Feeling-Thinking with the Land

Transitions: Transatlantic bridges for designing networks between Souths and Norths[1]

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Abstract

This text seeks to invert the established logic in the hierarchies of knowledge, and it argues that the proposals of some social movements (of and for indigenous and Afro-descendent people, environmentalists, campesinos and women), regarding matters of land and territory, are in fact at the cutting-edge of current thinking on these issues (and other issues too, such as food autonomy and alternative models for development), and are not relics of the past, nor romantic expressions that reality will duly unpick. With this as the starting point, I suggest the creation of something which, for now, I refer to as a space for thinking about transitions. More than a "center" or a "school", the notion of a space (which is widely used in the fields of art and design, giving it thus a somewhat more open and experimental feel) implies the creation of a platform (or perhaps an "ontology", as this concept is understood in the digital field, as well as in the so-called semantic web) for the construction of thinking, research and praxis for the transitions to the pluriverse. One of the objectives of this space would be to contribute to the creation of lexicons for these transitions, and encourage a perception of design as a critical praxis for them (ontological design).

Keywords

transitions; ontological design; feeling-thinking; Latin America; Colombia.

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Background

The present text consists of new readings about development, territory and difference, and it helps define a field that we provisionally term "political ontology".[2] Political ontology seeks to understand the fact that a whole set of practices bring a world into being, even in the fields of science and technology, which are assumed to be natural and unbiased, as well as universal. A fundamental question for political ontology is, therefore, *what kind of worlds are brought into being via which set of practices, and what are the consequences for certain human and non-human groups?*

This text seeks to invert the established logic in the hierarchies of knowledge. It suggests that the proposals of some social movements (of and for indigenous and Afro-descendent people, environmentalists, *campesinos* and women), regarding matters of land and territory, are in fact at the cutting-edge of current thinking on these issues (and other issues too, such as food autonomy and alternative models for development), and are not relics of the past, nor romantic expressions that reality will duly unpick. Meanwhile, most of the "expert" knowledge about these issues, coming from the state and the academy, is anachronistic and archaic, knowledge that can only lead to greater ecological and social devastation. These institutions are entirely out of step with the current state of affairs. Is there anything more anachronistic, I wonder, than the so-called "engines for development"? This might have been a useful metaphor for the Industrial Revolution, but is by no means suited to the demands of the 21st century.

This is an interpretation of where the social movements are on the spectrum of thought, and so, to prevent it from being understood in a utopian or romantic way, it must be situated within three different dimensions. First is *the dimension of the Earth*. Global warming is just the tip of the iceberg of the ecological crisis that is endangering life on the planet. In this context, if we consider the basic, inescapable fact that all living beings are an outward expression of Earth's creative force, of its self-organization and constant emergence, including of course human beings, then the perceptions of territory and life that are based on this conviction (such as those of the indigenous peoples who defend Mother Earth, among others), can quite easily be seen as futuristic visions, completely in tune with the Earth's own ideals.

Secondly, the ecological and social crisis is leading many thinkers and movements to emphasize that re-localizing the food supply, the economy and many other aspects of social life goes directly against globalization, which is based on markets dominated by large corporate conglomerates. This *paradigm of re-localization*, as is well known, is the basis of many *campesino* and ethno-territorial proposals for food and the economy, for example in the field of resistance against free trade agreements. In short, if the perspectives for the rural policies offered by the state and most of the private sector and even the academy reflect the values of a world that is falling apart, then those of the movements represent the defense of life, and the hope for other possible worlds. These efforts therefore seek to invert the usual assessment of knowledge: on the one hand, they aim to make visible and value the 'other' knowledges of the social movements, and on the other hand, in thus doing so, they might contribute to the debate on other possible rural, social, environmental and cultural policies.

As a third point, the same ecological and social crisis has spurred many visionaries into proposing a profound *ecological and cultural transition*. These *transition discourses* are gaining great traction today, in many spaces, and they include ecology, complexity sciences, spirituality, alternative approaches to development and economics, critical academia and, of course, in many social movements, they envisage a true "civilizing transition". Identifying the movements' production of knowledge as progressive thinking makes a great deal of sense in this context, since many activists are producing transition-based imaginaries.

