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**A CRITIQUE OF LAZY REASON:  
AGAINST THE WASTE OF EXPERIENCE\***

**Introduction**

This paper builds upon a research project that I conducted recently, entitled “Reinventing Social Emancipation.” The central topic of this project was the study of the alternatives to neoliberal globalization and global capitalism produced by social movements and NGOs, both local and global, struggling against exclusion and discrimination in various social domains and countries. The project’s principal objective was to determine how alternative globalization is being generated from below, and what its possibilities and limits may be. I chose six countries, five of which semiperipheral, in different continents. My working hypothesis was that the conflicts between hegemonic, neoliberal globalization and counter-hegemonic globalization are more intense in these countries. To confirm my hypothesis, I added one of the poorest countries in the world: Mozambique. The six countries selected were, including Mozambique as a peripheral country, South Africa, Brazil, Colombia, India, and Portugal. In these countries, initiatives, movements, experiments were identified in five thematic areas: participatory democracy;

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alternative production systems; multiculturalism, collective rights and cultural citizenship; alternatives to intellectual property rights and capitalist biodiversity; new labor internationalism. As part of the project and aiming to identify other discourses or narratives about the world, extended interviews with activists or leaders of the social movements or initiatives analyzed were conducted.<sup>1</sup> This project educed a profound epistemological reflection to which this paper is witness.

Here are the factors and circumstances of the project that most contributed to my epistemological reflection. First, it was a project conducted outside the hegemonic centers of production of social science. Its aim was to create an international scientific community not linked to any hegemonic center of production of social science. Second, the project included crossings not only of different theoretical and methodological traditions of social science but also of different cultures and forms of interaction between culture and knowledge; and crossings, as well, between scientific and nonscientific knowledge. Third, this project dealt with struggles, initiatives, alternative movements, many of them local, often in remote parts of the world, and thus perhaps easily discredited as irrelevant, or too fragile or localized to offer a credible alternative to capitalism.

The factors and circumstances described above led me to three conclusions. First, social experience in the world is much wider and varied than what the western scientific or philosophical tradition knows and considers important. Second, this social wealth is being wasted. On this waste feed the ideas that proclaim that there is no alternative, that history has come to an end, and such like. Third, to fight against the waste of experience, to render visible the initiatives and the alternative movements and to give them credibility, resorting to social

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<sup>1</sup> The project can be currently consulted on the web: [www.ces.fe.uc.pt/emancipa](http://www.ces.fe.uc.pt/emancipa).

science as we know it is of very little use. After all, social science has been responsible for concealing or discrediting alternatives. To fight against the waste of social experience, there is no point in proposing another kind of social science. Rather, a different model of rationality must be proposed. Without undertaking a critique of the model of western rationality that has dominated for at least 200 years, all the proposals presented by the new social analysis, no however alternative it may conceive of itself, will tend to reproduce the same effect of concealment and discrediting.

In my paper, I engage in a critique of this model of rationality which, after Leibniz, I call *lazy reason*, and propose the prolegomena to another model that I designate as *cosmopolitan reason*. I try to ground three sociological procedures on this cosmopolitan reason: the sociology of absences, the sociology of emergences, and the work of translation.

The starting points are three. First, the understanding of the world exceeds considerably the western understanding of the world. Second, the understanding of the world and the way it creates and legitimates social power has a lot to do with conceptions of time and temporality. Third, the most fundamental characteristic of the western conception of rationality is that, on the one hand, it contracts the present and, on the other, expands the future. The contraction of the present, brought about by a peculiar conception of totality, turned the present into a fleeting instant, entrenched between the past and the future. By the same token, the linear conception of time and the planning of history permitted to expand the future infinitely. The larger the future, the more exhilarating the expectations vis-à-vis the experiences of today. In the forties, Ernst Bloch (1995: 313) wondered in

perplexity: if we only live in the present, why is it so transient? The same perplexity lies at the core of this paper.

I propose a cosmopolitan rationality that, in this phase of transition, must trace the inverse trajectory: to expand the present and contract the future. Only thus will it be possible to create the time-space needed to know and valorize the inexhaustible social experience under way in our world today. In other words, only thus will it be possible to avoid the massive waste of experience we suffer today. To expand the present, I propose a sociology of absences; to contract the future, a sociology of emergences.

Because we live, as Prigogine (1997) and Wallerstein (1999) show, in a situation of bifurcation, the immense variety of social experiences these procedures permit to reveal cannot be adequately accounted for by a general theory. Instead of a general theory, I propose a theory or procedure of translation, capable of creating mutual intelligibility among possible and available experiences.

In the preface to his *Theodicy* [1710 (1985)], Leibniz mentions the perplexity that the sophism the ancients called “indolent” or “lazy reason” had always caused: if the future is necessary and what must happen happens regardless of what we do, it is preferable to do nothing, to care for nothing, and merely to enjoy the pleasure of the instant. This form of reason is lazy because it gives up thinking in the face of necessity and fatalism, of which Leibniz distinguishes three kinds: *Fatum Mahometanum*, *Fatum Stoicum*, and *Fatum Christianum*.

The laziness of the reason critiqued in this paper occurs in four different ways: impotent reason, a reason that does not exert itself because it thinks it

nothing can do against necessity conceived of as external to itself; arrogant reason, a kind of reason that feels no need to exert itself because it imagines itself as unconditionally free and therefore free from the need to prove its own freedom; metonymic reason, a kind of reason that claims to be the only form of rationality and therefore does not exert itself to discover other kinds of rationality or, if it does, it only does so to turn them into raw material;<sup>2</sup> and proleptic reason, a kind of reason that does not exert itself in thinking the future because it believes it knows all about the future and conceives of it as linear, automatic, and infinite overcoming of the present.<sup>3</sup>

Under its various forms, lazy reason underlies the hegemonic knowledge, whether philosophical or scientific, produced in the West in the past two hundred years. The consolidation of the liberal state in Europe and North America, the industrial revolutions and capitalist development, colonialism, and imperialism constituted the social and political context in which lazy reason evolved. Partial exceptions, like romanticism and marxism, were neither strong enough nor different enough to become an alternative to lazy reason. Thus, lazy reason created the framework of the large philosophical and epistemological debates of the last two centuries, and indeed presided over them. For example, impotent and arrogant reason shaped the debate between determinism and free will, and later the debate between structuralism and existentialism. No wonder these debates were intellectually lazy. Metonymic reason, in turn, took over old debates, such as the debate between holism and atomism, and originated others, such as the

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<sup>2</sup> I use metonymy, a figure of speech related to synecdoche, to signify the part for the whole.

*Methodenstreit* between nomothetic and ideographic sciences, and between explanation and understanding. In the 1960s, metonymic reason led the debate on the two cultures launched by C. P. Snow (1959, 1964). In this debate, metonymic reason still considered of itself as a totality, although a less monolithic one. The debate deepened in the 1980s and 1990s under feminist epistemology, cultural studies, and the social studies of science. By analyzing the heterogeneity of the practices and narratives of science, the new epistemologies further pulverized that totality and turned the two cultures into an unstable plurality of cultures. Metonymic reason, however, continued to lead the debates, even when the topic of multiculturalism was introduced and science started to see itself as multicultural. Other knowledges, neither scientific nor philosophical, particularly nonwestern knowledges, have remained largely outside the debate until today.

As regards proleptic reason, the way it conceived of the planning of history dominated the debates on dialectical idealism and materialism and on historicism and pragmatism. From the 1980s onward, proleptic reason was contested mainly by the complexity and chaos theories. Proleptic reason, based on the linear idea of progress, was confronted with the ideas of entropy and disaster, although no alternative has yet emerged from such confrontation.

The debate generated by the “two cultures” and the various third cultures thereby emerging — the social sciences (Leppenberg, 1988) or the popularization of science (Brockman, 1995)<sup>4</sup> — did not affect the domination of lazy reason under any of its four forms: impotent reason (determinism, realism), arrogant reason (free

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<sup>3</sup> I use prolepsis, a common narrative device of anticipation, to signify knowledge of the future in the present.

will, constructivism), metonymic reason (*pars pro toto*), and proleptic reason (the control of the future by means of history planning, and the control of nature). There was, therefore, no restructuring of knowledge. Nor could there be, to my mind, because the indolence of reason manifests itself particularly in the way it resists changes of routine and transforms hegemonic interests into true knowledge. As I see it, in order for deep changes to occur in the structure of knowledge it is necessary to change the form of reason that presides over knowledge and its structure. In a word, lazy reason must be confronted.

In this essay, I confront lazy reason in two of its forms: as metonymic and proleptic reason.<sup>5</sup> The two other forms have elicited more debate (on determinism or free will; on realism or constructivism).

### **The Critique of Metonymic Reason**

Metonymic reason is obsessed by the idea of totality in the form of order. There is no understanding or action without reference to a whole, the whole having absolute primacy over each one of its parts. There is therefore only one logic ruling both the behavior of the whole and of each of its parts. There is thus homogeneity between the whole and its parts, the latter having no independent existence outside their relation with the whole. Possible variations in the movement of the parts do not affect the whole and are viewed as particularities. The most complete form of totality according to metonymic reason is dichotomy, because it combines symmetry and hierarchy most elegantly. The symmetry of parts is always a

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<sup>4</sup> Nunes, addressing contemporary debates on this subject, illustrates how the new configuration of knowledges has to go beyond the “two cultures” (1998/99).

horizontal relation that conceals a vertical relation. It is so because, contrary to what is proclaimed by metonymic reason, the whole is less, not more, than the sum of its parts. The whole is indeed a part turned into a term of reference for the others. This is why all dichotomies sanctioned by metonymic reason contain a hierarchy: scientific culture/literary culture; scientific knowledge/traditional knowledge; man/woman; culture/nature; civilized/primitive; capital/labor; white/black; North/South; West/East, and so on and so forth.

