy (especially in the academies of the Global North) is sufficient for progressive politics. What I am saying is that analysis and critique, while important, are not enough. Rather, we must engage in a transformative political praxis of one sort or another. This is what people like Gustavo Esteva and others have been trying to do in their work with social movements.

I would like to connect this last issue of critique and transformation with an issue I consider of utmost importance at present and that we touched upon only in passing thus so far in this conversation, which is how contemporary cutting-edge technologies, such as nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, synthetic biology, robotics, genomics, geoengineering, neuroscience, interstellar traveling, and so on, are making the power of the modern ontology to shape life even more profound. This concern is beginning to be voiced differently by people like Yuk Hui, Byung-Chul Han, and design theorists Clive Dilnot and Tony Fry. There is no doubt that modernity has created this amazingly giant cybernetic machine, largely via the application of computing and AI, that has deployed over all spheres and domains of life and is transforming and designing us as a particular kind of beings or humans. As a result, we are becoming out of touch with many other important things to life, such as place, landscape, body, the sacred and so forth, making us even more individualistic than with conventional globalization. Therefore, the project imagining and articulating alternative frameworks for social, economic, and political life needs to be renewed accordingly.

But again, I emphasize that these alternatives have to be thought about and advanced through praxis. A praxis that connects with the struggles for healing the web of life. I link this idea with my definition of design (*design is an invitation for us to be mindful and effective weavers of the web of life)* and to do so with others collectively to the extent possible. This finally brings me to post-development. I believe that critiques of development and proposals for post-development and alternatives to development, such as Buen Vivir, continue to be important precisely because they are intended to imagine and

enable new ways of understanding and designing the world. From a political ontology perspective, the notions of post-development and transitions to post-extractivism (beyond the prevailing extractive model of development) are seen as essential for a pluralistic movement beyond the dominance of the globalized anthropocentric model of life to a peaceful, though tense, coexistence of multiple civilizational projects, or ways of rendering life into worlds.

Reconstituting local, national, and global governance along plural civilizational foundations must be seen as essential to foster the flourishing of the pluriverse. This applies even to the SDGs that you mentioned. While mechanisms such as REDD+ and carbon trading, which are produced through a capitalist worldview, have proven useful tools for some grassroots groups to appropriate for their own purposes. Still, taken as a whole, the SDGs continue to uphold developmentalist and modernizing ontologies. The task for critical development studies is to move development cooperation and strategies such as the SDGs to support pluriversal transitions. This is what we argue in the conversion with Gustavo Esteva you mentioned in your question.

I think some other topics continue to be important today in critical development studies. For example, food sovereignty is a critical one, climate change, transitions to Buen Vivir, post-extractivist transitions, just to name a few. Pluriversal transitions evince "the gigantic and global confrontation between diverse and plural communitarian entanglements, with a greater or lesser degree of relationality and internal cohesion, on the one hand; and, on the other, the most powerful transnational corporations and coalitions among them, which saturate the global space with their police and armed bands, their allegedly 'expert' discourses and images, and their rigidly hierarchical rules and institutions" (Gutierrez Aguilar 2012) A holistic conception of Buen Vivir (good living, or collective well-being; some Afrodescendant groups liken it to Ubuntu ("I am because we all are") is often taken as a statement on the goal of the transitions.

Finally, regarding your question about what we, 'moderns', can do: in the book you mentioned (Escobar 2020), I identify a three-layered characterization to sort out political strategies and think about how the 'moderns' engage with pluriversal politics. The first one refers to the political strategies and designs conducted in the name of progress and the improvement of people's conditions; these are the standard biopolitical liberal forms of design and politics, such as those by most neoliberal governments, the World Bank, and mainstream NGOs. They take for granted the dominant world (in terms of markets, individual actions, productivity, competitiveness, the need for economic growth, etc.) and take it as a whole. Therefore, they can only reinforce the universals of modernity and their accompanying capitalist institutions with strategies of domination, control, violence, and war; they are inimical to pluriversal politics.

The second layer comprises political strategies and designs for social justice and postcapitalist social and economic orders: this is the kind of politics practiced to foster greater social justice and environmental sustainability; it embraces human rights (including gender, sexual, and ethnic diversity), environmental justice, the reduction of inequality, direct alliances with social movements, and so forth. Some progressive development NGOs, such as Oxfam, and several social movements, might serve as a paradigm for this second trajectory. In principle, these forms of politics may contribute to pluriversal politics, especially if they are pushed toward the third trajectory.

The third option would be pluriversal politics proper, or political strategies and designs for pluriversal transitions. Those practicing this option would engage in ontological politics from the perspective of radical interdependence. In doing so, they would go beyond the binary of modernist and pluriversal politics, engaging all

forms of politics in the same, though diverse, movement for civilizational transitions through meshworks of autonomous collectives and communities from both the Global North and the Global South. No readily available models exist for this third kind of politics, although it is the subject of active experimentation by many social struggles at present. How these kinds of politics might initiate rhizomatic expansions from below, effectively relativizing modernity's universal ontology and the imaginary of one world that it actively produces, is an open question in contemporary social theory and activist debates.

CT: Thank you very much, Arturo for sharing your thinking-feeling with us and for the assertiveness and detail of your answers. We look forward to continuing this conversation with you in the near future.

AE: My pleasure. I very much look forward to that as well.

Endnotes

1. Ailton Krenak is a Brazilian writer, journalist, philosopher and indigenous movement leader of Krenak ethnicity. Several of his writing are available here: http://ailtonkrenak.blogspot.com/
2. Three other yet-to-be-published writings from Arturo Escobar that will come out in 2022 deal explicitly with these concepts. We use them as references here with the permission of the author, to whom we are grateful for granting us access.
3. See: https://globaltapestryofalternatives.org/

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