The text, simply titled *¡A transicionar!* ("Time to Transition!") suggests the creation of something which, for now, I refer to as a *space* for thinking about transitions. More than a "center" or a "school", the notion of a space (which is widely used in the fields of art and design, giving it thus a somewhat more open and experimental feel) implies the creation of a platform (or perhaps an "ontology" as this concept is understood in the digital field, as well as in the so-called semantic web) for the construction of thinking, research and praxis for the transitions to the pluriverse. One of the objectives of this space would be to contribute to the creation of lexicons for these transitions, and encourage a vision of design as a critical praxis for them (i.e. ontological design). We shall see, below, what these "transitions" are. All that needs to be said for now is that when we talk about transitions (or as many activists would say, other truly sustainable and diverse civilizing models), we are highlighting the planetary dimension of the local struggles, especially in the face of global warming.

As with all such studies of problematizations, it is not about coming up with a new answer that is truer and more correct than any other. Rather, it is about trying to identify the fundamental problems and questions that have brought them about, even in all their same tensions and complementarities. But there is more to it: although this text seeks to build bridges between, on the one hand, the social movements' conversations about these matters (generally speaking, the issues of difference, life and political practice) and, on the other, the academic debates in these related areas, I take as my starting point the movements' various kinds of knowledge. We know that these two theoretical/political fields (i.e. the movements themselves, and the academy) are not completely separate; instead, inevitably, they hybridize, with extensive crossover between them. However, they both have their own quirks: one of them, and the only one I shall highlight in this brief introductory note, is that while the academy works with a criterion of "critical distance" from the object of study, the movements, meanwhile, consider the predominant model of the production of knowledge to be that of "intense involvement" with the relevant situations and collectives. This latter model confronts the social actors such as the state and the academy

with key questions about identities, territories and life, an approach which is unimaginable from any other perspective.

This text, finally, is also inspired by the concept of *feeling-thinking* as popularized by the great Orlando Fals Borda (1986), an idea he picked up from the popular beliefs of communities along Colombia's Atlantic Coast. *Feeling-thinking* with the territory implies thinking from the heart and from the mind, or "*co-razonar*",[3] as so deftly put by colleagues in Chiapas inspired by the Zapatista experience[4] – it is the way in which territorialized communities have learnt the art of living. This is a call, therefore, for the reader to *feel-think* with their peoples' territories, cultures and forms of knowledge – with their ontologies – more so than with the decontextualized knowledge that underlies the notions of "development", "growth" and even "economics".

Brief description of the project

Transiciones is intended as a space for the study and advancement of transitions toward a world in which many worlds fit – a pluriverse. It takes as its point of departure the notion that the contemporary ecological and social crises are inseparable from the model of social life that has become dominant over the past few centuries. There are many ways to refer to this model: industrialism, capitalism, modernity, (neo)liberalism, anthropocentrism, rationalism, patriarchalism, secularism. All of these concepts point to a central aspect of the model, yet from the perspective of *Transiciones* they are all related to an underlying process, which we describe here as the global spread of the idea that we all live in a single world – a 'one-World world,' to use the compact formulation proposed by John Law (2011) – largely conceived of from the perspective of the Euro-American historical experience and exported to many world regions over the past few hundred years through colonialism, development, and globalization. From this perspective, globalization can be described as a *mono-ontological occupation* of the planet by the 'one-World world.' Can this ongoing occupation be redressed, shifted, and rearticulated toward a pluriversal condition, that is, as the effective possibility of many worlds at a planetary scale?

Activists who refer to the current crises as a *crisis de modelo civilizatorio*, or civilizational crisis (such as many indigenous, Afro-descendant, and peasant activists in Latin America at present) are attuned to this understanding. This is why we utilize the Zapatista dictum, *a world where many worlds fit* – the pluriverse, in our more academic language – as partial inspiration for the project. The pluriverse refers to a vision of the world that echoes the autopoietic dynamics and creativity of the Earth and the indubitable fact

that no living being exists independently of the Earth. The ecologist and theologian Thomas Berry refers to this profoundly relational notion as 'the dream of the earth' (1988). In this sense, we are all within the pluriverse, understood as the ever-changing entanglements of humans and non-humans that result from the Earth's ceaseless movement of vital forces and processes. Out of these dynamics, humans create particular worlds, often with enduring effects; the defining point is that one of these worlds has arrogated for itself the right to be 'the world,' and attempts to efface or reduce to its terms the richness of the multiple worlds that make up socio-natural life.