All this is too well known today and needs no further elaboration. I focus on its consequences.<sup>6</sup> The two main ones are the following. First, because nothing exists outside the totality that is or deserves to be intelligible, metonymic reason claims to be exclusive, complete, and universal, even though it is merely one of the logics of rationality that exist in the world and prevails only in the strata of the world comprised by western modernity. Metonymic reason cannot accept that the understanding of the world is much larger than the western understanding of the

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<sup>5</sup> For a first critique of the lazy reason, see my quest for a new common sense (1995, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> In the West, the critique of both metonymic reason and proleptic reason has a long tradition. To restrict myself to the modern era, it can be traced back to romanticism and appears under different guises in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, phenomenology, existentialism and pragmatism. The laziness of the debates lies in that they do not question, in general, the peculiar disembeddedness of reason as something set apart from and higher than the rest of reality. This is why, in my view, the most eloquent critique comes from those for whom metonymic and proleptic reason are not just an intellectual artifact or game but the generating ideology behind a brutal system of domination, that is, the colonial system. Gandhi (1929/1932, 1938, 1951, 1960, 1972) and Martí (1963) are two outstanding voices. In the colonial context lazy reason lies behind what Quijano and others call the "coloniality of power", a form of power which, rather than ending with the end of colonialism, has continued to be prevalent in postcolonial societies (Quijano, 2000; Lander (ed.), 2000).

world. Second, according to metonymic reason, none of the parts can be conceived outside its relation with the totality. The North is not intelligible outside its relation with the South as traditional knowledge is not intelligible outside its relation with scientific knowledge or woman outside her relation with man. It is inconceivable that each of the parts may have its own life beyond the dichotomous relation, let alone be a different totality. The understanding of the world promoted by metonymic reason is therefore not only partial but also very selective. Western modernity, controlled by metonymic reason, has not only a limited understanding of the world, but also a limited understanding of itself.

Before I deal with the processes that sustain understanding and police its limits, I must explain how such a limited rationality ended up having such primacy in the last two hundred years. Metonymic reason is, together with proleptic reason, the response of the West, intent on the capitalist transformation of the world, to its own cultural and philosophical marginality vis-à-vis the East. As Karl Jaspers and others have shown, the West constituted itself as a deserter part of a founding matrix—the East (Jaspers, 1951, 1976; Marramao, 1995:160).<sup>7</sup> This founding matrix is truly totalizing because it encompasses a multiplicity of worlds (both earthly and nonearthly) and a multiplicity of times (past, present, future, cyclical, linear, simultaneous). As such, it has no need to claim totality nor to subordinate its parts to itself. It is an anti-dichotomic matrix because it does not have to control

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<sup>7</sup> Jasper considers the period between 800 and 200 BC as an “axial age,” a period that lay down “the foundations upon which humanity still subsists today” (1951:98). In this period, most of “the extraordinary events” that shaped humankind as we know it occurred in the East— in China, India, Persia, Palestine. The West is represented by Greece and, as we know today, Greek classic antiquity owes much to its African and Eastern roots (Bernal, 1987). See also Schluchter, 1979.

nor police limits. On the contrary, the West, aware of its own eccentricity vis-à-vis this matrix, takes from it only what can encourage the expansion of capitalism. Thus, the multiplicity of worlds is reduced to the earthly world and the multiplicity of times to linear time.

Two processes preside over such a reduction. The reduction of the multiplicity of worlds to the earthly world comes about by means of secularization and laicization as analyzed by Weber (1958, 1963, 1968), Koselleck (1985) and Marramao (1995), among many others. The reduction of the multiplicity of times to linear time is achieved by means of the concepts replacing the soteriological idea that used to link the multiplicity of worlds, namely the concepts of progress and revolution upon which proleptic reason came to be based. This crippled conception of eastern wholeness, precisely because it is crippled, must affirm itself authoritarily as a totality and impose homogeneity to its parts. It was with it that the West took possession of the world in a productive way and turned the East into a stagnated, unproductive center. With it, too, Weber countered the unproductive seduction of the East with the disenchantment of the western world.

As Marramao notes (1995: 160), the supremacy of the West, created from the margins, never turned culturally into an alternative centrality vis-à-vis the East. For this reason, the power of western metonymic reason always exceeded the power of its foundation. This power is, however, undermined by a weakness that paradoxically grounds the very reason for its power in the world. This dialectic between power and weakness ended up translating itself into the parallel development of two opposite urges, the *Wille zur Macht* from Hobbes to Nietzsche, Carl Schmitt and Nazism/Fascism, and the *Wille zur Ohnmacht* from Rousseau to Kelsen and democracy and the primacy of the law. In each of these urges totality

is nonetheless present. Totality, because it is crippled, must ignore what it cannot contain and impose its primacy on its parts; and the parts, to be maintained under its control, must be homogenized as parts. Because it is unsure as to its foundations, metonymic reason does not insert itself in the world through argumentation and rhetoric. It does not explain itself, rather it imposes itself by the efficacy of its imposition. Such efficacy manifests itself in a twofold way: by productive thought and by legislative thought. Instead of the reasonableness of argumentation, it resorts to productivity and legitimate coercion.

Grounded on metonymic reason, the transformation of the world cannot be based on or accompanied by an adequate understanding of the world. Inadequacy, in this case, meant violence, destruction, and silencing for all those who, outside the West, were subjected to metonymic reason; in the West it meant alienation, *malaise*, and *uneasiness*. Walter Benjamin was witness to this uneasiness when he showed the paradox that has dominated life in the West ever since: the fact that the wealth of events translates itself into the poverty, rather than wealth, of our experience (Benjamin, 1972, II,1: 213-219).<sup>8</sup> This paradox

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<sup>8</sup> Benjamin thought that the First World War had deprived the world of the social relations through which the older generations passed their wisdom onto the younger generations (1972, II, 1: 214). A new world had emerged after the war, he argued, a world dominated by the development of technology, a world in which even education and learning ceased to translate themselves into experience. A new poverty has thus emerged, a lack of experience in the midst of hectic transformation, a new form of barbarism (1972, II, 1: 215). And he concludes his essay in this way: "We have become poor. Piece by piece have we relinquished the heirloom of humankind, often deposited in a pawnshop for a hundredth of their value, only to get back the small change of the "current balance" [*Aktuelle*] (my translation) (1972, II, 1: 219).

came to coexist with another: the fact that the vertigo of change frequently turns itself into a feeling of stagnation.

Today, it begins to be obvious that metonymic reason has contracted the world in the very process of expanding it according to its (the metonymic reason's) own rules. Herein lies the crisis of the idea of progress and hence the crisis of the idea of totality that grounds it. The abbreviated version of the world became possible because of a conception of the present time that reduces it to the fleeting instant between what no longer is and what not yet is. The brevity of the gaze conceals the abbreviation of the gazed upon. As such, what is considered contemporaneous is an extremely reduced part of the simultaneous. The gaze that sees a person ploughing the land only sees in that person the premodern peasant. This much acknowledges Koselleck when he speaks of the noncontemporaneity of the contemporaneous (1985). But he does not problematize that in such asymmetry a hierarchy is hidden, namely the superiority of those who establish the time that determines contemporaneity. The contraction of the present thus conceals most of the inexhaustible richness of the social experiences in the world. Benjamin identified the problem but not its causes. The poverty of experience is not the expression of a lack, but rather the expression of an arrogance: the arrogance to refuse to see, let alone valorize, the experience around us, only because it is outside the reason that allows us to identify and valorize it.

The critique of metonymic reason is therefore a necessary condition to recuperate the wasted experience. What is at stake is the expansion of the world through the expansion of the present. Only by means of a new time-space will it be possible to identify and valorize the inexhaustible richness of the world and the present. But this new time-space presupposes another kind of reason. Up until

now, the aspiration of the expansion of the present was formulated by literary creators alone. An example among many is Franz Kafka's parable about the precariousness of modern man stuck between two formidable adversaries: the past and the future.<sup>9</sup>

The expansion of the present lies in two procedures that question metonymic reason in its foundations. The first consists of the proliferation of totalities. The question is not to amplify the totality propounded by metonymic reason, rather to make it coexist with other totalities. The second consists in showing that any totality is made of heterogeneity and that the parts that comprise it have a life outside it. That is to say, their being part of a certain totality is always precarious, whether because the parts, besides being parts, always hold, at least in latency, the status of totality, or because parts migrate from one totality to another. What I propose is a procedure denied by metonymic reason: to think the terms of the dichotomies regardless of the power articulations and relations that bring them together as a first step to free them of such relations; and to reveal other alternative relations that have been obscured by hegemonic dichotomies. To conceive of the South as if there were no North, to conceive of woman as if there

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<sup>9</sup> "He has two antagonists: the first pushes him from behind, from his birth. The second blocks the road in front of him. He struggles with both. Actually the first supports him in his struggle with the second, for the first wants to push him forward; and in the same way the second supports him in his struggle with the first; for the second of course is trying to force him back. But this is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two protagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? However that may be, he has a dream that some time in an unguarded moment - it would require too, one must admit, a night darker than anything ever been yet - he will spring out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience of such warfare, as judge over his struggling antagonists." (Kafka, 1960: 298-299).

were no man, to conceive of the slave as if there were no master. The assumption underlying this procedure is that metonymic reason was not entirely successful when it dragged these entities into the dichotomies, because components or fragments not socialized by the order of totality were left out. These components or fragments have been wandering outside the totality like meteorites hovering in the space of order, not susceptible of being perceived and controlled by order.