Transiciones is based on the following inter-connected presuppositions, questions, and tentative proposals:

- Although taken as the common sense understanding of 'the way things are,' the 'one-World world' (OWW henceforth) is the result of particular practices and historical choices. A crucial moment in the emergence of such practices was the Conquest of America, which some consider the point of origin of our current modern/colonial world system. Perhaps the most central feature of the one-World project has been a twofold ontological divide: a particular way of separating humans from nature; and the distinction and boundary policing between those who function within the OWW from those who insist on other ways of worlding. These (and many other derivative) dualisms underlie an entire structure of institutions and practices through which the OWW is enacted.

- There are many signs that suggest that the one-World doctrine is unraveling. The ubiquity of the language of crisis to refer to the planetary ecological and social condition (chiefly, but well beyond, global warming) heralds this unraveling. The growing visibility of struggles to defend mountains, landscapes, forests, territories, and so forth by appealing to a relational (non-dualist) and multi-ontological understanding of life is another manifestation of the OWW's crisis. Santos (2007) has powerfully stated it through the following paradox: *we are facing modern problems for which there are no longer sufficient modern solutions*. The crisis thus stems from the models through which we imagine the world to be a certain way and construct it accordingly.

- The unraveling of the OWW fosters momentous questions for both social theory and political activism: how did the OWW become so powerful? how does it work today? how is it made and unmade? Can it be rearticulated in terms of a plurality of worlds? (Blaser, de la Cadena, and Escobar 2013; Law 2004, 2011; Law and Lien 2012). These are key questions for a pluriversal *ontological politics*.

- This conjuncture and these questions define the context for pluriversal studies: on the one hand, the need to understand the conditions by which the OWW continues to maintain its dominance; on the other, the emergence of projects based on different ontological commitments and ways of worlding, and how they struggle to weaken the one-World project while widening their spaces of re/existence.

- The emergence, over the past decade, of an array of discourses on the cultural and ecological transitions necessary to deal with the interrelated crises of climate, food, energy, and poverty is another powerful sign of the unraveling of the OWW. What one-Worlders call the anthropocene – itself an expression of the profound effects on the biophysical integrity of the planet associated with the OWW – points to the need for a transition. In the global north and the global South, multiple *transition narratives and forms of activism* articulate veritable cultural and ecological transitions to different societal models, going beyond strategies that offer anthropocene conditions as solutions. Mapping this domain is a key task for pluriversal studies.

- For some, the multiple crises point at a massive design failure. Transitions activism and pluriversal studies open the door for re-visioning design in ontological terms. Whereas all design is ontological in that even simple tools make possible particular ways of being and doing, *pluriversal ontological design* is aimed at enabling the eco- logical, social, and technological conditions where multiple worlds and knowledges, involving humans and non-humans, can flourish in mutually enhancing ways. The project intends to develop the idea of *designs for the pluriverse.*

- Finally, pluriversal studies and transition(s) activism(s) require new media and communications strategies. Contemporary media are the most effective purveyors of the OWW vision. Pluriversal communications strategies would serve two main purposes: to construct narratives that persuade people into thinking about why the one-World story no longer quite makes sense; and to contribute to make visible the projects by which other practices attempt to persevere and perform themselves into worlds (including social movements).

Transiciones thus has three overlapping dimensions: Pluriversal Studies, Transition(s) Activism(s), and Design and Communications. An underlying hypothesis of the project is that there is synergy in considering them together. In its initial phase (first three to five years), we envision the following main elements in each of these dimensions:

Pluriversal studies (PVS):

- *Trends in social theory conducive to the pluriverse.* Investigation of the potential and limitations of modern (Western) social theory to contribute to the three dimensions. Limits of the modern episteme.

- *Trends in universities and the question of other academies.* Most Latin American (and world?) universities are yielding to the pressure of training people to perform well for market globalization and the OWW. Can spaces be created within the universities to foster the perspectives of the pluriverse, transitions, and design? Are other academies possible and necessary?

- *The theory and practice of pluriversal studies.* The framework of political ontology. Other knowledges and saberes. Development of PVS readers.

Transition Studies

- Transition narratives and movements in the global North

- Transition narratives and movements in the global South

- Imagining regional transitions: The Colombian Cauca Valley and the Colombian Pacific. Other world regions? Ecologies of scale

Design and communications

- Ontological design. Design for transitions

- Social movements and design

- Community (place-based) design new media for the pluriverse

Some caveats

It should be made clear at the outset that the approach taken in this proposal does not seek to replace more established analyses of the global situation such as those couched in terms of political economy, political ecology, or cultural studies (see Addendum I). Similarly, it does not attempt to replace the goals of struggles for social justice, environmental sustainability, and cultural pluralism or interculturality that often emerge from these frameworks. The PVS framework is an attempt at getting at some of the same issues and goals from what we provisionally label a 'pluriversal' or 'political-ontological' vantage point. It should be stressed, however, that the rise of ontological politics goes well beyond the academy – indeed, it takes place largely outside of the academy, in the world-making

practices of many actors, including social movements. We aim to capture this conjuncture by speaking about *the political activation of relationality*.

The project may also be seen as complementary of other initiatives that aim at rethinking the global condition (e.g. the various projects led by Boaventura de Sousa Santos at Coimbra (http://www.ces.uc.pt/); the Scales of governance, the Un and Indigenous Peoples (SogIP) project, coordinated by Irène Bellier at the EhESS in Paris (http://www.sogip.ehess.fr/?lang=en); the 'overheating' project led by Thomas Eriksen at oslo, (http://www.sv.uio.no/sai/english/research/projects/overheating/); the Sawyer Seminar on 'Indigenous Cosmopolitics: Dialogues about the reconstitution of Worlds,' convened by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser at the University of California at Davis (http://sawyerseminar.ucda-vis.edu/); the Life Projects network initiated by Blaser in Canada (http://www.lifeprovida.net/); and surely many other projects of which I am not aware). Moreover, if we can think about these issues at all it is because they are emerging in various locations of social and intellectual life. One of the main guises under which this emergence is taking place is 'the ontological turn' in social theory.

Figure 1

1) Trends in social theory conducive to the pluriverse

2) Trends in Latin American universities / *Academias otras*

3) Theory and practice of pluriversal studies

- Political ontology
- Other knowledges and saberes

1) Ontological design / design for transitions

2) Social movements / community design

3) New media for the pluriverse

1) Transition narratives in the Global North

2) Transition narratives in the Global South

3) Regional studies of transition:

- The Cauca river valley
- The Pacific rainforest region
- Other regions?

Addendum I. Brief explanation of terms

The pluriverse and pluriversal studies

The 'pluriverse' is a way of looking at reality that contrasts with the OWW assumption that there is a single reality to which there correspond multiple cultures, perspectives, or subjective representations. For the pluriverse proposal, there are multiple reals, yet it is not intended to 'correct' the view on a single real on the grounds of being a truer account of 'reality.' *We propose the pluriverse as a tool to first, make alternatives to the one world plausible to one-worlders, and, second, provide resonance to those other worlds that interrupt the one-world story* (Blaser, de la Cadena, and Escobar 2013).

As it is already commonly accepted, the OWW is based on a number of constitutive dualisms, such as nature/culture or humans/non-humans, mind/body, and so forth. Displacing the centrality of this dualist ontology, while broadening the space for non-dualist ontologies, is a sine qua non for breaking away from the one-World story. This implies a transition from one-World concepts such as 'globalization' and 'global studies' to concepts centered on the pluriverse as made up of a multiplicity of mutually entangled and co-constituting but distinct worlds.