In this transition phase in which metonymic reason, although much discredited, is still dominant, the enlargement of the world and the expansion of the present must begin by a procedure that I designate as *sociology of absences*. It consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is in fact actively produced as nonexistent, that is, as a non-credible alternative to what exists. Its empirical object is deemed impossible in the light of conventional social science, and for this reason its formulation already represents a break with it. The objective of the sociology of absences is to transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects. It does so by focusing on the fragments of social experience that have not been fully socialized by metonymic reason. What is there in the South that escapes the North/South dichotomy? What is there in traditional medicine that escapes the modern medicine/traditional medicine dichotomy? What is there in woman apart from her relation with man? Is it possible to see the subaltern regardless of the relation of subalternity?

There is no single, univocal way of not existing. The logics and processes through which metonymic reason produces the nonexistence of what does not fit its totality and linear time, are various. Nonexistence is produced whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable. What unites the different logics of production of nonexistence is that

they are all manifestations of the same rational monoculture. I distinguish five logics or modes of production of nonexistence.

The first derives from the monoculture of *knowledge and rigor of knowledge*. It is the most powerful mode of production of nonexistence. It consists in turning modern science and high culture into the sole criteria of truth and aesthetic quality, respectively. The complicity that unites the “two cultures” resides in the fact that both claim to be, each in its own field, exclusive canons of production of knowledge or artistic creation. All that is not recognized or legitimated by the canon is declared nonexistent. Nonexistence appears in this case in the form of ignorance or lack of culture.

The second logic resides in the *monoculture of linear time*, the idea that history has a unique and well known meaning and direction. This meaning and direction have been formulated in different ways in the last two hundred years: progress, revolution, modernization, development, globalization. Common to all these formulations is the idea that time is linear and that ahead of time proceed the core countries of the world system and, along with them, the dominant knowledges, institutions and forms of sociability. This logic produces nonexistence by describing as backward whatever is asymmetrical vis-à-vis whatever is declared forward. It is according to this logic that western modernity produces the noncontemporaneity of the contemporaneous, and that the idea of simultaneity conceals the asymmetries of the historical times that converge into it. The encounter between the African peasant and the officer of the World Bank in his field trip illustrates this condition. In this case, nonexistence assumes the form of residuum, which in turn has assumed many designations for the past two hundred

years, the first being the primitive, closely followed by the traditional, the premodern, the simple, the obsolete, the underdeveloped.

The third logic is the logic of social classification, based on the monoculture of *naturalization of differences*. It consists in distributing populations according to categories that naturalize hierarchies. Racial and sexual classification are the most salient manifestations of this logic. Contrary to what happens in the relation between capital and labor, social classification is based on attributes that negate the intentionality of social hierarchy. The relation of domination is the consequence, rather than the cause, of this hierarchy, and it may even be considered as an obligation of whoever is classified as superior (for example, the white man's burden in his civilizing mission). Although the two forms of classification (race and sex) are decisive for the relation between capital and labor to stabilize and spread globally, racial classification was the one most deeply reconstructed by capitalism, as Wallerstein and Balibar (1991) and Quijano (2000), among others, have shown.<sup>10</sup> According to this logic, nonexistence is produced as a form of inferiority, insuperable inferiority because natural. The inferior ones, because insuperably inferior, cannot be a credible alternative to the superior ones.

The fourth logic of production of nonexistence is the *logic of the dominant scale*. According to this logic, the scale adopted as primordial determines the irrelevance of all other possible scales. In western modernity, the dominant scale appears under two different forms: the universal and the global. Universalism is the scale of the entities or realities that prevail regardless of specific contexts. For that reason, they take precedence over all other realities that depend on contexts and are

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<sup>10</sup> Quijano considers the racialization of power relations as an intrinsic feature of capitalism, a feature that he designates as the "coloniality of power" (2000: 374).

therefore considered particular or vernacular. Globalization is the scale that in the last twenty years acquired unprecedented relevance in various social fields. It is the scale that privileges entities or realities that widen their scope to the whole globe, thus earning the prerogative to designate rival entities as local. According to this logic, nonexistence is produced under the form of the particular and the local. The entities or realities defined as particular or local are captured in scales that render them incapable of being credible alternatives to what exists globally and universally.

Finally, the fifth logic of nonexistence is the *logic of productivity*. It resides in the monoculture of the criteria of capitalist productivity. According to this logic, economic growth is an unquestionable rational objective. As such, the criterion of productivity that best serves this objective is unquestionable as well. This criterion applies both to nature and to human labor. Productive nature is nature at its maximum fertility in a given production cycle, whereas productive labor is labor that maximizes generating profit likewise in a given production cycle. According to this logic, nonexistence is produced in the form of nonproductiveness. Applied to nature, nonproductiveness is sterility; applied to labor, sloth or professional disqualification.

There are thus five principal social forms of nonexistence produced by metonymic reason: the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local, and the nonproductive. They are social forms of nonexistence because the realities to which they give shape are present only as obstacles vis-à-vis the realities deemed relevant, be they scientific, advanced, superior, global, or productive realities. They are, therefore, disqualified parts of homogeneous totalities which, as such, merely

confirm what exists and precisely as it exists. They are what exists under irretrievably disqualified forms of existing.

The social production of these absences results in the subtraction of the world and the contraction of the present, and hence in the waste of experience. The sociology of absences aims to identify the scope of this subtraction and contraction so that the experiences produced as absent may be liberated from those relations of production and thereby made present. To be made present means to be considered alternatives to hegemonic experience, to have their credibility discussed and argued for and their relations taken as object of political dispute. The sociology of absences aims thus to create a want and turn the lack of social experience into waste of social experience. It thereby creates the conditions to enlarge the field of credible experiences in this world and time, thus contributing to enlarge the world and expand the present. The enlargement of the world occurs not only because the field of credible experiences is widened but also because the possibilities of social experimentation in the future are increased. The expansion of the present occurs as what is considered contemporaneous is augmented, as present time is flattened out so that all experiences and practices occurring simultaneously may eventually be considered contemporaneous, even if each one in each own way.

How does the sociology of absences work? The sociology of absences starts from two inquiries. The first one inquires about the reasons why such a strange and exclusive conception of totality could have acquired such primacy in the past two hundred years. The second inquiry aims to identify the ways to confront and overcome such a conception of totality as well as the metonymic reason that sustains it. The first, more conventional inquiry has been tackled by various

aspects of critical sociology, from the social and cultural studies of science to feminist criticism, deconstruction, postcolonial studies, etc. In this paper, I focus on the second inquiry, which has been less dealt with so far.

Homogeneous and exclusive totalities and the metonymic reason that sustains them can be superseded by confronting each one of the modes of production of absence mentioned above. Because metonymic reason shaped conventional social science, the sociology of absences cannot but be transgressive, and as such bound to be discredited. Nonconformity with such discredit and struggle for credibility, however, make it possible for the sociology of absences not to remain an absent sociology.

*The ecology of knowledges.* The first logic, the logic of the monoculture of scientific knowledge and rigor, must be confronted with the identification of other knowledges and criteria of rigor that operate credibly in social practices pronounced nonexistent by metonymic reason. Such contextual credibility must be deemed a sufficient condition for the knowledge in question to have enough legitimacy to participate in epistemological debates with other knowledges, namely with scientific knowledge. The central idea of the sociology of absences in this regard is that there is no ignorance or knowledge in general. All ignorance is ignorant of a certain knowledge, and all knowledge is the overcoming of a particular ignorance (Santos, 1995: 25). This principle of incompleteness of all knowledges is the condition of the possibility of epistemological dialogue and debate among the different knowledges. What each knowledge contributes to such a dialogue is the way in which it leads a certain practice to overcome a certain ignorance. Confrontation and dialogue among knowledges is confrontation and

dialogue among the different processes through which practices that are ignorant in different ways turn into practices that are knowledgeable in different ways.

In this domain, the sociology of absences aims to substitute an ecology of knowledges for the monoculture of scientific knowledge. Such an ecology of knowledges permits not only to overcome the monoculture of scientific knowledge but also the idea that the nonscientific knowledges are alternatives to scientific knowledge. The idea of alternatives presupposes the idea of normalcy, and the latter the idea of norm, and so, nothing being further specified, the designation of something as an alternative carries a latent connotation of subalternity. If we take biomedicine and African traditional medicine as an example, it makes no sense to consider the latter, by far the predominant one in Africa, as an alternative to the former. The important thing is to identify the contexts and the practices in which each operates, and the way they conceive of health and sickness and overcome ignorance (as undiagnosed illness) in applied knowledge (as cure).

*The ecology of temporalities.* The second logic, the logic of the monoculture of linear time, must be confronted with the idea that linear time is only one among many conceptions of time and that, if we take the world as our unit of analysis, it is not even the most commonly adopted. The predominance of linear time is not the result of its primacy as a temporal conception, but the result of the primacy of western modernity that embraced it as its own. Linear time was adopted by western modernity through the secularization of Judeo-Christian eschatology, but it never erased, not even in the West, other conceptions of time such as circular time, the doctrine of the eternal return, and still others that are not adequately grasped by the images of the arrow or circle.

The need to take into account these different conceptions of time derives from the fact, pointed out by Koselleck (1985) and Maramao (1995), that societies understand power according to the conceptions of temporality they hold. The most resistant relations of domination are those based on hierarchies among temporalities. Such hierarchies are constitutive of the world system. They reduce much social experience to the condition of residuum. Experiences become residual because they are contemporary in ways that are not recognizable by the dominant temporality: linear time.