Transiciones involves the creation of a field of pluriversal studies. one of the main frameworks proposed for PVS so far is that of political ontology (Blaser 2010, 2014). On the one hand, political ontology refers to the power-laden practices involved in bringing into being a particular world or ontology; on the other hand, it refers to a field of study that focuses on the interrelations among worlds, including the conflicts that ensue as different ontologies strive to sustain their own existence in their interaction with other worlds. This framework links conversations in critical theory (particularly in indigenous studies and Science and Technology Studies (STS) with momentous developments in socio-natural life (e.g. Latin American indigenous uprisings and struggles). The space crafted by researchers at this intersection is particularly hopeful to illuminate effective paths toward the planet's ontological reconstitution (de la Cadena 2010, 2012, 2015). It should be stressed, however, that the PVS framework is not limited to ethnic minorities. In different ways, it applies to all social groups worldwide.

Pluriversal studies and political ontology should be seen as inter-epistemic and inter-world rather than intra-European, as is still the case in most discussions taking place from the perspective of modern social theory. Hence the importance of thinking about the academy's limits for pluriversal studies. PVS will build on social theory trends that problematize the modernist ontology (e.g. neo-realist and post-constructivist trends,

phenomenology, vitalism, process thought, digital philosophies, complexity, cognitivism, etc.), but will also function partly outside the imaginative geography defined by Western discourse, particularly from subaltern categories. PVS also responds to the increasing realization that the *modern universities are increasingly yielding to the pressures to just train people to perform well in globalization*, that is, to be successful market citizens under the aegis of 'late liberalism' (Povinelli 2011). While it would be *naïve* to expect an overhaul of the mission of universities, it is crucial to foster debates about worlds and knowledges otherwise.

Pluriversal studies are not envisioned in opposition to, or as a complement of, globalization studies, but need to be outlined as a different intellectual and political project. No single notion of the world, the human, civilization, the future, or even the natural can fully occupy the space of pluriversal studies. Even if partly building on the critical traditions of the modern natural, human, and social sciences, pluriversal studies will travel its own paths as it discovers worlds and knowledges that the sciences have effaced or only observed obliquely.

Transitions and transition(s) activism(s)

From an epistemic and ontological perspective, globalization *has taken place at the expense of relational and non-dualist worlds*, worldwide. Economically, culturally, and militarily, we are witnessing a renewed attack on anything collective. This is the merciless world of the 1%, foisted upon the 99% and the natural world with a seemingly ever-increasing degree of virulence, cynicism, and illegality, since more than ever 'legal' only signals a self-serving set of rules that imperialize the desires of the powerful. It is in this sense that we say that the world created by the OWW ontology is wrong; despite all of its accomplishments, it has brought about untold devastation and suffering; its time is running out. The remoteness and separation it effects from the worlds that we inevitably weave with other Earth-beings are themselves a cause of the ecological and social crisis (Bird, 2008). Epistemic and ontological analyses thus emerge as necessary dimensions for understanding the current conjuncture of crises, domination, and attempts at transformation.
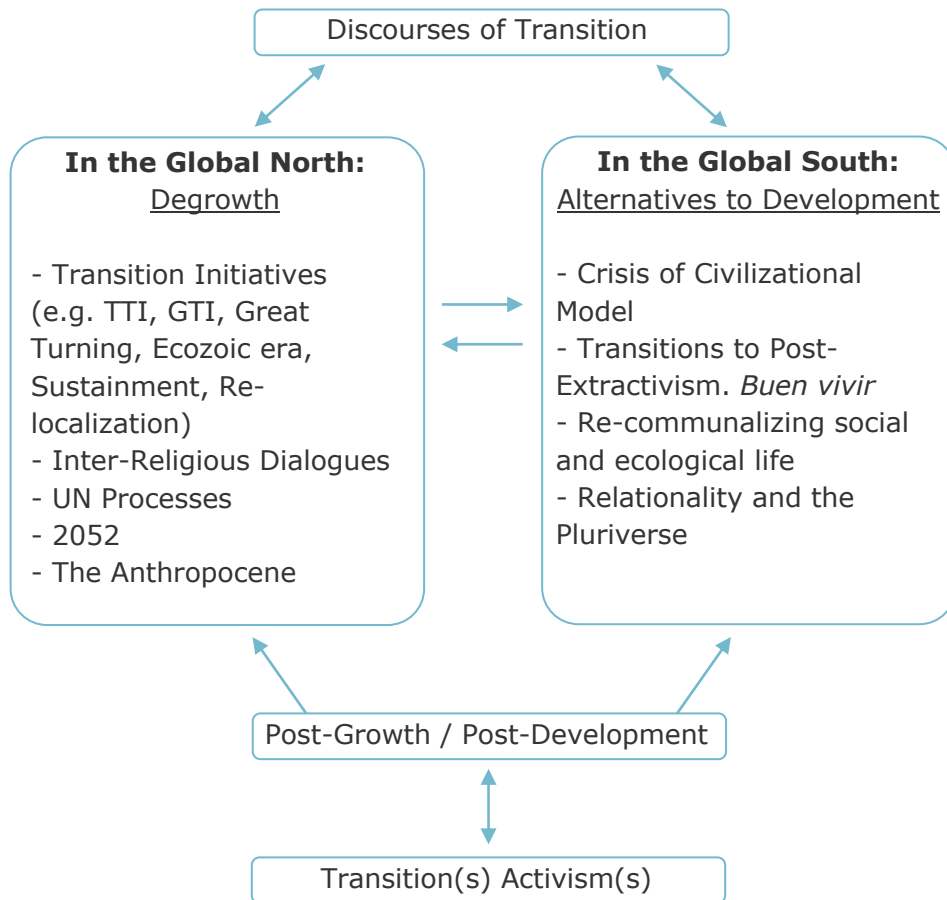
Transition discourses (TDs) are emerging today with particular richness, diversity, and intensity to the point that a veritable field of 'transition studies' can be posited as an emergent scholarly-political domain. Notably, those writing on the subject are not limited to the academy; in fact, the most visionary TD thinkers are located outside of it, even if most engage with critical currents in the academy. TDs are emerging from a multiplicity of sites, principally social movements worldwide and some civil society NGOs, from some emerging scientific paradigms and academic theories, and

from intellectuals with significant connections to environmental and cultural struggles. TDs are prominent in several fields, including those of culture, ecology, religion and spirituality, alternative science (e.g. complexity), futures studies, feminist studies, political economy, and digital technologies.

The range of TDs can only be hinted at here, and there needs to be a concerted effort at bringing together TDs in the north and the South. In the north, the most prominent include degrowth, a variety of transition initiatives (TIs), the Anthropocene, forecasting trends (e.g. Club of Rome, Randers 2012), and some approaches involving interreligious dialogues and Un processes, particularly within the Stakeholders Forum. Among the explicit TIs are the Transition Town Initiative (TTI, Rob Hopkins, UK), the great Transition Initiative (GTI, Tellus Institute, US), the great Turning (Joanna Macy), the great Work or transition to an Ecozoic era (Thomas berry), and the transition from The Enlightenment to an age of Sustainment (Tony Fry). In the global South, TDs include crisis of civilizational model, post-development and alternatives to development, Buen Vivir, communal logics and *autonomía*, food sovereignty, and transitions to postextractivism. While the features of the new era in the north include post-growth, post-materialist, post-economic, post-capitalist, and post-dualist, those for the South are expressed in terms of post-development, post/non-liberal, post/non-capitalist, and postextractivist (see Escobar 2011, 2012 for a complete list of references, and Figure 2).

Transiciones would be the first space devoted to the study of TDs worldwide. In addition, it purports to engage in detailed transition research and scenarios at the regional level, starting with two regions in Colombia, loosely following the model proposed by Randers in *2052. A Global Forecast for the Next Forty Years* (2012). It is clear that each locality, region, and nation will have to create and adapt their own transition modeling and scenarios, with existing frameworks (e.g. the TTI, GTI, or *2052*) serving only as a guide.