In this domain, the sociology of absences aims to free social practices from their status as residuum, devolving to them their own temporality and thus the possibility of autonomous development. Once liberated from linear time and devolved to its own temporality, the activity of the African or Asian peasant stops being residual and becomes contemporaneous of the activity of the *hi-tech* farmer in the USA or the activity of the World Bank executive. By the same token, the presence or relevance of the ancestors in one's life in different cultures ceases to be an anachronistic manifestation of primitive religion or magic to become another way of experiencing contemporaneity.

By freeing alternative realities from their status as residuum, the sociology of absences replaces the monoculture of linear time with the ecology of temporalities. Societies are constituted of various temporalities. Many practices are disqualified, suppressed or rendered unintelligible because they are ruled by temporalities that are not contained in the temporal canon of western capitalist modernity. Once these temporalities are recuperated and become known, the practices and sociabilities ruled by them become intelligible and credible objects of argumentation and political debate. The expansion of the present occurs in this

case by the relativization of linear time and the valorization of other temporalities that may articulate or conflict with it.

*The ecology of recognition.* The third logic of production of absences is the logic of social classification. Although in all logics of production of absence the disqualification of practices goes hand in hand with the disqualification of agents, it is here that the disqualification affects mainly the agents, and only secondly the social experience of which they are the protagonists. The coloniality of western modern capitalist power mentioned by Quijano (2000) consists in collapsing difference and inequality, while claiming the privilege to ascertain who is equal or different. The sociology of absences confronts coloniality by looking for a new articulation between the principles of equality and difference, thus allowing for the possibility of equal differences—an ecology of differences comprised of mutual recognition. It does so by submitting hierarchy to critical ethnography (Santos, 2001b). This consists in deconstructing both difference (to what extent is difference a product of hierarchy?) and hierarchy (to what extent is hierarchy a product of difference?). The differences that remain when hierarchy vanishes become a powerful denunciation of the differences that hierarchy reclaims in order not to vanish.

*The ecology of trans-scale.* The sociology of absences confronts the fourth logic, the logic of global scale, by recuperating what in the local is not the result of hegemonic globalization. The local that has been integrated in hegemonic globalization is what I designate as localized globalism, that is, the specific impact of hegemonic globalization on the local (Santos, 1998b; 2000). As it deglobalizes the local vis-à-vis hegemonic globalization, the sociology of absences also explores the possibility of counter-hegemonic globalization. In sum, the

deglobalization of the local and its eventual counter-hegemonic reglobalization broadens the diversity of social practices by offering alternatives to localized globalisms. The sociology of absences requires in this domain the use of cartographic imagination, whether to see in each scale of representation not only what it reveals but also what it conceals, or to deal with cognitive maps that operate simultaneously with different scales, namely to identify local/global articulations (Santos, 1995: 456-473; Santos, 2001a).

*The ecology of productivity.* Finally, in the domain of the fifth logic, the logic of productivity, the sociology of absences consists in recuperating and valorizing alternative systems of production, popular economic organizations, workers' cooperatives, self-managed enterprises, solidarity economy, etc., which have been hidden or discredited by the capitalist orthodoxy of productivity. This is perhaps the most controversial domain of the sociology of absences, for it confronts directly both the paradigm of development and infinite economic growth and the logic of the primacy of the objectives of accumulation over the objectives of distribution that sustain global capitalism.

In each of the five domains, the objective of the sociology of absences is to disclose the diversity and multiplicity of social practices and confer credit to them in opposition to the exclusive credibility of hegemonic practices. The idea of multiplicity and nondestructive relations is suggested by the concept of ecology: ecology of knowledges, ecology of temporalities, ecology of recognition, and ecology of social production and distribution. Common to all these ecologies is the idea that reality cannot be reduced to what exists. It amounts to an ample version of realism that includes the realities rendered absent by silence, suppression, and marginalization. In a word, realities that are actively produced as nonexistent.

In conclusion, the exercise of the sociology of absences is counterfactual and takes place by confronting conventional scientific commonsense. To be carried out it demands sociological imagination, both epistemological imagination and democratic imagination. Epistemological imagination allows for the recognition of different knowledges, perspectives and scales of identification, analysis and evaluation of practices. Democratic imagination allows for the recognition of different practices and social agents. Both the epistemological and the democratic imagination have a deconstructive and a reconstructive dimension. Deconstruction assumes five forms, corresponding to the critique of the five logics of metonymic reason, namely un-thinking, de-residualizing, de-racializing, de-localizing, and de-producing. Reconstruction is comprised of the five ecologies mentioned above.

### **The Critique of Proleptic Reason**

Proleptic reason is the face of lazy reason when the future is conceived of from the vantage point of the monoculture of linear time. The monoculture of linear time expanded the future enormously at the same time that it contracted the present, as we saw when metonymic reason was analyzed. Because the meaning and direction of history resides in progress and progress is unbounded, the future is infinite. Because it is projected according to an irreversible direction, however, the future is, as Benjamin clearly saw, an empty and homogeneous time.<sup>11</sup> The future is as abundant as empty, a future that only exists, as Marramao says, to become

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<sup>11</sup> "The concept of historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time" (1969: 261). And he counterposes: "The soothsayers who found from time to time what it had in stone certainly did not experience time as either homogeneous or empty" (1969: 264).

past (1995: 126). A future thus conceived need not be the object of thought, in this consisting the laziness of proleptic reason.

Whereas the objective of the critique of metonymic reason is to expand the present, the objective of the critique of proleptic reason is to contract the future. To contract the future means to make it scarce and hence the object of care. The future has no other meaning or direction but what results from such care. To contract the future consists in eliminating, or at least diminishing, the discrepancy between the conception of the future of society and the conception of the future of individuals. Unlike the future of society, the future of individuals is limited by the duration of their lives—or reincarnated lives, in cultures where metempsychosis is a matter of faith. In either case, the limited character of the future and the fact that it depends on the management and care of individuals makes it possible for the future to be reckoned with as an intrinsic component of the present. In other words, the contraction of the future contributes to the expansion of the present.

Whereas the expansion of the present is obtained through the sociology of absences, the contraction of the future is obtained through the *sociology of emergences*. The sociology of emergences consists in replacing the emptiness of the future according to linear time (an emptiness that may be all or nothing) by a future of plural and concrete possibilities, utopian and realist at one time, and constructed in the present by means of activities of care.

The concept that rules the sociology of emergences is the concept of Not Yet (*Noch Nicht*) advanced by Ernst Bloch (1995). Bloch takes issue with the fact that western philosophy was dominated by the concepts of All (*Alles*) and Nothing (*Nichts*), in which everything seems to be contained in latency, but from whence nothing new can emerge. Western philosophy is therefore a static philosophy. For

Bloch, the possible is the most uncertain and the most ignored concept in western philosophy (1995: 241). Yet, only the possible permits to reveal the inexhaustible wealth of the world. Besides All and Nothing, Bloch introduces two new concepts: Not (*Nicht*) and Not Yet (*Noch Nicht*). The Not is the lack of something and the expression of the will to surmount that lack. The Not is thus distinguished from the Nothing (1995: 306). To say No is to say yes to something different. The Not Yet is the more complex category because it expresses what exists as mere tendency, a movement that is latent in the very process of manifesting itself. The Not Yet is the way in which the future is inscribed in the present. It is not an indeterminate or infinite future, rather a concrete possibility and a capacity that neither exist in a vacuum nor are completely predetermined. Indeed, they actively re-determine all they touch, thus questioning the determinations that exist at a given moment. Subjectively, the Not Yet is anticipatory consciousness, a form of consciousness that, although extremely important in people's lives, was completely neglected by Freud (Bloch, 1995: 286-315). Objectively, the Not Yet is, on the one hand, capacity (potency) and, on the other, possibility (potentiality). Possibility has a dimension of darkness as it originates in the lived moment, which is never fully visible to itself, as well as a component of uncertainty that derives from a double want: 1) the fact that the conditions that render possibility concrete are only partially known; 2) the fact that the conditions only exist partially. For Bloch, it is crucial to distinguish between these two wants: it is possible to know relatively well conditions that exist only very partially, and vice-versa.

The Not Yet inscribes in the present a possibility that is uncertain, but never neutral; it could be the possibility of utopia or salvation (*Heil*) or the possibility of catastrophe or damnation (*Unheil*). Such uncertainty brings an element of chance,

or danger, to every change. This uncertainty is what, to my mind, expands the present, while at the same time contracting the future and rendering it the object of care. At every moment, there is a limited horizon of possibilities, and that is why it is important not to waste the unique opportunity of a specific change offered by the present: *carpe diem* (seize the day). In accord with Marxism, which he in any case interpreted in a very creative way, Bloch thinks that the succession of horizons leads or tends toward a final state. I believe, however, that not agreeing with Bloch in this regard is not relevant. Bloch's emphasis stresses the critique of the mechanical conception of matter, on the one hand, and the affirmation of our capacity to think and act productively upon the world, on the other. Considering the three modal categories of existence — reality, necessity, and possibility (Bloch, 1995: 244, 245)—lazy reason focused on the first two and neglected the third one entirely. According to Bloch, Hegel is mainly responsible for the fact that the possible has been neglected by philosophy. For Hegel, because the possible is contained in the real, either it does not exist or is not different from what exists; in any case, it need not be thought of. Reality and necessity have no need of possibility to account for the present or future. Modern science was the privileged vehicle of this conception. For this reason, Bloch invites us to focus on the modal category that has been most neglected by modern science: possibility. To be human is to have a lot ahead of you (1995: 246). Possibility is the world's engine. Its moments are: *want* (the manifestation of something lacking), *tendency* (process and meaning), and *latency* (what goes ahead in the process). Want is the realm of the Not, tendency the realm of the Not Yet, and latency the realm the Nothing and the All, for latency can end up either in frustration or hope.

The sociology of emergences is the inquiry into the alternatives that are contained in the horizon of concrete possibilities. Whereas the sociology of absences amplifies the present by adding to the existing reality what was subtracted from it by metonymic reason, the sociology of emergences enlarges the present by adding to the existing reality the possibilities and future expectations it contains. In the latter case, the enlargement of the present implies the contraction of the future inasmuch as the Not Yet, far from being an empty and infinite future, is a concrete future, for ever uncertain and in danger. As Bloch says, by every hope there is always a coffin (1995: 311). Caring for the future is imperative because it is impossible to armor hope against frustration, the advent against nihilism, redemption against disaster. In a word, because it is impossible to have hope without the coffin.

The sociology of emergences consists in undertaking a symbolic enlargement of knowledges, practices and agents in order to identify therein the tendencies of the future (the Not Yet) upon which it is possible to intervene so as to maximize the probability of hope vis-à-vis the probability of frustration. Such symbolic enlargement is actually a form of sociological imagination with a double aim: on the one hand, to know better the conditions of the possibility of hope; on the other, to define principles of action to promote the fulfillment of those conditions.

The sociology of emergences acts both on possibilities (potentiality) and on capacities (potency). The Not Yet has meaning (as possibility), but no direction, for it can end either in hope or disaster. Therefore, the sociology of emergences replaces the idea of determination by the idea of care. The axiology of progress is thus replaced by the axiology of care. Whereas in the sociology of absences the axiology of care is exerted vis-à-vis available alternatives, in the sociology of

emergences the axiology of care is exerted vis-à-vis possible alternatives. Because of this ethical dimension, neither the sociology of absences nor the sociology of emergences are conventional sociologies. But they are not conventional for another reason: their objectivity depends upon the quality of their subjective dimension. The subjective element of the sociology of absences is cosmopolitan consciousness and nonconformism before the waste of experience. The subjective element of the sociology of emergences is anticipatory consciousness and nonconformism before a want whose fulfillment is within the horizon of possibilities. As Bloch says, the fundamental concepts are not reachable without a theory of the emotions (1995: 306). The Not, the Nothing, and the All shed light on such basic emotions as hunger or want, despair or annihilation, trust or redemption. One way or another, these emotions are present in the nonconformism that moves both the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences.

Whereas the sociology of absences acts in the field of social experiences, the sociology of emergences acts in the field of social expectations. The discrepancy between experiences and expectations is constitutive of western modernity. Through the concept of progress, proleptic reason polarized this discrepancy so much that any effective linkage between experiences and expectations disappeared: no matter how wretched current experiences may be, they do not preclude the illusion of exhilarating expectations. The sociology of emergences conceives of the discrepancy between experiences and expectations without resorting to the idea of progress and seeing it rather as concrete and measured. Whereas proleptic reason largely expanded the expectations, thus reducing the field of experiences and contracting the present, the sociology of emergences

aims at a more balanced relation between experience and expectation, which, under the present circumstances, implies dilating the present and shrinking the future. The question is not to minimize expectations, but rather to radicalize the expectations based on real possibilities and capacities, here and now. These are the real utopias, the study of which Wallerstein designates as utopistics (1998).

Modernist expectations were grandiose in the abstract, falsely infinite and universal. As such they have justified death, destruction, and disaster in the name of a redemption ever to come. With the crisis of the concept of progress, the future stopped being automatically prospective and axiological. The concepts of modernization and development diluted those characteristics almost completely. What is today known as globalization consummates the replacement of the prospective and axiological by the accelerated and entropic. Thus, direction turns into rhythm without meaning, and if there is a final stage, it cannot but be disaster. Against this nihilism, which is as empty as the triumphalism of hegemonic forces, the sociology of emergences offers a new semantics of expectations. The expectations legitimated by the sociology of emergences are both contextual, because gauged by concrete possibilities, and radical, because, in the ambit of those possibilities and capacities, they claim a strong fulfillment that protects them, though never completely, from frustration. In such expectations resides the reinvention of social emancipation, or rather emancipations.

By enlarging the present and contracting the future, the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences, each one in each own way, contribute to decelerate the present, giving it a denser, more substantive content than the fleeting instant between the past and the future to which proleptic reason condemned it. Instead of a final stage, they propose a constant ethical vigilance

over the unfolding of possibilities, aided by such basic emotions as negative wonder that provokes anxiety, and positive wonder that feeds hope.

The symbolic enlargement brought about by the sociology of emergences aims to analyze in a given practice, experience, or form of knowledge what in them exists as tendency or possibility. It acts both upon possibilities and capacities. It identifies signals, clues, or traces of future possibilities in whatever exists. Proleptic reason has totally dismissed this kind of inquiry, either because it assumes that the future is predetermined, or can only be identified by precise indicators. According to proleptic reason, clues are too vague, subjective, and chaotic to be credible predictors. By focusing intensely on the clue side of reality, the sociology of emergences aims to enlarge symbolically the possibilities of the future that lie, in latent form, in concrete social experiences.

The notion of *clue*, understood as something that announces what is to come next, is essential in various practices, both human and animal. For example, it is well known how animals announce when they are ready for the reproductive activity by means of visual, auditory, and olfactory clues. The preciseness and detail of such clues are remarkable. In medicine, criminal investigation and drama, clues are crucial to decide on future action, be it diagnosis and prescription, identification of suspects, or development of the plot. In the social sciences, however, clues have no credibility. On the contrary, the sociology of absences valorizes clues as pathways toward discussing and arguing for concrete alternative futures. Whereas regarding animals clues carry highly codified information, in society clues are more open and can therefore be fields of argumentation and negotiation about the future. The care of the future exerts itself in such argumentation and negotiation.

## **The Field of the Sociology of Absences and of the Sociology of Emergences**

While the sociology of absences expands the realm of social experiences already available, the sociology of emergences expands the realm of possible social experiences. The two sociologies are deeply interrelated since the more experiences are available in the world, the more experiences are possible in the future. The ampler the credible reality, the wider the field of credible clues and possible, concrete futures. The greater the multiplicity and diversity of the available and possible experiences (knowledges and agents), the wider the expansion of the present and the contraction of the future. The sociology of absences, reveals multiplicity and diversity through the ecologies of knowledges, temporalities, differences, scales, and production; whereas the sociology of emergences reveals them through the symbolic amplification of clues. The most important social fields in which multiplicity and diversity are likely to be revealed are the following.

**Experiences of knowledges.** These are conflicts and possible dialogues among different forms of knowledge. The richest experiences in this domain are likely to occur in biodiversity (between biotechnology and indigenous or traditional knowledges); in medicine (between modern and traditional medicine); in justice (between indigenous jurisdiction or traditional authorities and modern, national jurisdictions); in agriculture (between industrial and peasant or sustainable agriculture); in studies of environmental impact (between technical and lay knowledge, between experts and common citizens).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The literature on all these topics is immense. See, for example, Brush and Stablinsky (eds.), 1996; Balick et al. (eds.), 1996; ; Vandana, 1997; Visvanathan, 1997. Brush, 1999;

**Experiences of development, labor, and production.** These are conflicts and possible dialogues among different forms and modes of production. On the margins or underneath the dominant forms and modes—the capitalist mode of production and pattern of development as infinite growth—forms and modes of solidarity-based economy — from alternative development to alternatives to development — are available or possible. They include ecofeminist production or Ghandhian *swadeshi*;<sup>13</sup> popular economic organizations (workers' cooperatives, mutualities, self-managed firms, micro-credit associations);<sup>14</sup> forms of social redistribution based on citizenship rather than productivity;<sup>15</sup> initiatives of fair trade as alternative to free trade;<sup>16</sup> struggles for labor standards;<sup>17</sup> anti-sweatshop movements;<sup>18</sup> and the new international labor movement.<sup>19</sup>

**Experiences of recognition.** These are conflicts and possible dialogues among systems of social classification. On the margins or underneath the dominant systems—capitalist nature, racism, sexism, and xenophobia—

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Escobar, 1999; Posey, 1999. Different case studies of conflicts and possible dialogues among knowledges in all these areas can be read in the project "Reinventing Social Emancipation", mentioned in the introduction of this paper (consult the themes on multiculturalism and cultural citizenship and biodiversity, rival knowledges and intellectual property rights). The papers can also be read in Santos 2002c and 2000d.

<sup>13</sup> More on this below.

<sup>14</sup> On popular economic organizations and alternative production systems consult the case studies included in the research project "Reinventing Social Emancipation." The papers can also be read in Santos, 2002b.