Figure 2

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                    │ Discourses of Transition │
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In the Global North:
Degrowth

- Transition Initiatives
(e.g. TTI, GTI, Great
Turning, Ecozoic era,
Sustainment, Re-
localization)
- Inter-Religious Dialogues
- UN Processes
- 2052
- The Anthropocene

In the Global South:
Alternatives to Development

- Crisis of Civilizational
Model
- Transitions to Post-
Extractivism. *Buen vivir*
- Re-communalizing social
and ecological life
- Relationality and the
Pluriverse

Post-Growth / Post-Development

Transition(s) Activism(s)

Design and communications for the pluriverse

Transiciones proposes that design may constitute a novel critical praxis, a special kind of knowledge-practice for transitions and the pluriverse. To do so, however, design has to be extricated from the rationalistic, dualist, capitalistic, and modernist traditions in which it has been enmeshed, and reoriented toward the creation of conditions for other ways of being-knowing-doing – for living otherwise. Reorienting a tradition that has become so culturally pervasive is a tall order, but it is what some authors are proposing through the notion of *ontological design* (Ehrenfeld 2011; Escobar 2012; Fry 2012; Winograd and Flores 1986; Willis 2005). For these authors, what is at stake is developing an entirely different way of being-in-the-world. Together, PVS and ontological design map an onto- logical, practical, and political field with the potential to contribute unique elements for the various paths toward the ecological and cultural transitions seen by many as necessary in the face of the interconnected crises of climate, food, energy, poverty, and meaning.

Ontological design goes well beyond sustainability; from an ontological perspective, what goes on under this rubric amounts, at best, to reducing unsustainability while leaving the universal ontology untarnished. Unsustainability is structurally designed into our everyday life; it is the result of concrete design practices, hence the crucial importance of the reconfiguration of design. Whether couched in terms of radical sustainability innovation (Tonkinwise 2013), sustainability as flourishing (Ehrenfeld 2011), Sustainment (Fry 2012), environmental complexity (Leff 1998), or going beyond reason-centered culture (Plumwood 2002), at stake is a decentering of design from its anthropocentric and rationalistic basis and its recreation as a tool against the unsustainability that has become entrenched with the modern world. Succinctly, if we are at risk of self-destruction, we need to reinvent ourselves ontologically (Fry 2012). Design thus becomes one of the most important philosophical conversations about the world.

Design questions are crucial. Can design become a means for fostering the pluriverse? For this hypothesis to be fruitful, we need to think about design agency and practices that do not replicate universalistic anthropocene-creating strategies but that interrupts them. This design would not be so much about 'solving problems' and negotiating 'deals' but about creating conditions for dwelling and partaking in the pluriverse, an earth-wise politics that opens up to a variety of world-making practices, including those that are utterly foreign to (our) OWW. It would be about reinventing the communal and equipping communities with toolkits for their own transition designs (see, e.g. the Design Studio for Social Intervention (www.ds4si.org); Gibson-Graham, Cameron, and Healy 2013); these design practices would reimagine rural and urban landscapes, food and energy and habitats, science and technology, etc. toward the goals of sustainment and Buen Vivir rather than 'success in the global world' (Escobar 2012). They call for new engagements between the academy, activism, and design (Berglund 2012). How to render the insights of relationality and the PV into effective transformative forces is one of the key questions for pluriversal and critical design studies. Part of the answer will have to involve the creation of transition lexicons and media and communicative strategies through which relationality and pluriversality can resonate in wider circles. Conventional media are no doubt the most effective means by which the liberal world vision of the individual, markets, development, growth, consumption, and so forth is reproduced in daily life; they are indeed one of the OWW's most insidious design strategies, in charge of the cultural-political work of keeping capitalism, anthropocentrism, and increasingly untenable forms of rationalism in place. New media are thus key to the creation of different possibilities for making worlds otherwise.

Addendum II. Some practical and institutional aspects

Potential institutional partners

We envisage several institutional partners in Colombia (particularly in Cali and in the Colombian Southwest) and possibly Europe. We expect the project to have partial affiliation with a few Colombian NGOs and social movement organizations for specific projects (e.g. regional studies and communications and media strategies). We welcome expressions of interest by other partners and institutions.

Why Colombia?