<sup>15</sup> On minimum guaranteed income, see, for example, Van Parijis (1992) and Purdy (1994).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Blowfield, 1999; Renard, 1999; Simpson and Rapone, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> See Compa and Diamond, 1996; Trubek et al., 2000.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Ross, 1997; Schoenberger, 2000; Bonacich and Appelbaum, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Consult the theme of new labor internationalism in the research project "Reinventing Social Emancipation." The papers can also be read in Santos, 2002e.

experiences of anticapitalist nature, equal differentiation, multicultural constitutionalism, post-national and cultural citizenship, are available or possible.<sup>20</sup>

**Experiences of democracy.** These are conflicts and possible dialogues between the hegemonic model of democracy (liberal representative democracy) and participatory democracy.<sup>21</sup> As salient illustrations I mention the participatory budgeting in the city of Porto Alegre, also in force, under different forms, in many other Brazilian and Latin American cities;<sup>22</sup> the decentralized participatory planning — based on district, block and *grama panchayats* — in Kerala, India,<sup>23</sup> forms of communitarian deliberation in indigenous or rural communities, mainly in Latin America and Africa;<sup>24</sup> citizen participation in decisions concerning scientific or technological impacts.<sup>25</sup>

**Experiences of communication and information.** These are conflicts and possible dialogues arising from the revolution of communication and information technologies, between global capitalist flows of information and global media, on the one hand and, on the other, transnational advocacy networks of information and alternative independent media.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> On the politics of recognition, see note 12.

<sup>21</sup> A variety of case studies on participatory democracy can be read in the research project "Reinventing Social Emancipation;" consult the theme participatory democracy. These papers can also be read in Santos, 2002a.

<sup>22</sup> See Fedozzi, 1997; Santos, 1998; Abers, 1998; Baiocchi, 2001, Baierle, 2001.

<sup>23</sup> See Heller, 2000; Desai, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> See Stavenhagen, 1996; Mamdani, 1996; Van Cott, 1996, 2000; Gentili, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> See Gonçalves, 2000; Fischer, 2000; Jamison, 2001; Callon et al. 2001.

<sup>26</sup> See Ryan, 1991; Bagdikian, 1992; Hamelink, 1994; Herman and McChesney, 1997; McChesney et al. (eds.), 1998; McChesney, 1999; Shaw, 2001. Many independent media centers can be easily consulted in the internet.

## **From Absences and Emergences to Translation Theory**

The multiplicity and variety of the available and possible experiences raise two complex problems: the extreme fragmentation or atomization of social reality, and, derived therefrom, the impossibility of conferring meaning to social transformation. As we saw, these problems have been solved by metonymic and proleptic reason through the concept of totality and the conception of history as having both meaning and direction. As we also saw, these solutions led to an excessive waste of experience and, for that reason, they are discredited today. Since discrediting solutions does not imply discrediting problems, the latter still must be addressed. To be sure, for certain currents that I designate as celebratory postmodernism (Santos, 1998b), the problems themselves are discredited. For such currents, social fragmentation and atomization are not a problem, rather a solution, and the very concept of society that would provide the cement to give coherence to fragmentation is of little use. On the other hand, according to the same currents, social transformation has no meaning or direction, whether because it occurs chaotically or because what changes is not society, but rather our discourse on society.

I believe that these stances are closer to metonymic and proleptic reason than they are ready to admit, for they share with them the idea that they provide universal answers to universal questions. From the point of view of the cosmopolitan reason I argue for, the task before us is not so much to identify new totalities, or to adopt other meanings for social transformation, but rather to propose new ways to think about such totalities and meanings.

This task includes two autonomous but intrinsically linked tasks. The first consists in answering the following question. If the world is an inexhaustible totality, as Bloch maintains and I agree, it holds many totalities, all of them necessarily partial, which means that all totalities can be seen as parts and all parts as totalities. This means that the terms of any dichotomy have (at least) one life beyond dichotomous life. According to this conception of the world, there is no sense in attempting to grasp the world by any single grand theory, because any such general theory always presupposes the monoculture of a given totality and the homogeneity of its parts. Hence the question: What is the alternative to the grand theory?

The second task consists in answering the following question. If meaning, let alone direction, are not predefined, if, in other words, we do not know for sure if a better world is possible, what legitimates and motivates us to act as if we did? And if we are indeed legitimated and motivated, how could we define that better world and fight for it? In other words, what is the meaning of the struggles for social emancipation?

In this paper I try to answer the first question. To my mind, the alternative to a general theory is the work of translation. Translation is the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among the experiences of the world, both the available and the possible ones, as revealed by the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences. This procedure does not ascribe the status of exclusive totality or homogenous part to any set of experiences. The experiences of the world are viewed at different moments of the work of translation as totalities or parts and as realities that are not exhausted in either totalities or parts. For example, to see the subaltern both within and without the relation of subalternity.

As Banuri asserts, what most negatively affected the South since the beginning of colonialism was to have to concentrate its energies in adapting and resisting the impositions of the North.<sup>27</sup> Likewise concerned, Serequeberham (1991: 22) identifies the two challenges that confront African philosophy today. The first is a deconstructive challenge, and consists in identifying the eurocentric residua inherited from colonialism and present in various sectors of collective life, from education to politics, from law to culture. The second is a reconstructive challenge and consists in giving new life to the cultural and historical possibilities of the African legacy interrupted by colonialism and neocolonialism. The work of translation tries to catch these two moments: the hegemonic relations among experiences and what is there beyond such relations. In this double movement, the social experiences disclosed by the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences are reconstructed in such a way as to offer themselves to relations of mutual intelligibility.

The work of translation concerns both knowledges and practices (and their agents). Translation of knowledges takes the form of *diatopical hermeneutics*. It consists of interpretation work between two or more cultures to identify isomorphic concerns among them and the different responses they provide for them. I have been proposing a diatopical hermeneutics on the isomorphic concern of human dignity between the western concept of human rights, the islamic concept of

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<sup>27</sup> Banuri argues that the development of the "South" has been disadvantageous "not because of bad policy advice or malicious intent of the advisers, nor because of the disregard of neo-classical wisdom, but rather because the project has constantly forced indigenous people to divert their energies from the *positive* pursuit of indigenously defined social change, to the *negative* goal of resisting cultural, political, and economic domination by the West" (emphasis in the original) (Banuri 1990: 66)

*umma*, and the hindu concept of *dharma* (Santos 1995: 340)<sup>28</sup> Two other exercises of diatopical hermeneutics strike me as important in our time. The first focuses on the concern for productive life in capitalist conceptions of development and in the *swadeshi* conception proposed by Gandhi.<sup>29</sup> The conceptions of capitalist development have been reproduced by conventional economics and the metonymic and proleptic reason underlying it. They are based on the idea of infinite growth reached through the increasing subjection of the practices and knowledges to mercantile logic. The *swadeshi*, in turn, is based on the idea of sustainability and reciprocity that Gandhi defined in 1916 in the following way: “swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion... If I find it defective I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proven defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbors and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting” (Gandhi, 1941: 4-5).

The other exercise of diatopical hermeneutics I consider important focuses on concern for wisdom and enabling world views. It takes place between western philosophy and the African concept of philosophical sagacity. The latter is an innovative contribution of African philosophy propounded by Odera Oruka (1990,

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<sup>28</sup> On the concept of *umma*, see, for example, Faruki, 1979; An-Na'im, 1995, 2000; Hassan, 1996; on the hindu concept of *dharma*, see Gandhi, 1929/32; Zaehner, 1982.

1998) and others.<sup>30</sup> It resides in a critical reflection on the world that has as its protagonists what Odera Oruka calls *sages*, be they poets, traditional healers, storytellers, musicians, or traditional authorities. According to Odera Oruka, sage philosophy “consists of the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between *popular wisdom* (well known communal maxims, aphorisms and general commonsense truths) and *didactic wisdom*, an expounded wisdom and a rational thought of some given individuals within a community. While popular wisdom is often conformist, didactic wisdom is at times critical of the communal set-up and the popular wisdom. Thoughts can be expressed in writing or as unwritten sayings and argumentations associated with some individual(s). In traditional Africa, most of what would pass as sage-philosophy remains unwritten for reasons which must now be obvious to everyone. Some of these persons might have been partly influenced by the inevitable moral and technological culture from the West. Nevertheless, their own outlook and cultural well being remain basically that of traditional rural Africa. Except for a handful of them, the majority of them are “illiterate” or semi-illiterate” (Odera Oruka, 1990: 28).

Diatopical hermeneutics starts from the idea that all cultures are incomplete and can, therefore, be enriched by dialogue and confrontation with other cultures. To acknowledge the relativity of cultures does not imply the adoption of relativism as philosophical stance. It does imply, however, to conceive of universalism as a western peculiarity, whose idea of supremacy does not reside in itself, but rather in

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<sup>29</sup> See Gandhi, 1967, 1941. On *swadeshi* see also, among other, Bipinchandra, 1954; Nandy, 1987; Krishna, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> On sage philosophy see also Oseghare, 1992; Presbey, 1997.

the supremacy of the interests that sustain it. The critique of universalism derives from the critique of the possibility of a general theory. Diatopical hermeneutics presupposes, rather, what I designate as negative universalism, the idea of the impossibility of cultural completeness. In the transition period we are in, still dominated by the metonymic and proleptic reason, negative universalism is perhaps best formulated as a residual general theory: a general theory about the impossibility of a general theory.

The idea and feeling of want and incompleteness create motivation for the work of translation. In order to bear fruit, translation must be the crossing of converging motivations with origin in different cultures. The Indian sociologist Shiv Vishvanathan formulated eloquently the notion of want and motivation that I here designate as the work of translation. Says Vishvanathan (2000: 12): "My problem is, how do I take the best of Indian civilization and at the same time keep my modern, democratic imagination alive?" If we could imagine an exercise of diatopical hermeneutics conducted by Vishvanathan and a European or North American scientist, it would be possible to think of the latter's motivation for dialogue formulated thus: "How can I keep alive in me the best of modern and democratic western culture, while at the same time recognizing the value of the world that it designated autocratically as noncivilized, ignorant, residual, inferior, or unproductive?"

The work of translation may occur either among hegemonic and nonhegemonic knowledges, or among different nonhegemonic knowledges. The importance of this last work of translation is that only through mutual intelligibility and subsequent possibility of aggregation among nonhegemonic knowledges is it possible to construct counter-hegemony.

The second type of the work of translation is undertaken among social practices and their agents. All social practices imply knowledge, and as such they are also knowledge practices. When dealing with practices, however, the work of translation focuses specifically on mutual intelligibility among forms of organization and objectives of action. In other words, in this case, the work of translation deals with knowledges as applied knowledges, transformed into practices and materialities. The work of translation between modern biomedicine and traditional medicine is a good illustration of how the work of translation must deal simultaneously with knowledges and the practices into which such knowledges translate themselves. What distinguishes the two types of translation work is, after all, the emphasis or perspective that informs them. The specificity of the translation work concerning practices and their agents becomes clearer in situations in which the knowledges that inform different practices are less distinguishable than the practices themselves. This happens particularly when the practices take place inside the same cultural universe. Such would be the case of a work of translation between the forms of organization and the objectives of action of two social movements, say, the feminist movement and the labor movement in a western society.

The relevance of the work of translation as regards practices is due to a double circumstance. On the one hand, the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences permit to enlarge considerably the stock of available and possible social experiences. On the other, because there is no single principle of social transformation, it is not possible to determine in abstract the articulations or hierarchies among the different social experiences and their conceptions of social transformation. Only by means of the mutual intelligibility of practices is it possible

to evaluate them and identify possible alliances among them. As happens with the work of translation of knowledges, the work of translation of practices is particularly important as regards nonhegemonic practices, because intelligibility among them is a condition of their reciprocal articulation. The latter is, in turn, a condition of conversion of nonhegemonic into counter-hegemonic practices. The anti-systemic or counter-hegemonic potential of any social movements resides in its capacity to articulate with other movements, their forms of organization and objectives. For these articulations to be possible, the movements must be mutually intelligible.

The work of translation aims to clarify what unites and separates the different movements and practices so as to ascertain the possibilities and limits of articulation and aggregation among them. Because there is no single universal social practice or collective subject to confer meaning and direction to history, the work of translation becomes crucial to define, in each concrete and historical moment or context, which constellations of non-hegemonic practices carry more counter-hegemonic potential. To give a recent example. In Mexico in March 2001, the Zapatista indigenous movement was a privileged counter-hegemonic practice inasmuch as it was capable of undertaking the work of translation between its objectives and practices and the objectives and practices of other Mexican social movements, from the civic and labor movements to the feminist movement. From that work of translation resulted, for example, that the Zapatista leader chosen to address the Mexican Congress was Comandante Esther. By that choice, the Zapatistas wanted to signify the articulation between the indigenous movement and the women's liberation movement and thus deepen the counter-hegemonic potential of both.

More recently, the work of translation has become even more important as a new counter-hegemonic or anti-systemic movement began to take shape. This movement, mistakenly known as anti-globalization movement, has been proposing an alternative to neoliberal globalization on the basis of transnational networks of local movements. After having first drawn attention to itself in Seattle in November 1999, it reached its global organizational form during the World Social Forum that took place in Porto Alegre in January 2001.<sup>31</sup> The movement of counter-hegemonic globalization reveals the increasing visibility and diversity of the social practices that resist neoliberal globalization all over the world. The movement is a constellation of highly diversified movements. On the one hand, local movements and organizations that are not only very different in their practices and objectives but also embedded in different cultures. On the other, transnational organizations, some from the South, some from the North, that also differ widely among themselves. The articulation and aggregation among all these different movements and organizations demands a giant effort of translation. What do the participatory budgeting practiced in many Latin American cities and the participatory democratic planning based on *panchayats* in Kerala and West Bengal in India have in common? What can they learn from each other? In what kinds of counter-hegemonic global activities can they cooperate? The same questions can be asked about the pacifist and the anarchist movements, or the indigenous and gay movements, the Zapatista movement, the ATTAC organization,<sup>32</sup> the Landless

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<sup>31</sup> On counterhegemonic globalization there is a growing body of literature. See among others: Santos, 1995: 250-377; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Evans, 1999; Brecher et al., 2000, Cohen and Rai, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Acronym of *Association pour la Taxation des Transactions Financières pour l'Aide aux Citoyens*.

Movement in Brazil, and the Rio Narmada movement in India, and so on and so forth. These are the questions that the work of translation aims to answer. It is a complex work, not only because the movements and organizations involved are many and diverse but also because they are embedded in diverse cultures and knowledges. The work of translation must take up knowledges and cultures, on the one hand, and their practices and agents, on the other. Furthermore, it must identify what unites and separates them. The points in common represent the possibility of a bottom-up aggregation or combination, the only possible alternative to a top-down aggregation imposed by a grand theory or a privileged social actor.

### **Conditions and Procedures of Translation**

The work of translation supplements the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences. If the latter expand widely the number and diversity of available and possible experiences, the work of translation aims to create intelligibility, coherence, and articulation in a world enriched by such multiplicity and diversity. Translation is not a mere technique. Even its obvious technical components and the way in which they are applied in the course of the translation process must be the object of democratic deliberation. Translation is an intellectual and a political work at the same time. It has an emotional dimension as well, because it presupposes nonconformity vis-à-vis a want derived from the deficient nature of a given knowledge or practice. Clearly for these reasons, the conventional social sciences are of little use to the work of translation.<sup>33</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>33</sup> As Immanuel Wallerstein points out, not only did the social sciences evolve from the divorce between the quest for truth and the quest for the good society, but they also banished the enchantment of reason (1999: 137-251).

disciplinary confinement constrained the intelligibility of the reality under analysis, and such constraint is to be blamed for the reduction of reality to hegemonic or canonical realities. For example, to analyze or evaluate *swadeshi* from the view point of conventional economics would amount to rendering it unintelligible, and hence untranslatable. The religious and political dimensions of *swadeshi*, evident in Gandhi's quotation above, would be lost in such analysis and evaluation. As happens in the case of the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences, the work of translation is a transgressive kind of work that, as the poet teaches, makes its path by walking it.

I said that the work of translation is based on a postulate upon which transcultural consensus must be created: the general theory of the impossibility of a general theory. Without this negative universalism, translation is a colonial kind of work no matter how postcolonial it claims to be. Once such postulate is guaranteed, the conditions and procedures of the work of translation can be elucidated on the basis of the following questions: What to translate? From what and into what to translate? Who translates? When should translation take place? Why translate?

**What to translate?** The crucial concept in answering this question is the concept of *contact zone*.<sup>34</sup> Contact zones are social fields in which different

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<sup>34</sup> The concept of contact zone has been used by different authors meaning different things. For instance, Mary Louise Pratt defines contact zones as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – like colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (1992: 4). In this formulation contact zones seem to involve encounters among cultural totalities. This does not have to be the case. The contact zone may involve selected and partial cultural differences, the ones that in a given time-space find themselves in competition to provide meaning for a given course of

normative life worlds, practices, and knowledges meet, clash, and interact. The two contact zones constitutive of western modernity are the epistemological zone, where modern science and common knowledge confront each other, and the colonial zone, where the colonizer and the colonized confront each other. These two zones are characterized by the extreme disparity among the realities in contact and by the extreme inequality of the power relations among them.

From these two zones and in opposition to them, the contact zones reclaimed by cosmopolitan reason must be built. The cosmopolitan contact zone starts from the assumption that it is up to each knowledge or practice to decide what is put in contact with whom. Contact zones are always selective because knowledges and practices exceed what of them is put in contact. Indeed, what is put in contact is not necessarily what is most relevant or central. On the contrary, the contact zones are frontier zones, borderlands, or no-man's-lands, where the peripheries or margins of knowledges and practices are the first to emerge. As the work of translation advances it becomes possible to bring into the contact zone the aspects that each knowledge or practice considers more central and relevant.

In multicultural contact zones, it is up to each cultural practice to decide which aspects must be selected for multicultural confrontation. In every culture, there are features deemed too central to be exposed and rendered vulnerable by the confrontation in the contact zone, or aspects deemed inherently untranslatable into another culture. These decisions are part and parcel of the work of translation itself and are susceptible of revision as the work proceeds. If the work of translation

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action. Moreover, as I claim in this paper, unequal exchanges extend today far beyond colonialism and its aftermath, even though colonialism continues to play a much more important role than one is ready to admit.

progresses, it is to be expected that more features will be brought to the contact zone, which in turn will contribute to further translation progress. In many countries of Latin America, particularly in those in which multicultural constitutionalism has been adopted, the indigenous peoples have been fighting for the right to control what in their knowledges and practices should or should not be the object of translation vis-à-vis the “sociedad mayor.”

The issue of what is translatable is not restricted to the selection criterion adopted by each practice or knowledge in the contact zone. Beyond active selectivity, there is what we might call passive selectivity. It consists of what in a given culture has become unpronounceable because of the extreme oppression to which it was subjected during long periods. These are deep absences, made of an emptiness impossible to fill, an emptiness that gives shape to the unfathomable identity of the knowledges and practices in question. In the case of long-time absences, it is possible that not even the sociology of absences may make them present. The silences they produce are too unfathomable to become the object of translation work.

What to translate stirs one other question that is particularly important in contact zones between cultural universes. Cultures are monolithic only when seen from the outside or from afar. When looked at from the inside or at close range, it is easy to see that they are comprised of various and often conflicting versions of the same culture. For example, when I speak of a possible multicultural dialogue about conceptions of human dignity, we can easily see that in the western culture there is not just one conception of human rights. Two at least can be identified: a liberal conception that privileges political and civic rights to the detriment of social and economic rights; and a marxist or socialist conception that stresses social and

economic rights as condition of all the others. By the same token, in Islam it is possible to identify several conceptions of *umma*; some, more inclusive, go back to the time when the Prophet lived in Mecca; others, less inclusive, evolved after the construction of the Islamic state in Medina. Likewise, there are many conceptions of *dharma* in Hinduism.