For a long time, I have thought that Colombia is a testing case of capitalist, modernizing globalization. Colombia (along with Mexico) has the dubious privilege of having maintained one of the most enduring and callous forms of elite control in Latin America, unabashed pro-US policies, and ruthless capitalistic development. Today, these two countries continue to be the strongholds of the neo-liberal model, going against the tide of progressive regimes in the continent. It is no coincidence that these two countries exhibit the highest degrees of conflict, violence, inequality, and human rights abuses in the continent. It is also not a coincidence that Colombia – endowed with immensely rich natural resources and a large, highly trained professional class – continues to witness amazingly vibrant social movements. Periodic peace processes (including the ongoing peace talks between FArC guerrillas and the government, initially sponsored by the Norwegian government and currently taking place in Havana) are only part of the sustained attempt at social transformation by many actors (peasants, Afro-descendants and indigenous movements, and student, labor, women, environmentalist, and urban groups). Colombia is thus a testing case of the reaches and limits of an imperial kind of globality, and of attempts by many groups to resist it and bring about a more livable and ecological societal model.

Two initial regional studies

Like Colombia in the global context, the fertile Cauca river Valley could be seen as a 'poster child' of sub-national capitalist development gone awry. Capitalist development based on sugar cane plantations in the plains and extensive cattle ranching in the Andean hillsides started to take hold in the mid-nineteenth century. It gained force in the early 1950s with the setting up of the Cauca regional Autonomous Development Corporation (CVC), patterned after the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). At present, it is not only clear that this model of development based on cane and cattle is exhausted but that it has caused massive ecological devastation of hills,

aquifers, rivers, forests, and soils, besides profoundly unjust and painful social and territorial dislocation of the region's peasants and Afro-descendant communities. The region can easily be re-imagined as a veritable agro-ecological stronghold of organic fruit, vegetable, grain, and exotic plants production and as a multicultural region of small and medium size producers, a de-centralized network of functional medium size cities, and so forth. There are excellent technical studies (by the CVC, by local academics, and by UnDP) on many aspects of social and ecological life of the region. The region is thus 'ripe' for a radical transition, even if the proposition would seem unthinkable to elites and most locals.

Although the Pacific rainforest to the west (largely inhabited by Afro-Colombians, and one of the richest world's biodiversity hotspots) is very different, it is also being rapidly destroyed by macro- development projects (including agrofuels, mining, and illicit drugs), and thus ready for transition imaginations, which local Afro-descendant movements are already engaged in developing (see Escobar 2008 for a lengthy treatment). While recalcitrant elites and the regional government press on with economic strategies that will only increase eco-social devastation, violence and unrest – against all scientific evidence and ecological, social, and cultural common sense – a growing intellectual an social movement sector has started to imagine and bring about a post-capitalist alternative, against all odds, to which this project would lend support via concrete transition, design, and media strategies. These two regions are prime laboratories for researching the anthropocene in full force, thus local/regional transition projects can provide rich lessons for alternative pluriversal articulations.

This sub-program will be used as the basis for trying out the framework of 'transitions to post-extractivism' that is becoming prominent in South America (Gudynas 2011). The goal will be to develop well-crafted transition frameworks for the two regions as a way to test out and illustrate the pluriversal and ontological design hypotheses. The studies will be based on established and emerging forecasting, scenario building, futuring, and transitions principles and methodologies. *The regional studies might well initially be the most feasible and compelling, hence we give priority to this aspect for funding and institutional goals.*

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Notes

[1] The texts compiled in this article were originally published in Escobar, Arturo (2014): *Sentipensar con la tierra. Nuevas lecturas sobre desarrollo, territorio y diferencia*, Medellín: Ediciones UNAULA. This selection has been edited by Belén Romero and published by *Re-visiones*. Please acknowledge and quote any use of this publication online. We are very grateful to the author for allowing us to publish and translate his article. The first part of this article was translated into English by George Hutton. [Editor's Note]

[2] I speak in the plural, here, because this forms part of a joint project with the anthropologists Mario Blaser (Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Canada) and Marisol de la Cadena (University of California, Davis).

[3] This is a play on words between *corazón* ("heart") and *razonar* ("to think", "to reason"). [Translator's Note]

[4] See the beautiful book produced by Xochitl Leyva and collaborators from the network known as the Red de Artistas, Comunicadores Comunitarios y Antropólogos de Chiapas: *Tejiendo nuestras raíces* (San Cristóbal de las Casas: Universidad de las Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2011 (http://jkopkutik.org/index.php/).