The most inclusive versions, which hold a wider circle of reciprocity, are the ones that generate more promising contact zones; they are the most adequate to deepen the work of translation and diatopical hermeneutics.

### **To translate from what into what?**

The choice of knowledges and practices among which the work of translation occurs is always the result of a convergence of experiences of want and nonconformity as well as motivation to overcome them. It may emerge as reaction to a colonial or imperial contact zone. For example, biodiversity is today an imperial contact zone between biotechnological knowledge and the knowledge of the shamans, traditional healers or witch doctors in indigenous or rural communities of Latin America, Africa, Asia, and even Europe. The indigenous movements and allied transnational social movements contest this contact zone and the powers that constitute it, and fight for the creation of other, nonimperial contact zones, where relations among the different knowledges may be more horizontal. This struggle brought a new acuteness to the translation between biomedical and traditional knowledges. To give an example from a totally different field, the labor movement, confronted with an unprecedented crisis, has been opening itself to contact zones with other social movements, namely civic, feminist, ecological, and movements of migrant workers. In this contact zone, there is an

on-going translation work between labor practices, claims, and aspirations, and the objectives of citizenship, protection of the environment, anti-discrimination against women and ethnic or migrant minorities. Translation has slowly transformed the labor movement and the other social movements, thus rendering possible constellations of struggles that until a few years ago would be unthinkable.

### **When to translate?**

In this case, too, the cosmopolitan contact zone must be the result of a conjugation of times, rhythms, and opportunities. If there is no such conjugation, the contact zone becomes imperial and the work of translation a form of cannibalization. In the last two decades, western modernity discovered the possibilities and virtues of multiculturalism. Accustomed to the routine of its own hegemony, western modernity presumed that if it were to open itself to dialogue with cultures it had previously oppressed, the latter would *naturally* be ready and available to engage in the dialogue, and indeed only too eager to do so. Such presupposition has resulted in new forms of cultural imperialism, even when it assumes the form of multiculturalism. This I call reactionary multiculturalism.

As regards multicultural contact zones, the different temporalities that occur in them must still be taken into account. As I said previously, one of the principles of the sociology of absences consists in countering the logic of the monoculture of linear time with a pluralist constellation of times and durations in order to free the practices and knowledges that never ruled themselves by linear time from their status as residuum. The objective is to convert the simultaneity provided by the contact zone as much as possible into contemporaneity. This is not to say that contemporaneity annuls history. This is an important caveat, particularly as

regards contact zones of knowledges and practices in which extremely unequal relations of power led to massive production of absences. In such situations, once a given knowledge or practice, absent before, is made present, the danger is there to believe that the history of that knowledge or practice starts with its presence in the contact zone. This danger has been present in many multicultural dialogues, mainly in those in which indigenous peoples have participated after their claims and rights started being recognized from the 1980s onward. The contact zone must be monitored by all the participants to prevent the simultaneity of contact from meaning the collapse of history.

### **Who translates?**

Knowledges and practices only exist as mobilized by social groups. Hence, the work of translation is always carried out among representatives of those social groups. As argumentative work, the work of translation requires intellectual capacity. Cosmopolitan intellectuals must have a profile similar to that of the *philosophical sage* identified by Odera Oruka in his quest for African sagacity. They must be deeply embedded in the practices and knowledges they represent, having of both a profound and critical understanding. This critical dimension, which Odera Oruka designates as “didactic sageness,” grounds the want, the feeling of incompleteness, and the motivation to discover in other knowledges and practices the answers that are not to be found within the limits of a given knowledge or practice. Translators of cultures must be good cosmopolitan intellectuals. They are to be found both among the leaders of social movements and among the rank and file activists. In the near future, the decision about who translates is likely to

become one of the most crucial democratic deliberations in the construction of counter-hegemonic globalization.

### **How to translate?**

The work of translation is basically an argumentative work, based on the cosmopolitan emotion of sharing the world with those who do not share our knowledge or experience. The work of translation encounters multiple difficulties. The first difficulty concerns the premises of argumentation. Argumentation is based on postulates, axioms, rules, and ideas that are not the object of argumentation because they are taken for granted by all those participating in the argumentative circle. In general, they are called *topoi* or commonplaces and constitute the basic consensus that makes argumentative dissent possible.<sup>35</sup> The work of translation has no *topoi* at the outset, because the available *topoi* are the ones appropriate to a given knowledge or culture, hence not acceptable as evident by another knowledge or culture. In other words, the *topoi* that each knowledge or practice brings into the contact zone cease to be premises of argumentation and become arguments. As it progresses, the work of translation constructs the *topoi* adequate to the contact zone and the translating situation. It is a demanding work, with no safety nets and ever on the verge of disaster. The ability to construct *topoi* is one of the most distinctive marks of the quality of the cosmopolitan intellectual or sage.

The second difficulty regards the language used to conduct the argumentation. It is not usual for the knowledges and practices in presence in contact zones to have a common language or master the common language

equally well. Furthermore, when the cosmopolitan contact zone is multicultural, one of the languages in question is often the language that dominated the colonial or imperial contact zone. The replacement of the latter by a cosmopolitan contact zone may thus be boycotted by this use of the previously dominant language. The issue is not just that the different participants in the argumentative discourse may master the language unequally. The issue is that this language is responsible for the very unpronounceability of some of the central aspirations of the knowledges and practices that were oppressed in the colonial contact zone.

The third difficulty concerns the silences. Not the unpronounceable, but rather the different rhythms with which the different knowledges and social practices articulate words with silences and the different eloquence (or meaning) that is ascribed to silence by the different cultures. To manage and translate silence is one of the most exacting tasks of the work of translation.

### **Conclusion: Why translate?**

This last question encompasses all the others. It makes sense, therefore, to answer it as a conclusion to the argument presented here. Very succinctly, the argument is that the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences, together with the work of translation, enable us to develop an alternative to lazy reason, what I call cosmopolitan reason. This alternative is based on the core idea that global social justice is not possible without global cognitive justice.

The work of translation is the procedure we are left with to give meaning to the world after it lost the automatic meaning and direction that western modernity claimed to have conferred on it by planning history, society, and nature. The

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<sup>35</sup> On *topoi* and rethoric in general, see Santos (1995: 7-55)

answer to the question—why translate?— answers as well the second question I formulated above: if we do not know if a better world is possible, what gives us legitimacy or motivation to act as if we did? The need for translation resides in the fact that the problems that western modernity attempted to solve remain unsolved, and their solution seems more and more urgent. The solutions proposed by the previous paradigm are not available to us, that being the reason for its profound crisis. In other words, in the transition period in which we find ourselves, we are faced with modern problems for which we have no modern solutions.

The work of translation undertaken on the basis of the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences is a work of epistemological and democratic imagination, aiming to construct new and plural conceptions of social emancipation upon the ruins of the automatic social emancipation of the modernist project. There is no guaranty that a better world may be possible, nor that all those who have not given up struggling for it conceive of it in the same way. The oscillation between banality and horror, which intrigued Adorno and Horkheimer so much, is now turned into the banality of horror. The possibility of disaster begins today to be obvious.

The situation of bifurcation mentioned by Prigogine and Wallerstein is the structural situation in which the work of translation takes place. The objective of the translation work is to create constellations of knowledges and practices strong enough to provide credible alternatives to what is designated today as neoliberal globalization, which is no less no more than a new step of global capitalism toward subjecting the inexhaustible wealth of the world to the mercantile logic. We know that it will never succeed in reaching this objective entirely, that being perhaps the only certainty we draw from the collapse of the modernist project. But that does not

tell us if a better world is possible and what profile it might have. This is why cosmopolitan reason prefers to imagine the better world from the vantage point of the present. Thus, it proposes the expansion of the present and the contraction of the future. Once the field of experiences is enlarged, it is possible to evaluate better the alternatives that are possible and available today. This diversification of experiences aims to recreate the tension between experiences and expectations, but in such a way that they both happen in the present. The new nonconformity results from the verification that it would be possible to live in a much better world today and not tomorrow. After all, Bloch wonders, if we only live in the present, how come it is so fleeting?

Expectations are the possibility of reinventing our experience by confronting the hegemonic experiences imposed upon us with the immense variety of experiences, whose absence is actively produced by metonymic reason, or whose emergence is suppressed by proleptic reason. The possibility of a better future lies therefore not in a distant future, but rather in the reinvention of the present as enlarged by the sociology of absences and by the sociology of emergences, and rendered coherent by the work of translation.

The work of translation permits to create meanings and directions that are precarious but concrete, short-range but radical in their objectives, uncertain but shared. The aim of translation between knowledges is to create cognitive justice from the standpoint of the epistemological imagination. The aim of translation between practices and their agents is to create the conditions for global social justice from the standpoint of the democratic imagination.

The work of translation creates the conditions for concrete social emancipations of concrete social groups in a present whose injustice is legitimated

on the basis of a massive waste of experience. The work of translation, based on the sociology of absences and the sociology of emergences, only permits to the reveal or denounce the dimension of such a waste. The kind of social transformation that may be accomplished on the basis of the work of translation requires the constellations of meaning created by it to be transformed into transforming practices. For that, the work of translation must be supplemented by the practice of manifestos.

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